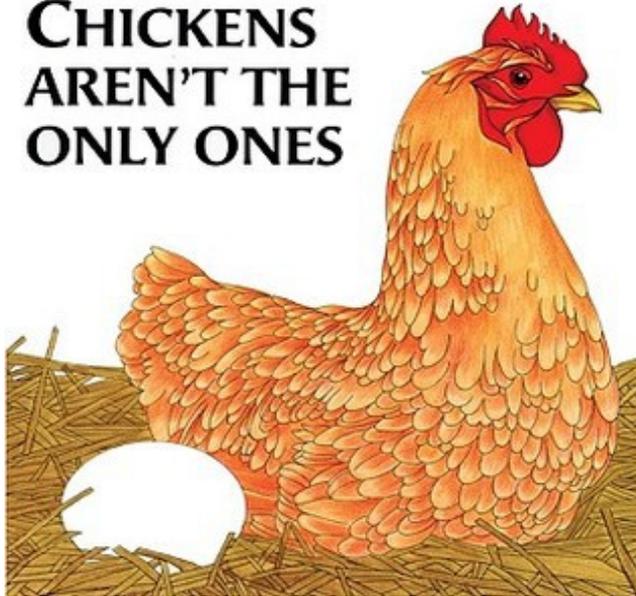


Literary Guide for Ruth Heller's

Chickens Aren't the Only Ones

RUTH HELLER
WORLD OF NATURE

**CHICKENS
AREN'T THE
ONLY ONES**



by Robin M. Huntley

Summary

As a nonfiction text that *looks* very much like most fiction books, Ruth Heller's Chickens Aren't the Only Ones is filled with rich illustrations and vocabulary and draws readers in with its alluring, picture-book-like structure. This fun, upbeat, and informative text pairs the inherent wonder of childhood with a collection of fascinating facts, and despite its appearance, it is a great example of a rich nonfiction text for young readers.

The text within the book is short and simple, and draws meaty sentences out over the course of several pages, thus allowing young readers to digest each piece of information on its own while working to piece together a larger idea. There are few words, but the ones that are there convey important information and essential vocabulary. The rich, detailed illustrations appear to be simply artwork, but provide readers with accurate images of the many species mentioned in the book. Young readers can gain much knowledge (and entertainment!) from endless close examination of the pictures alone.

Critical Thinking Questions

Written for use with young readers, these critical thinking questions are designed to help readers closely examine the information presented within the text. Readers will be asked to take note of details in illustrations, process facts shared in the text, and connect the information offered within the book to their own animal-related schema. The questions are presented in the order in which they can/should be asked, and each one matches up with a two-page spread within the book. The question content makes it clear which page each question matches.

- What do *you* do with regular chicken eggs?
- What do chicken eggs look like when you see them? What is their size like? Color? Shape?
- Can you think of any other egg-laying creatures besides chickens? Where have you seen

them?

- What kinds of birds do you see here? Do any of them live around here?
- What does the bird's egg size have to do with the size of its body?
- These green eggs from the ocean all have something in common. Why do you think they're shape, color, and size is alike? What does it remind you of?
- Do you recognize any of these insects? Are some of them ones that we could find outside?
- What creatures in this book live in our landscape?
- Do you remember the names of any of these creatures mentioned earlier in the story?
- What animals *don't* lay eggs?

In addition to using the questions above to promote closer reading of the text, readers should be asked to notice and share patterns in the text structure and details included in the illustrations. Ruth Heller's text (in all of her books) follows a pattern throughout, and noticing the pattern can help readers strengthen their language skills. Additionally, the rich, brilliant illustrations share scientific information about each species. Young readers should be supported in recognizing this and taking full advantage, so as to be able to glean the maximum amount of information from the text.

Mini-Lesson

The mini-lesson outlined below is designed to support readers in utilizing both text and illustrations to gather information from a book. Additionally, the mini-lesson offers readers the opportunity to learn and/or practice using a structured method of note-taking. While still quite young, 5-8 year old readers are capable of understanding the basics of organizing information. Designed with this age group in mind, the mini-lesson is presented in very basic terms but can be easily adapted for use with almost any age group.

