

Reading—Self Esteem—Health—Physical Science
Geography—Creative Writing—Art

Duck's Tale

by Harmen van Straaten

“This book teaches the values of self-expression, determination, and friendship. The warm, softly colored illustrations suit the calm atmosphere of the story. Children will be drawn to these appealing creatures, true friends who don't expose each others' foibles.”
--School Library Journal



North-South Books: How did the story of Duck's Tale develop?
Harmen van Straaten: I saw children at pre-school acting as if they were writing. When I started with the character, Duck, I first made some drawings of all the figures. Then I started to discuss him with the publisher and we decided that I had to explain where Duck came from, and we got the idea of letting him tell or write his own story. So that's how we invented the first story.



NBS: The way you have Toad handle having to "read" Duck's story is so affirming of their friendship. How did you arrive at this resolution?

HVS: In the stories I write about Duck and his friend, respect for each other and friendship are keywords. I try to tell the stories with humor and without being moralistic. In this story, both Duck and Toad realize that they need each other. Duck can't read the story himself and from Toad we are not sure if he can read at all. But they are very respectful towards each other.

NBS: What are some of the most common questions children ask during school visits? What is the most memorable question and how did you respond?

HVS: How do I start to work, what materials I use, etc., are common questions. The most memorable question: "What is your favorite food?" I

responded: "Pancakes." After that answer, the little girl asked if she could come for dinner at my house. Another question from a boy of four years old: "When can you stop working?" I answered, "When I win the jackpot in the national lottery." But, to be honest, I hope that I can work forever because I really love my job.

NBS: Of course, Duck has many more tales to come, one of which is being published this coming season by North-South Books. Can you give us a preview of what will happen in the next story about Duck and his friends?

HVS: In the story *For Me?*, Duck receives a letter with a red heart and a red rose. The other three have received the same letter. "Someone is in love with us," Toad whispers. They are having an argument about who this letter really is for. "My rose is the longest," Otter says. "I received the letter first," Toad says. Finally when they are discussing this love thing, a little mole enters the room. She is the new neighbor and wanted to know some new people so that is why she wrote letters to them all.

Want to learn more? Read the complete interview at www.northisouth.com and learn how Harmen van Straaten went from being a lawyer to a children's book author/illustrator!



January, 978-0-7358-2163-7, \$16.95

What's Your Story?

A teacher's guide to
Duck's Tale by Harmen van Straaten

SUMMARY

Everyone thinks that Toad is very important. He's found a pair of glasses, and now he can "read." If Toad can read with his glasses, then surely Duck can write with the pen he found! Proudly, he scribbles a story on some paper and presents it to Toad. Toad clears his throat, hesitates, and complains that his eyes are tired from reading all day—anything to admit he can't really read at all. Toad finds a solution as he considers his friends and begins to "read" Duck's Tale, the story of how Duck came to be their neighbor.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

When sharing this story with pre-K and Kindergarten classes, ask the children if they ever thought reading would be as easy as finding a pair of glasses or just coming to school the first day. Draw out their stories and use these to praise their progress!

Take it one step further: For good readers, help them to remember the initial challenge of reading by showing them books in other languages such as *Animals Speak*, published by North-South Books.

GLASSES MAKE THE DIFFERENCE?

Borrow or buy a pair of strong reading glasses. Let the students try these on and see if they can read the board! For students who wear glasses, encourage them to talk about life before and after. Your students might hear stories about how one of their classmates didn't know trees had individual leaves until the day they tried on their first glasses.

Take it one step further: Invite a local optician to come to the class or tie this into a vision screening.

TELL AND ILLUSTRATE A STORY ABOUT A FRIEND

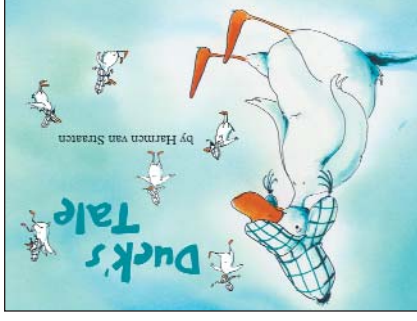
Fair up your students and have them tell each other a story about his or her life—perhaps it was moving to a new neighborhood or the coming of a baby brother or sister. If your students are accomplished writers, invite them to put the story on paper. If writing a story is a goal, help them use Toad's technique to tell the story of their classmate. Invite them to illustrate two or three key scenes.

Take it one step further: Publish the story as a biography, explaining what biographies are and where they can be found in the library.

LEARN ABOUT THE SETTING OF THE STORY

Harmen van Straaten's lovely watercolor illustrations reflect the landscape of his native Holland. Borrow a book about the Netherlands from your library and talk about the constant struggle between the land and the water and the role dikes play. "Sea level" takes on a whole new relevance in a country where much of the land is less than three feet above the water and some of it is *below* sea level.

Take it one step further: Fill a dish with sand or dirt and create a ridge to act as a dike around the edge of the plate. Place the plate in a basin or tray of water where the water is almost to the level of the dish. Simulate a storm by sloshing the water so that the students understand the balance of water and land. Draw comparisons with parts of our country that have similar issues such as New Orleans.



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978-0-7358-2133-0

Hardcover, \$16.95

North-South Books Inc

www.northsouth.com.

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