



# The Story of Siddhartha and the Swan - teacher's notes

You can watch the story on video here: <https://youtu.be/1GCjsHLZ9-M>

## Background Information

The story of Siddhartha and the swan is a favourite with Buddhists all over the world. It is not found in the Pali scriptures but comes from a Sanskrit text which has also been translated into Tibetan.

The figure of Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin, appears in many of the Jataka tales which are stories of the Buddha's previous lives. Devadatta became one of the followers of the Buddha but eventually broke away and set up a separate movement. This might explain why he is often featured in an unfavourable light. In our retelling of the story we have added Devadatta's change of heart: we wanted to keep to the spirit of the story; encourage children to develop empathy; and assert the fact that we can all reflect on our past actions and, in the light of this, change for the better.

## Programme synopsis

### Story

This story includes the birth and childhood of Prince Siddhartha who was later to become the Buddha. Siddhartha rescues a swan shot by his cousin. They argue about who should have the swan and go to ask the king and his councillors to help settle the disagreement. A wise man appears and gives his judgement.

## Themes

- Compassion and empathy
- Respect for living things



## Recalling the story

*(please refer to the “Siddhartha and the Swan” worksheet)*

The sequencing activity is designed to help the children recollect the main aspects of the story. Recall with the children the main points of the story. The pictures may be enlarged and used as support. The children may then:



- Cut out the sentences and match them to the pictures.
- Order the sentences and copy them out to match the pictures.
- Write their own sentence for each picture, using illustrated key words as support.
- Free write the story, using the illustrations and key words as support.



## Explore and respond

Discussion : Animals have feelings too

- How would you feel if someone forgot to give you any food or drink?
- Why does it matter how we treat our pets?
- How do we know that our pets have feelings?
- Do you have any pets? How do you care for them?
- Who looks after your pet for you when you are away?
- How can you tell if your pet is happy or unhappy, or hungry, or unwell, etc.?
- Do all animals have feelings?
- How do you know?
- How can we show we care about wild animals?



*(please refer to the “Things that have feelings” worksheet)*



After discussion, have the children:

- Circle and colour the things that have feelings.
- Complete the “How to look after my pet” sheet.
- Draw their pet.
- Draw the things their pet needs and complete the following sentences:

My pet likes to eat ..... My pet sleeps in ..... My pet also needs .....

### **Drama**

The aim of this is to help the children to improvise relevant sections of the story in order to explore their own feelings and those of the various characters.

#### **Wild Swans**

- Move around the room as if you were a wild swan: flying free in the clear blue sky; tilting and stretching your wings; gliding over the mountains and lakes, etc.
- Suddenly you feel a pain in your wing. You tumble to the ground. You don't understand what has happened.
- You lie on the ground. Your wing hurts.
- Someone approaches. You are very frightened.
- They begin to speak in a kind voice. They bandage your wing. You realise they want to help you. You gradually become less afraid.
- Your wing is healed. Flap and stretch and test it out before flying off. Don't forget to say thank you!





## Discussion

Imagine how others feel

Devadatta had never stopped to think that animals had feelings, too.

When he realised this, he felt sorry and wanted to help the swan get well again.



- What was the wild swan thinking as it flew along and looked down on the world below?
- What was Devadatta thinking when he saw the swans fly past?
- How did the swan feel when it realised it had been shot?
- Why did Devadatta shoot the swan?
- What do you think Devadatta wanted to do with the swan?
- Why did he change his mind?
- If you were the swan, and could speak, what would you have said to Devadatta?
- If you were Devadatta, what would you have said to the swan as you let it go once it was well again?

*(please refer to the “Who thought that?” worksheet)*

After the above discussion, the children:

- Read the sentences
- Decide “Who thought that?”
- Match the sentences to the bubbles



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