

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Fledgling

by

Jane Langton

Book Information

Jane Langton, The Fledgling
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Georgie's fondest hope, to be able to fly, is fleetingly fulfilled when she is befriended by a Canada goose.
Book #4

Award: Misc./Other; Newbery Honor; Phoenix Award/Honor

Topics: Animals, Geese; Fantasy/Imagination, Human-Animal Relationships; Series, Hall Family Chronicles

Main Characters

Aunt Alex Hall Georgie's concerned mother; a widow who married Uncle Freddy after taking a class at Concord College and who now is a professor at the college

Dorothea Broom a young neighbor girl of the Hall family

Eddy Hall Eleanor's twelve-year-old brother and Uncle Freddy's nephew, who develops a plan to protect Georgie from their strange neighbor

Eleanor Hall the fourteen-year-old-niece of Uncle Freddy, who dotes on Georgie and is convinced she needs to find some friends

Georgie Dorian an eight-year-old girl; the principal character in the story, who befriends a Canada goose and learns to fly

Miss Madeline Prawn the nosy neighbor of the Hall family; she is a compulsive busybody who dislikes children

Mr. Ralph Preek the owner of a Concord bank, who hunts down the old goose to save innocent children from attack

Oliver Winslow Eddy's obnoxious friend

the Goose Prince an old gander who adopts Georgie, teaches her to fly, and entrusts her with a gift

Uncle Freddy Hall the founder of the Concord College of Transcendental Knowledge, who is devoted to the philosophy of Henry Thoreau; a kindhearted man, he is the guardian of Eleanor and Eddy and stepfather to Georgie

Vocabulary

balk to stop or refuse to go on

daunted discouraged or having dampened enthusiasm

fledgling a young bird that has just gotten its flight feathers

pinions the primary feathers of a bird

reveries daydreams or musings

transcendental beyond common thought, mystical

vouchsafed bestowed or awarded

Synopsis

A sure sign of fall is the annual return of flocks of geese to Concord, Massachusetts as they rest temporarily on their migration route south. An old widower goose lands on Walden Pond, finds a present, and hides it in leaves where Henry Thoreau's house once stood. He vows to give the present to someone who will understand how precious it is and begins to look for that someone.

Georgie, an especially small girl for being eight-years-old, lives with her older step-cousins, Eleanor and Eddy, and her mother and stepfather, whom her step-cousins call Aunt Alex and Uncle Freddy. Their big house also serves as The Concord College of Transcendental Knowledge. Georgie believes she can fly, and she is sure she has done it before. She jumps from a landing down a flight of stairs only to land in a heap at the bottom. Georgie's attempts at flying have her mother and step-cousins worried, but Uncle Freddy tries to be reassuring by saying Georgie is a child of nature, just like Thoreau.

The old goose notices Georgie as he flies overhead and breaks from the flock for a closer look, but he is frightened away by the presence of other people. Georgie knows her Goose Prince is trying to be with

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her, so she leaves the house early one morning to visit him at Walden Pond. The goose leaves her again when the town banker, Mr. Preek, drives by and frightens him off. Fearing this goose will attack local children, Mr. Preek is determined to get a gun and shoot it.

Georgie continues to practice her flying and is successful when she jumps from the porch and floats upward. The child-hating neighbor, Miss Prawn, witnesses the phenomenon and decides Georgie is either a saint or a fairy child. She unsuccessfully tries to make money from her discovery by attempting to trick Georgie into blessing some water, but Georgie refuses.

The old goose comes to see Georgie one night, tapping at her bedroom window. He invites her to climb on his back, and she accepts. They fly to Walden Pond, and there he teaches her how to glide on the cushions of air. This adventure becomes a nightly ritual for the goose and Georgie until the hunting season opens. Mr. Preek waits in ambush on the opening day and unknowingly shoots Georgie as she floats down in the sky. After attacking Mr. Preek, the goose brings Georgie to her parents' window, where Aunt Alex and Uncle Freddy bandage her wounded arm.

Aunt Alex and Uncle Freddy, with Eleanor and Eddy's help, now watch Georgie every second and prevent her from seeing her Goose Prince. Georgie is compliant but eagerly awaits the end of the hunting season, when she hopes to sneak off to see him again. When that day arrives, she leaves her home after midnight and signals him that it is all right to come. Waiting near the house, Mr. Preek is disappointed he has not yet landed the goose, but he turns back his clock for daylight savings time, giving him one last hour to try. When the goose comes to see Georgie, he brings the present he has saved and tells her to take care of it. Mr. Preek then shoots the goose as it takes flight.

In the confusion of the moments that follow, with people rushing about, the present is lost. Georgie becomes dejected. After a week, she bravely tries to

be cheerful. Several days later, while playing in her nest-like bush house outdoors, she finds a rubber ball and knows instantly it is the goose's present. That night she notices the ball's luminescence and enters the hallway closet where the ball is transformed into the image of the Earth. Recalling the goose's words, "Take good care of it," Georgie vows to do so.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

What are some signs winter is approaching in Concord?

Some signs are the flocks flying south, the thin layer of ice on the pond, the setting back of the clocks, the conclusion of the hunting season, and the abundance of acorns.

Literary Analysis

How would the story be different if told directly by Georgie rather than by an omniscient narrator?

Georgie would give the story a younger perspective and perhaps a more intimate understanding of her relationship with the Goose Prince. The reader may not be given the same perspective about Mr. Preek or Miss Prawn and their motivations or information about the town and its literary past. It is also likely that the humor would be different, as it would come from an eight-year-old's perspective of the world.

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Inferential Comprehension

Apart from Georgie flying, what else seems unbelievable about the story?

There are a number of elements that do not seem credible. For instance, we know that geese cannot talk or carry people. Also, it seems hard to fathom that a young girl being shot in a wildlife refuge would not be reported and further investigated by the legal authorities. Finally, in the closet, the seemingly ordinary rubber ball begins to glow, then float, spin, and take on all the geographic features of the Earth.

Constructing Meaning

Miss Prawn and Mr. Preek both jump to conclusions about Georgie based on a short period of observation. Miss Prawn assumes Georgie is a saint or moon child, while Mr. Preek thinks she is retarded and in danger from the goose. Has there been a time when you jumped to conclusions about someone or something and then later found you were wrong?

The students should share an incident in their lives in which they misjudged a situation. Encourage them to consider how their judgment affected their behavior toward an individual or situation and how they changed when they found out they were wrong.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Henry Thoreau is mentioned a number of times in the book. Summarize Thoreau's ideas and philosophies for the class. Then lead a class discussion about how his concepts are reflected in the book.

Comparing and Contrasting Miss Prawn is the proverbial busybody and nosy neighbor. Children's literature and many television shows are full of examples of other such characters. Some examples are Rachel Lynde in the book *Anne of Green Gables* book series and Mrs. Kravitz in the television show *Bewitched*. Have the students choose a busybody from another book or television show and compare and contrast him or her to Miss Prawn.

Recognizing Details By observing the Goose Prince in flight, Georgie is able to alter her flight patterns by learning to change direction, spin, dive, and glide. Have students research the anatomy of birds to learn the adaptation birds have that allow them to fly. Have them give an oral report using visual aids such as posters, charts, photos, models, etc. to show or illustrate what they have learned.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning Imagery abounds in *The Fledgling*. The author works to create an image of Georgie as a true fledgling, from the way she looks to the way she eats. Have the students review the book and write down the descriptions of Georgie and her behavior. Then have them explain how these characteristics are bird-like.