

Rubber Duck Lesson Plan

Summary

In this lesson, students learn about the history, cultural significance, and scientific use of the rubber duck. From its origin as a teething toy in the 1800s to the pop culture surge from Sesame Street, the accidental 1992 duck spill that helped oceanographers study currents, and modern uses in art and community traditions, the rubber duck's story shows how simple objects can carry surprising importance.

Full episode link: <https://www.youtube.com/live/S7j5NuLDrpY?si=Ed7OKOeiMhI6IneI>

Objective

Students will explore the evolution of the rubber duck from invention to cultural icon, understand its role in scientific research, and analyze how ordinary objects can have unexpected historical and cultural impact.

Materials

- 9 Fun Facts (provided)
- Worksheet (provided)
- Optional: images of historical rubber ducks, Sesame Street clips, or photos of Hofman's giant duck installations

Introduction

Begin with a discussion about familiar toys and their possible histories. Ask students what they know about rubber ducks. Explain that although they may seem simple, rubber ducks have influenced culture, art, science, and even modern traditions.

Activity

1. Read through the 9 Fun Facts together as a class.
2. Show images or optional video clips to illustrate different contexts: early toys, Sesame Street, the 1992 spill, Hofman's art.
3. Have students complete the worksheet questions, focusing on comprehension and reflection.

Assessment

- Participation in class discussion
- Completion of worksheet
- Contributions to group reflection on how everyday objects influence culture and science

Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Understanding of Content	Demonstrates full understanding of all 9 Fun Facts and discussion points	Shows good understanding with minor gaps	Shows partial understanding, some inaccuracies	Minimal understanding, frequent inaccuracies
Engagement	Actively participates in discussions and activities	Participates but may need prompting	Limited participation	Rarely participates
Worksheet Completion	All questions answered thoughtfully and completely	Most questions answered, some incomplete	Several questions incomplete	Few or no questions completed

9 Fun Facts

1. Origin of the Rubber Duck

The first rubber ducks appeared in the late 1800s when vulcanized rubber was a new material. They weren't bath toys at all, but solid cast shapes made for babies to chew on during teething. They didn't squeak, and they didn't float, but they set the stage for the hollow squeaky bath ducks that came later.

<https://www.museumofplay.org/toys/rubber-duck>

2. Early Marketing

By the early 20th century, manufacturers began making hollow rubber ducks that floated and squeaked. Bright colors and playful designs turned them into cheerful bath-time companions, a staple of childhood marketing.

<https://therubberduckmuseum.com/blog/the-early-history-of-the-rubber-duck>

3. Sesame Street

Ernie's song "Rubber Duckie," written by Jeff Moss and performed by Jim Henson in 1970, turned the duck into a pop-culture superstar. According to Sesame Street Unpaved, the duck was originally just a small bath-time prop, but the song's runaway popularity made it a permanent part of Ernie's character.

<https://muppetcentral.com/articles/reviews/merchandise/unpaved.shtml>

4. The Great Rubber Duck Spill

In 1992, a storm in the North Pacific knocked a shipping container overboard, releasing about 29,000 bath toys, including thousands of rubber ducks.

<https://medium.com/knowledge-stew/the-great-rubber-ducky-journey-576f2a9e5527>

5. Ducks on the Move

These "Friendly Floatees" began washing up on shores from Alaska to Australia, and even slipped through Arctic sea routes into the Atlantic. Their decades-long drift turned them into global castaways.

<https://bigthink.com/strange-maps/275-the-friendly-floatees-world-tour>

6. Science at Sea

Oceanographers studied the Floatees to better understand currents and climate patterns. The ducks became unlikely research tools, offering real-world data on how floating objects move across oceans.

<https://traderiskguaranty.com/trgpeak/friendly-floatees>

7. The Giant Rubber Duck

Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman created a series of massive floating rubber duck sculptures, some over 50 feet tall. Since 2007, these giant ducks have toured harbors around the world, from Sydney to Hong Kong, turning the humble bath toy into a work of public art and a global photo magnet.

<https://www.fox13seattle.com/news/rubber-duck-seattle>

8. Rubber Ducks in Pop Culture

Kris Kristofferson's "Rubber Duck" in Convoy, Arthur Weasley's question in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, baby Harry playing with a duck in Goblet of Fire, and a duck toy in Toy Story 3.

https://harrypotter.fandom.com/wiki/Rubber_duck#:~:text=In%20a%20flashback%20depicting%20the,Voldemort%20arri,ves%20in%20the%20room.

9. Sales and Popularity

Exact figures before 1970 are unclear, but when Ernie's "Rubber Duckie" song debuted, sales jumped to an estimated 5 million that year. Today, about 1 million ducks are still sold annually, proof of their lasting charm.

<https://ducksinthefwindow.com/about-rubber-ducks>

Worksheet

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Review

1. When were the first rubber ducks made, and what were they originally used for?
2. Who patented the first floating hollow rubber duck in the 1940s?
3. What popular TV character helped boost rubber duck sales in 1970?

Discussion

4. How did the 1992 shipping accident with rubber ducks become useful for scientists?
5. What do Hofman's giant rubber ducks symbolize about everyday objects in art?

Data Analysis

6. In 1970, about 5 million rubber ducks were sold. Today, about 1 million sell per year. How many ducks would that be in a decade today?
7. Compare the number of ducks sold in 1970 with today's yearly sales. What does this say about long-term popularity?

Reflection

8. Why do you think a simple toy like the rubber duck has stayed popular for over a century?
9. Do you have a toy or object in your life that has meaning beyond its original purpose? Explain.