



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Fledgling

Jane Langton



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Fledgling

Jane Langton

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NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Summary of *The Fledgling*

Eight-year-old Georgie lives with her mother (Alexandra), her stepfather (Uncle Freddy), and Uncle Freddy's orphaned niece and nephew (14-year-old Eleanor and 12-year-old Eddy) in a big old house in Massachusetts. Uncle Freddy and his wife run The Concord College of Transcendental Knowledge out of their home, where students meet to discuss the writings of such people as Henry Thoreau, who lived at Walden Pond in nearby Concord. Georgie is a small, quiet child—a loner who likes to play in her little bush house with her cornhusk doll, Dollabella. No one in Georgie's family believes her when she says that she can fly down the steps, but one day a new neighbor—snoopy, self-righteous Miss Prawn—happens to witness one of Georgie's flights and is convinced that Georgie is either a saint or a wicked fairy moon-child.

Meanwhile, autumn has arrived and the Canada geese are back in town. One majestic old goose in the flock finds a special present at Walden Pond. He looks for someone who will value and take care of this treasure and settles on Georgie. One morning before school Georgie decides to walk to Walden Pond to find the geese. After passing Miss Prawn, who is already up planting plastic flowers in her yard, Georgie is thrilled to see that the "Goose Prince" is dropping from the sky to see her. Just then, Mr. Preek, the self-important president of the local bank, honks his horn and scares the bird away. Convinced that there is a dangerous giant duck on the loose, he buys a gun and waits for hunting season to begin. The Goose Prince begins to visit Georgie's house, tapping on her window and taking her for flights around the pond on his back.

Unbeknown to Georgie, each time her mother watches the pair leave and waits anxiously for their return. The Goose Prince teaches Georgie to fly like a bird and stays in Concord while the rest of the flock migrates. Meanwhile, Preek tracks his prey and shoots at the "birds," never realizing that he has not only wounded the old goose, but injured little Georgie. While Georgie recovers in bed, her parents take special precautions to see that there are no more night-time escapades.

Finally, too big to fly anymore, Georgie decides to see the Goose Prince one last time. For his safety, she waits until midnight of the last day of hunting season to sneak out of the house. Delighted to see her before flying flying south, he gives her the wonderful present he found at the pond—a rubber ball. Unfortunately, Mr. Preek realizes that there is an extra hour of hunting season because of daylight savings, and kills the Goose Prince, who drops from the sky at Georgie's feet. For a week, Georgie stays home from school mourning the loss of her friend and worrying about where the present has gone. Then she finds the ball in the bush house and that evening discovers something special about it. The ball glows, showing the surface of the whole world! Georgie's courage and hope are restored and that night the geese return to Walden Pond.

About the Author

Jane Langton was born in 1922 in Boston, Massachusetts. She attended Wellesley College for two years, then graduated from the University of Michigan (Phi Beta Kappa). She married a physicist, attended graduate school at the Boston Museum School of Art and Radcliffe College, and had three sons. In 1961, she began writing for children with the publication of *The Majesty of Grace* and *The Diamond in the Window* (which won an Edgar Award nomination from the Mystery Writers of America). In 1982, *The Fledgling* was given the Newbery Honor Book Award. Since then, she has written three books for juveniles and numerous adult suspense novels.

Langton has said that her books often start with an interest in a place. She lives in Lincoln, Massachusetts—near Concord, the setting of *The Fledgling* and several of Langton’s other books. She says that this town particularly intrigues her because of its layers of history from revolutionary times through nineteenth century transcendental times. While writing her stories, she often creates realistic present-day child characters, puts them into a real setting, and interweaves fantasy elements from the past.

Initiating Activities

Choose one or more of the following pre-reading activities to help students connect their background knowledge with the events and themes they meet in *The Fledgling*.

1. **Prediction:** Have students look at the title and cover illustration before flipping through the book and glancing at chapter titles. Ask: What is a fledgling? Where is the “fledgling” in the picture? What is the mood of that picture? What do you think happens in the story?

2. **Prereading Discussion Topics and Questions**

“Getting Back to Nature”: Would you rather live in the city or in the country? Do you like looking at plants and animals? How often do you “get back to nature”? What are the good things about spending time in the country? Do you think people who live in the country tend to have a different attitude toward wildlife than city-dwellers? What is your opinion of hunting?

Flying: How do you think it would feel to fly? What are some expressions that contain the word flying—like “flying high” or “flying free”? Why do you think there is such a long history of humans trying to learn to fly? What two brothers are considered to be the first to actually fly?

Fairy Tales: Can you think of some fairy tales in which an animal and a human being become friends? What problems do they often face? What often happens in the end?

Canada Geese: What do you know about Canada Geese? What do they look like? (Supply a picture.) Where can they be seen? Have you ever seen a flock? When? Where? What do they sound like? How do they behave?

