

Thumbelina

Part I

Background Information

This tale was written by Hans Christian Anderson and is included in Lang's "The Yellow Fairy Book."

Facts:

1. What did the old witch sell to the old woman? *(She sold her a barley-corn .)*
2. What grew when the old woman planted the barley-corn? *(A tulip grew and when it blossomed there sat a little girl.)*
3. What did the old woman name the little girl? *(Thumbelina)*
4. Who or what stole Thumbelina from the old woman's home? *(Thumbelina was taken by an old toad.)*
5. Where did the old toad place Thumbelina and her walnut shell? *(The old toad placed Thumbelina on a water-lily in a brook.)*
6. What was the old toad decorating Thumbelina's room with? *(Rushes and marigold leaves)*

Comprehension:

1. Why was the little girl given the name "Thumbelina"? *(She was given the name because , "she was scarcely half a thumb in height."*
2. What are some other indicators of Thumbelina's size? *(A walnut-shell was her cradle, tulip petals were her mattress, a rose-leaf was her blanket, and a toad could carry her.)*
3. Why did the old toad take Thumbelina from the old woman's home?*(The old toad took Thumbelina because she thought the little girl would make a beautiful wife for her son.)*
4. Did the old toad believe that Thumbelina would be happy once she discovered that she had been taken from the old woman's home? *(No, the old toad feared that Thumbelina would try to escape.)*
5. Why did the old toad place Thumbelina on a water-lily in the middle of a brook? *(The old toad did not want Thumbelina to escape so she was placed on a water-lily in the middle of the brook so she would not be able to run away.)*
6. Was Thumbelina happy when she woke up? *(No, she wept bitterly.)*
7. Did Thumbelina want to marry the old toad's son? *(No, Thumbelina did not want to marry the old toad's son. She found him ugly and his mother clammy.)*

Points to Ponder

What type of similes are used in this tale? Create your own to finish the sentence, "Thumbelina is as small as a" Create a metaphor for Thumbelina's tiny stature.

A simile compares dissimilar things using the words "like" or "as". An example is: "It is as yellow as ...a sweltering sun." A metaphor makes a comparison without using "like" or "as" and draws a comparison between two unlike things by naming the one for the other. For example, to say, "A cloud is a cotton ball" is a metaphor.

The theme of abduction is central to many of the tales in this unit of study. Discuss the comparisons that can be made to other stories that also feature abduction. How similar are the plots, the characters, the motives?

For example, abduction occurs in "Little Wildrose", "Prince Hyacinth", and "Thumbelina".

Discuss the relevance of Thumbelina's size in this tale. What are some stereotypes attributed to physical appearance? Are these stereotypes correct? How does one disprove incorrect stereotypes?

Thumbelina is often perceived as fragile and weak because of her size. Other characters often take advantage of her tiny stature exerting force because they are bigger than she.

Using your imagination, think of some everyday activities that might be more difficult, or at least different, for someone who is significantly smaller than average? Significantly larger? What are some of the things you see in public places like schools to help people handle the challenges presented by physical differences? How do your friends or relatives with special needs handle their challenges?

This will prompt discussion and compassion for others and will help students assess their own abilities.

Vocabulary

barley corn

sows

shilling

coverlet

magnificence

clammy

www.naturesound.com/frogs/frogs.html This site offers photographs and real sound recordings of each species' calls.

Newspaper Tie - In

This tale depicts a toad that can talk. Look through the newspaper and find an article or photograph that features an animal. Write a story based on it, but seen from the perspective of the animal as if it had some human abilities.

Have students look through the birth announcements and determine the type of information that is usually included. Write a birth announcement for Thumbelina.



Thumbelina

Part II

Background Information

In part I, little Thumbelina is abducted by a toad and placed on a lily pad so she cannot escape. She weeps bitterly and does not want to marry the old toad's son.

Facts:

1. Who helped Thumbelina escape from the toads? *(A school of little fish)*
2. What did Thumbelina tie the white butterfly to? *(She fastened her sash to the leaf she was sitting on.)*
3. What creature swooped down to take Thumbelina letting the leaf float down the stream while still attached to the butterfly? *(A beetle)*
4. Why did the beetle release Thumbelina? *(He began to think she was ugly.)*
5. What did Thumbelina eat while living alone in the woods? *(She ate honey from flowers and drank dew on the leaves.)*
6. How tall is Thumbelina? *(One inch high)*
7. What or who took Thumbelina in and said she could spend the winter? *(A field mouse)*

Comprehension:

1. Why did the little fishes nibble the stem of the leaf that Thumbelina was sitting on? *(They had heard her crying and knew that she did not want to be with the toads and they felt sorry for her. Nibbling on the stem of the leaf released it from the stalk holding it in place; therefore, the leaf was freed and floated down the stream.)*
2. Why did the beetle begin to think of Thumbelina as ugly when he had initially thought her quite pretty? *(The other beetles found Thumbelina unattractive because she did not look like them. They remarked, "She has only two legs...she has no feelers!" The beetle then started to think of her as ugly too.)*
3. Why did all of the birds that had sung about her fly away? *(The seasons had changed and as winter approaches birds migrate.)*
4. What was Thumbelina distressed about as the beetle flew away with her? *(She was quite distressed about the butterfly. She worried that she had tied the sash too tight and if the butterfly was unable to get loose it would starve to death.)*
5. Does the weather impact Thumbelina positively or negatively? *(The change of seasons is detrimental to Thumbelina's survival. During the summer she was able to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. She gathered her own food and created a home for herself. When winter approaches she fears for her own survival and ultimately seeks help.)*

Points to Ponder

There is an element of peer pressure in this tale. Can you point to the encounter that demonstrates the influence of peers on another's opinions?

The beetle that flew off with Thumbelina initially found her beautiful. His opinion changed after his friends repeatedly denounced Thumbelina's appearance. His initial opinion of Thumbelina was altered due to the opinions of others.

Have you ever changed your opinion as a way to fit in or please others?

This provides the opportunity to discuss peer pressure and how it influences one's thoughts and actions. You may want to consider making this part of a journal writing experience.

The beetle's friends did not think Thumbelina so pretty because she did not look like them. What is this an example of?

This may be viewed as prejudice. Prejudice can be described as the negative feelings one holds against another for a preconceived reason. Discrimination is described as an action that stems from prejudice. The beetles were prejudice against Thumbelina because her appearance is different from their own. Acceptance of diversity is critical.

The weather influences the plot of this tale and forces Thumbelina to seek help in order to survive. Do you recall any other tales where the weather influences the actions of the characters?

An example is "The Boy and the Wolves". The young boy and Thumbelina both were negatively influenced by the weather. In both tales the characters were able to fend for themselves until winter came along at which point the characters found it necessary to accept help from other characters.

Vocabulary

assembled

fluttered

sash

fastened

distressed

imaginable

clover-leaf

www.newwildlife.com This site offers recent articles bout preservation of wildlife, particularly in New England.

Newspaper Tie - In

Thumbelina is judged by the beetles on the basis of her appearance. There are laws in today's society that prevent people from discriminating. Research those laws and read newspaper articles to find examples of the laws in action and relate it to Thumbelina's plight. What kinds of discrimination do the laws apply to? Would that have helped her?



Thumbelina

Part III

Background Information

In part II, Thumbelina escapes from the toads only to find herself captive of a beetle. He releases her into the wild and she fares well until winter approaches. In need of shelter and food, she accepts an invitation to live in the home of a field mouse.

Facts:

1. Who came to visit the field mouse? *(A mole)*
2. What lay in the middle of the tunnel? *(A seemingly dead bird, a swallow)*
3. How did Thumbelina, the field mouse and the mole make their way through the tunnel? *(The mole carried a piece of rotten wood which glowed like fire in the dark.)*
4. What did Thumbelina bring to the swallow so that it would be buried warmly? *(She brought a blanket of straw and thistle-down.)*
5. What had the swallow torn one of its wings on? *(He tore it on a bramble.)*

Comprehension:

1. Why does the mole dislike sunlight and flowers? *(The field mouse remarks that the mole, "cannot bear the sun and the beautiful flowers, and speaks slightly of them, for he has never seen them.")*
2. Why does Thumbelina show compassion towards the seemingly dead bird? *(She was fond of birds because they had sung to her over the summer.)*
3. What assumption did the mole and the field mouse make regarding the swallow's death? *(They assumed that the swallow had died due to starvation.)*
4. Did the swallow die due to the reasons assumed by the mole and the field mouse? *(No, the swallow supposedly died because he froze. His wing had been torn and he was unable to fly with the other swallows that had migrated.)*
5. How did Thumbelina come to realize that the swallow was not dead? *(When Thumbelina placed her head against the bird's heart she realized that the bird was not dead. She most likely heard a heartbeat from within the bird's chest.)*
6. When the swallow came to life he wanted to regain his strength quickly in order to fly away. Why hadn't he realized that it was snowing and freezing? *(When he dropped to the ground after hurting his wing he could not remember anything; therefore, he was not sure of the season and falsely assumed winter had passed.)*

Points to Ponder

The mole professes to dislike flowers. What is the irony as it relates to Thumbelina?

Ironically, Thumbelina is born from a tulip. Flowers are a part of her essence and being yet the mole dislikes them.

What is the significance of the mole's blindness?

The mole falls in love with Thumbelina based on the beauty of her singing voice. Thumbelina loves the birds because of the beautiful voices. Ironically, the mole and the field mouse disregard the beauty of the birds' song.