Charting the Details

1. Discuss with readers the meaning of the word “investigate.” Ask them to share their ideas about what it means to investigate something, or to be an investigator.
2. After one close reading of the book, inform readers that now that they're familiar with the story, they'll become investigators – tasked with the challenge of uncovering as many bits of information as they can from the words and pictures included in the book.
3. Share the chart below in a way that allows all participants in the activity to see it and contribute if they wish. Chart paper, projectors, or a white or chalk board work perfectly. Ask readers to examine the chart and share their observations and ideas about what it might be for, how it might be used, etc.

Words	Pictures

The chart used to complete this mini-lesson can be T-shaped and have an open space underneath each heading. Alternately, it could include many cells underneath each heading so that one piece of information could be placed in each cell. An alternate version of this activity could use a Venn diagram to sort the information, allowing readers to explore the motivation behind duplicate information (is it to make a point, to illustrate something hard to explain in words, etc.). This alternate version would be an appropriate challenge for 7-9 year old readers.

4. Explain to readers that you'll share the story with them again, and that this time, you'll pause on each page to find information. Then, you'll place the information in either the “Words” or “Pictures” category based on where it came from. Point out the growth of your list as the story goes on.
5. After reading, discuss the chart's contents with readers. Notice which portion of the text held more information, and discuss this with readers. Be sure to touch on possible reasons for this: did the author want to make sure we could visualize everything? Was it easier to draw about animals than it was to write about them? Could it be that we might not be able to read all of the words if she included more

details in the text?

Extension Activities

Loosely written so as to be easily adapted for use in any educational setting, the activities below use Chickens Aren't the Only Ones as a catalyst for learning about a variety of topics and in a variety of ways.

Home Hatch

Hatch some eggs of your own! Chicken and frog eggs are the most common (and some of the easiest) eggs to hatch at home, but there are many other creatures whose eggs can be hatched indoors. Whether the creatures are the type that can become pets or they need to be returned to the wild eventually, a foray into hatchery work provides fantastic hands-on science opportunities and is the perfect amount of responsibility and scientific “magic” for 5-8 year olds. In the springtime, frog eggs can be found in local ponds and vernal pools, while chicken, duck, goose, and other farm bird eggs can usually be purchased at or through a local farm and garden store. Make close observations throughout the hatching process to learn firsthand about the life cycle of the species you choose!

Egg Hunt

Head to the woods and look for eggs! It's likely that most of the eggs found in your surroundings are not in nests in trees but are near the ground. As the book mentions, there are many, many species of egg-laying insects, and their eggs are tiny but plentiful at the right time of year. Look underneath logs, between rocks, in the soil, and on leaves, branches, and bark for the eggs of tiny creatures. Document your findings by taking pictures, journaling, or carefully collecting any eggs that can be studied in a container without causing harm. Afterward, do some detective work to learn what types of creatures each egg-type generates. Extensions to this activity include mapping the eggs found

and creating a field guide for eggs in the local landscape.

They Aren't the Only Ones!

Create your own version of Ruth Heller's fantastic story by choosing another category of animals and emulating her style and structure. This activity calls for readers to recognize the way in which the story is structured and the reasons why. Additionally, readers will need to use great care in creating engaging and informative illustrations. Potential book topics include creatures with webbed feet (“Ducks Aren't the Only Ones”), animals with spikes or spines (“Porcupines Aren't the Only Ones”), creatures that can breathe underwater (“Fish Aren't the Only Ones”), and animals that camouflage perfectly with their environments (“Chameleons Aren't the Only Ones”).

Matching Shells

This activity is actually a game, and it can be created by a facilitator and played by readers, or it can be both created and played by readers. The game follows regular Memory rules, where players place a deck of cards face-down in rows and flip two cards at a time in order to gather matches. In this game, the matches are made up of a species and its egg. Players will be asked to match eggs to the species' adult form by observing things like egg size, egg shape, and the egg's surroundings. Players can make matches for the game by researching creatures and their eggs further, or they can learn by studying a pre-made version of the game before playing.



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