

# DISHPAN DUCKS

By Margaret Springer

Rosa walked home from school slowly. The rows of apartment buildings and the streets full of cars looked all the same. And it was cold.

Rosa missed her country. She had begun to learn some English, but she did not know what to say or what to do when other kids were around. They were friendly, but Rosa felt safer being alone.

Behind Rosa's brick apartment building was a special place, a small creek where Rosa always stopped after school. There were ducks there, and she could speak to them in her language. The ducks seemed to understand.

Every afternoon Rosa sat on a concrete slab above the creek and watched the ducks until Mama came home from work.

Rosa did not feed them. She knew that most people food was not right for ducks. But she watched them swim and feed and walk up to her, quacking. Once they even walked over Rosa's tummy as she lay with her feet stretched out on the bumpy grass. They like me, Rosa said to herself.

One day after school, the ducks were not in the water. They did not waddle toward Rosa, even though she stayed very still. Something was wrong.

Gently, Rosa tiptoed to where the ducks were huddled. "Are you sick?" she whispered. They looked different. They looked greasy.

Then Rosa noticed the creek. An oily film covered it, making patches of color on the water's surface. She looked closely at the ducks. Their feathers were stuck together. They could not swim. They could not fly.

I must get help, said Rosa to herself. But how? I don't know anyone. Mama told me not to speak to strangers. Besides, I don't know how to ask in English.

Rosa had an idea. She rushed back to the street, walked to the traffic light, then raced around the corner and back to the school yard.

Rosa was in luck. Boys and girls were still there practicing baseball with the gym teacher. Rosa had never played baseball in this country.

"Please! Come!" said Rosa, breathless, "Ducks!"

"Hello, Rosa," said the teacher. "What's the trouble?"

"Ducks!" said Rosa again. It was one of the few English words she was sure of. "Come. Please. Ducks!"

She pointed in the direction of the creek. The kids were staring at her, but she didn't care. "Ducks!" she said again, her dark eyes pleading.

The teacher said something in English to his team. They looked at Rosa and talked all at once. Then the teacher smiled. "OK, Rosa," he said. "Show us." They all grabbed their baseball mitts and bats, and followed Rosa to the creek.

Pretty soon there were more people at Rosa's creek than she had ever seen there before. First the police came with their squad cars and sirens. Then came the firefighters with their big trucks and Humane Society workers in their vans.

People came out from the apartment building with dishpans and towels and liquid dish detergent. Rosa did not understand all the talk, but she knew what was happening.

The ducks were too weak to fly or run away. She and the other kids rounded them up and held them in the dishpans while the Humane Society people worked. Four washes for each duck with mild detergent, and four rinses with clear water. It reminded Rosa of doing the wash.

After a while someone brought a blow-dryer. Rosa laughed as the ducks were blown fluffy-dry. One by one, they were packed carefully into cages in the Humane Society vans.

"We'll keep them for a few days," one of the workers said. "They need time to regain the natural oils in their feathers, so they can keep themselves warm and swim properly. A big factory upstream spilled four hundred gallons of diesel fuel into the storm sewers last night. What a mess! You got to these ducks just in time, young lady."

Rosa did not know what the man was saying, but she saw how everyone smiled at her, and she felt proud.

By the time Rosa's mama came home, the cars and the vans and the people were gone. Rosa was in her special place by the creek. But she was not alone. She was playing baseball with three friends. Rosa was good at baseball. She was getting better at English, too.

"Home run!" she shouted, laughing, after she slugged the ball almost to the parking lot. Rosa was happy. And the dishpan ducks were safe.

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1. Why is the gym teacher important in the story? Use examples of what he says or does in your answer.

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## Question 1

## Scoring Guide

Score & Description
<p><b>Acceptable</b></p> <p>These responses use evidence from the story to explain why the gym teacher is an important character. Responses refer specifically to the teacher recognizing that something was wrong, that he smiled at Rosa, that he brought the baseball team to help, or may infer that it was the gym teacher who called the Humane Society and the police to the creek.</p>
<p><b>Unacceptable</b></p> <p>These responses contain inappropriate information from the story or personal opinions that give no indication of generally understanding why the gym teacher is important to what happens in the story.</p>

**Acceptable - Student Response**

- 1 Why is the gym teacher important in the story? Use examples of what he says or does in your answer.

The gym teacher is important in the story because he's the one Rosa came to when she needed help for the ducks. That's why the gym teacher was important in the story.

- 1 Why is the gym teacher important in the story? Use examples of what he says or does in your answer.

The gym teacher is important because he gets every body to help the ducks.

## Scorer Comments:

Both responses recognize the importance of the gym teacher by providing an example of what he does that is central to the main action of saving the ducks.

**Unacceptable - Student Response**

- 1 Why is the gym teacher important in the story? Use examples of what he says or does in your answer.

He make Rosa three friends, and  
he teach how to play baseball.

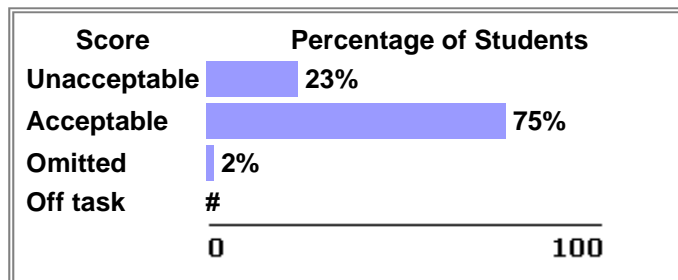
- 1 Why is the gym teacher important in the story? Use examples of what he says or does in your answer.

The gym teacher is important  
in this story because she's a  
grown up and not a stranger.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides irrelevant information. The second response provides an opinion about why the gym teacher is important that is not based on what he says or does in the story.

2007 National Performance Results



Note:

- These results are for public and nonpublic school students.
- Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

**Contexts for Reading:** *Reading for Literary Experience*  
**Aspects of Reading:** *Developing Interpretation*

## Contexts for Reading

### *Reading for Literary Experience*

- Involves the reader in exploring themes, events, characters, settings, problems, and the language of literary works

The reader brings his or her experiences and knowledge to the text in such activities as anticipating events, picturing settings, predicting consequences, analyzing actions, and considering the language of literary works. The reader thinks about the perspective of the authors and characters and considers the language and story structure when reading for literary experience. Various types of texts are associated with reading for literary experience, including novels, short stories, poems, plays, legends, biographies, myths, and folktales.

## Aspects of Reading

### *Developing Interpretation*

To develop an interpretation, the reader must extend initial impressions to develop a more complete understanding of what was read. This process involves linking information across parts of a text as well as focusing on specific information. Questions that assess this aspect of reading include drawing inferences about the relationship of two pieces of information and providing evidence to determine the reason for an action. Questions that assess this aspect of reading include the following:

- What event marked a change in the plot or situation?
- What caused the character to \_\_\_\_\_?
- What caused this event?
- What is the meaning of \_\_\_\_\_?
- What type of person is this character? Explain.
- What does this idea imply?
- In what ways are these ideas important to the topic or theme?
- What will be the result of this step in the directions?
- What does this character think about \_\_\_\_\_?

	<b>Description</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Difficulty</b>
<b>1</b>	Why is the gym teacher important	4th	Short Constructed Response	Easy