The weather plays an obvious role in this tale. Discuss how the weather influences each of the characters in this part of the tale. Compare this element with other tales and create a chart to demonstrate the similarities.

The weather influences the actions of the characters: Thumbelina, the mole, and the swallow. The mole does not like the sunlight and spends his time underground during the summer. The swallow migrates south for the winter because the cold weather jeopardizes his life and the ability to gather food. Thumbelina's actions are driven by the weather in that she needed to find shelter during the winter months; consequently, this results in a loss of independence.

Discuss the contrast between the characters Thumbelina and the mole. The contrasts between the characters reflect many of the overall elements included in fairy tales. Trace the elements and create a diagram to visually represent the contrasts.

There is an abundance of contrasts between Thumbelina and the mole. The main contrast that is an essential fairy tale element is the contrasts between light and dark, good and bad. Examples:

*Thumbelina represents light
She loves flowers
She loves birds and flight
She loves sunlight and warmth*

*The mole represents darkness
He dislikes flowers
He dislikes birds and is grounded
He dislikes sunlight*

Vocabulary

circumstances

accomplished

bandy

slighteningly

bramble

www.usatoday.com/weather/wfront.htm This site designed by USA Today offers viewers up to date forecasts globally, nationally, and regionally. It includes full coverage of weather related stories and information about weather in general. It includes maps and other graphics such as global satellite snapshots.

Newspaper Tie - In

Weather has a significant impact on people's lives. In this tale, the winter forces Thumbelina to seek help in order to survive and also forces the swallow to rely on Thumbelina to nurse him back to health. Read newspaper articles to find examples of how the weather shapes and molds our lives in a variety of ways. Perhaps a natural disaster has occurred: a blizzard, a drought, etc.



Thumbelina

Part IV

Background Information

In part III, Thumbelina is introduced to the mole and happens upon a seemingly dead swallow. Her compassionate nature compels her to secretly care for the dead bird who ultimately comes to life as he was frozen rather than dead.

Facts:

1. In what season did the swallow eventually depart from Thumbelina's care? *(The swallow flew away when spring came.)*
2. Who proposed to Thumbelina? *(The mole proposed to Thumbelina.)*
3. When is it stated that the wedding between the mole and Thumbelina would take place? *(It is stated that the wedding will take place after the summer had passed..)*
4. What did Thumbelina need to complete to prepare for her wedding with the mole? *(She needed to work at spinning her linen for her dowry.)*
5. How did Thumbelina eventually escape from her home with the field mouse and the mole? *(She flew on the back of the swallow in order to escape.)*

Comprehension:

1. Why did the field mouse think Thumbelina should marry the mole? *(The field mouse felt that Thumbelina should marry the mole because of his wealth and because no one else would want to marry her.)*
2. Did Thumbelina want to marry the mole? Why or why not? *(Thumbelina did not want to marry the mole. She found him ugly and she did not want to be forced to live underground away from the sun, the sky, the flowers, and the birds.)*
3. Why did the swallow come back for Thumbelina? *(The swallow was grateful to Thumbelina because she had shown him such compassion and had saved his life while he lay freezing in the tunnel.)*
4. How much time had passed since Thumbelina had last seen the swallow? *(It is obvious from the story that spring and summer had passed and it was autumn when the swallow returned. It is stated in the story and one can infer the season because the swallow is once again migrating to warmer land.)*
5. Where and why was the swallow flying away from the the place where Thumbelina, the mole, and the field mouse resided? *(The swallow is migrating to warmer land since winter is approaching.)*
6. Why did Thumbelina consider marrying the mole even if she did not like him? *(She felt obligated to the field mouse because the field mouse had been kind to her and helped her survive..)*

Points to Ponder

Discuss the habitats of each of the characters: the toad, the mole, the field mouse, the swallow, and the beetle. Are any of the habitats of these creatures acceptable to Thumbelina? Does she fit in or belong with any of these creatures?

This prompt encourages students to gather information from outside resources and may provide a platform for research. It also encourages students to reflect on the story in its entirety serving as an overall review.

Why did the swallow want Thumbelina to leave? Why wouldn't she leave when the swallow first asked her to?

This subjective prompting allows students the opportunity to discuss feelings pertaining to guilt, compassion, fear of disapproval, obligation, demand, etc. Thumbelina felt obligated to stay. Later in the story she decides to fly away with the swallow. She was unable to leave until she was ready to do so. She had to acknowledge her own needs before she was ready to take flight.

Was it fair for the field mouse to make Thumbelina feel as if she had to marry the mole? What might have been the field mice's ulterior motive for desiring Thumbelina to marry the mole?

Students' opinions will vary. It appears that the field mouse might have been acting on her own interests. She did not want to upset the mole and lose his friendship especially since he was wealthy.