3. **“Book Hook”:** Read aloud the passage on pages 5 and 6 that begins, “Georgie stood on the landing...” and ends “...I’ve got to.” Have students brainstorm what the passage tells them about Georgie—her interests, abilities, dreams, family relationships. Elicit their predictions about what happens next; then have them read the book to test their predictions.

4. **Log:** Have students keep a response log as they read.

In one type of log, the student assumes the persona of one of the characters (in this case, Georgie). Writing on one side of each piece of paper, the student writes in the first person about his or her reactions to one episode in that chapter. A partner (or the teacher) responds to these writings on the other side of the paper, as if talking to the character.

Chapters 20-23

Pages 105-126

Vocabulary

crescent 105	expectantly 105	intruder 106	ritual 106
racketing 106	inaudible 107	preen 107	beacons 108
buoyed 108	acrobatic 108	locusts 112	jaunty 113
willow 113	supple 113	manufactured 114	encrusted 115
compacted 120	rapturous 120	hydrangea 122	accord 122
hallooing 122	visage 124	nocturnal 124	deposited 124
muffled 126	notes 126		

Vocabulary Activity

Have students complete each of the following six analogies using one of the vocabulary words.

Sample: GOOD is to BAD as HOT is to _____ (COLD).

1. FLAKES are to SNOW as _____ (NOTES) are to DUST.
2. FOREHEAD is to BROW as FACE is to _____ (VISAGE).
3. COMB is to HAIR as _____ (PREEN) is to FEATHERS.
4. LIGHT is to VELVETY as HARD is to _____ (COMPACTED).
5. FOGHORNS are to SOUNDS as _____ (BEACONS) are to LIGHTS.
6. BLIND is to INVISIBLE as DEAF is to _____ (INAUDIBLE).

Discussion Questions

1. What ritual do Georgie and the Goose Prince follow every night? (*The Goose Prince comes to Georgie's window; they fly to Walden Pond, walk up the hill to the site of Thoreau's cabin; the Goose Prince takes a nap; they chat—but not much—and exchange presents; they fly together and the Goose Prince gives her a ride home.*) What do you think they talk about?
2. Compare Georgie's flying with the Goose Prince's. (*Georgie does many acrobatic tricks that the Goose Prince can't.*) Why does Georgie still need the Goose Prince to help her land? (*She can't come down in the water alone.*)
3. What is Mr. Preek's plan for getting the goose? Why is he so determined to kill the goose? Does he have the same thoughts about killing that most hunters have?
4. Why does Eleanor make the yellow dress? (*to wear on her birthday*) How does she feel about it when she first puts it on? Why does she get upset about the dress later? (*She loves it at first—until Robert Toby makes fun of it.*)

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5. Aunt Alex thinks about how different Eleanor and Georgie are (p. 117). How are they different? (*Eleanor is egocentric—thinks a lot about herself and her needs; Georgie doesn't think about herself, but marvels at the world around her.*) Which one are you more like?
 6. What is unusual about the cake the family makes for Eleanor? (*Aunt Alex burns the cake and makes lumpy frosting; she and the children squirt on all sorts of decorations.*) Does she appreciate it? (*She is upset about the dress, but later says she loves the cake.*)
 7. Why do you think Miss Prawn is so wrapped up in what the family next door is doing? What does she mean when she says, “Why should I be my brother’s keeper?” (p. 123) (*When Georgie’s family members don’t appreciate her warnings, she makes this biblical allusion in explaining why she feels responsible for taking care of them.*)
 8. Why does Miss Prawn grab Georgie? (*She is trying to keep Georgie from flying off.*) How do Eleanor and Eddy respond? (*They wrestle with Miss Prawn; Eleanor bites her.*) Do you think they are out of line to treat an adult this way? What else could they have done?
 9. After the ruckus between Miss Prawn and the children has eased up, how does Uncle Freddy “pour oil on troubled waters” (p. 124)? (*He tries to soothe Miss Prawn and make the situation better, but his attempt has the opposite effect.*) What is Uncle Freddy’s response to Miss Prawn’s warning? (*He says that the full moon can actually signal good fortune—and that Miss Prawn would appreciate that if she were to look at particular passages from Thoreau’s journal.*)
 10. **Prediction:** Should Aunt Alex worry about Georgie? Will she continue to let Georgie go off with the Goose Prince?

Writing Activities

- a) Eleanor’s birthday is quite a disaster. Describe a birthday or some other day that ended up being a catastrophe, despite your high hopes.
- b) We learn what Eleanor gets for her birthday. Make a list of what the family members might give Georgie if it were her birthday.

The Author’s Craft: Metaphor

Explain that when an author uses a **metaphor**, she compares two things without using the words “like” or “as.” Point out the metaphor on page 106, “...the broken mirror of the pond.” Discuss how the pond is like a broken mirror. (As Georgie and the Goose Prince land on the water, the smooth, gleaming surface breaks.) Suggest that students jot down other examples of metaphors as they read.