Thumbelina's compassion is evident throughout the story. What are some examples of this?

She shows compassion for the swallow, she felt terrible about the butterfly, she feels obliged to the field mouse.

Vocabulary

fortune

obstinate

dowry

reaped

unwilling

www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/i6140id.html This site offers information about swallows and other birds. The tree swallow is featured and taxonomy is listed. Includes photos, audio clips and distribution maps.

Newspaper Tie - In

Thumbelina is leaving the certainty of her life with the mole for the unknown. She is taking flight with the swallow and does not know what lies ahead in her future. Read the horoscope section of your newspaper and select an astrological sign for Thumbelina. To make the activity more realistic, remind students of Thumbelina's coming to life. She was born from a tulip, which indicates a spring month. Research the growth of tulips for your region to determine a possible time frame for Thumbelina's birthday. Review Thumbelina's horoscope and make a prediction for her future based on its contents.



Thumbelina

Part V

Background Information

In part IV, Thumbelina finds herself reluctantly engaged to the mole spending her time spinning linen for her dowry and wistfully hoping to see the swallow again. He surprises her and convinces her to take flight and escape her unhappy future.

Facts:

1. What did Thumbelina see standing beside a blue lake?
(She saw a white marble castle.)
2. What did Thumbelina see in the middle of one of the beautiful white flowers?
(She saw a little man with beautiful wings wearing a crown.)
3. Why was the little Prince frightened of the swallow? *(The little Prince was frightened of the swallow because in comparison to himself the swallow looked like a giant.)*
4. What was the best of all presents that the little men and woman bestowed upon Thumbelina? *(Thumbelina thought the beautiful pair of wings which were fastened on to her back was the best present she received.)*
5. What name was given to Thumbelina by the little Prince? *(The name given to Thumbelina was May Blossom.)*
6. Where did the swallow fly away to? *(The swallow flew back to Denmark where he lived with his wife in a little nest above a window.)*

Comprehension:

1. Why were the wings given to Thumbelina her best present of all? *(She loved to be free and it is ultimately the wings of the swallow that set her free from the life she was embarking on with the mole.)*
2. Why did the swallow bring Thumbelina to this location? *(Although it is not stated in the story, perhaps the swallow was aware of the presence of other little people like Thumbelina.)*
3. Why did the swallow have a heavy heart? *(The swallow had a heavy heart and was sad because he cared for Thumbelina and did not want to be away from her.)*
4. How does Thumbelina feel about the lands she flew over? *(Thumbelina found the landscape lush with beauty and warmth.)*
5. The author paints a portrait of the landscape with words. What sensory perceptions are touched upon? What imagery is evoked? *(The imagery is lush and colorful. The author speaks to readers about the beauty that can be seen with the eyes and the beauty that can be smelled in the scented air.)*

Points to Ponder

The landscape is described using vivid detail and appeals to sense of sight and smell. Can you imagine other sensory experiences Thumbelina might have experienced while flying over the land with the swallow? Can you write a poem in a variety of formats from her perspective?

Prompt students to use their imagination to explore. Have students write a series of poems to convey their opinion of all that Thumbelina experienced while flying over the land. Students can create cinquains, diamantes, or haiku poetry. To connect visual art to this activity have students paint a watercolor portrait of the landscape.

At the end of the story, the swallow returns to Denmark. Where is Denmark located? What do you know about Denmark, its culture, its people?

Elicit response regarding students geographical knowledge. Prompt further research and mapping skills.

If Thumbelina were to write an autobiography, what would she relate about her experiences? What were the most critical moments of her story?

This prompt serves as an overall review of the story. Another activity idea to keep students actively involved with the tale is to have them keep a daily journal from the perspective of Thumbelina..

Why did the Fairies give Thumbelina a new name? Is her new name nicer?

Often nicknames are based on physical attributes and can be unkind. The Fairies gave Thumbelina a name that is kinder. In their eyes, she was no different than them and was deserving of name more fitting to her.

www.denmarkemb.org/hist.html This site offers information about Denmark's history, holidays, its people, climate and culture. This official site of the Royal Danish Embassy of Washington, D.C. is comprehensive. Click on the link to education and educators will discover global teaching guides appropriate for grades 7-12 (including one on Denmark).

Vocabulary

myrtle	mint
astonishment	transparent
dwelt	noble

Newspaper Tie - In

Have students study book reviews in the newspaper. Write a critical review of "Thumbelina" in newspaper style. Limit the page space as it is done in the newspaper.

Have students read newspaper articles related to the theme of "flight". Relate the theme to the plot of "Thumbelina".

As a culminating activity, have students create a timeline of events of "Thumbelina" using photographs, headlines, and articles from the newspaper. Cut and paste the clippings in a timeline format explaining why each clipping relates to the story line.

