**Ugly? Says Who?  
Lesson**

**Overview**

We often talk about the beauty of nature. Well, sometimes you have to dig a little deeper to appreciate the beauty of some funny looking creatures. In this lesson students will vote for what they consider to be the ugliest animal, observe the animal’s features and predict how the animal’s unique features help it to survive, and create a critter guide that features an “ugly” animal. Students will also research an animal and write a poem that includes factual information about the animal.

**Grade level:** Grades 2 – 4

**Subject areas:** Science, Language Arts

**Learning objectives:**  
Students will be able to do the following:

* Analyze an animal’s unique features and predict how they might be instrumental in the animal’s survival.
* Research an animal and create a critter guide.
* Synthesize information about an animal and write a poem that incorporates factual information.

**Materials:**

* Computer with Internet access
* The video of the episode: “The Beauty of Ugly” from Thirteen’s series NATURE
* [“You Think I’m Ugly?” handout](http://www-tc.pbs.org/wnet/nature/files/2008/06/you_think_im_ugly.pdf) (PDF)
* [“Ugly Critter Guide” rubric](http://www-tc.pbs.org/wnet/nature/files/2008/06/critter_guide_rubric.pdf) (PDF)
* [“Ode to the Ugly” poem organizer](http://www-tc.pbs.org/wnet/nature/files/2008/06/poem_organizer.pdf) (PDF)
* Colored construction paper
* Glue

**Bookmark the following sites**

* **Oklahoma Microscopy Society’s Ugly Bug Contest**  
  [http://www.uglybug.org/](http://www.uglybug.org/" \t "_new)  
  This website contains information on their ugly bug contest.

The following websites contain information about a variety of animals:

* **PBS Nature**  
  [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/critter.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/critter.html" \t "_new)
* **Kid’s Planet**  
  [http://www.kidsplanet.org/factsheets/map.html](http://www.kidsplanet.org/factsheets/map.html" \t "_new)
* **People’s Trust for the Environment**   
  [http://www.ypte.org.uk/docs/animal\_facts.html](http://www.ypte.org.uk/docs/animal_facts.html" \t "_new)
* **Texas A&M University**  
  [http://insects.tamu.edu/fieldguide/](http://insects.tamu.edu/fieldguide/" \t "_new)

**Standards**  
[www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org/" \t "_new)

**Level I [Grade: K-2]**

**7.** Writes in a variety of forms or genres (e.g., picture books, friendly letters, stories, poems, information pieces, invitations, personal experience narratives, messages, responses to literature)

**8.** Writes for different purposes (e.g., to entertain, inform, learn, communicate ideas)

**Level II [Grade: 3-5]**

**5.** Uses strategies (e.g., adapts focus, organization, point of view; determines knowledge and interests of audience) to write for different audiences (e.g., self, peers, teachers, adults)

**6.** Uses strategies (e.g., adapts focus, point of view, organization, form) to write for a variety of purposes (e.g., to inform, entertain, explain, describe, record ideas)

**Standard 7.** Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

**Level I [Grade: K-2]**

**1.** Uses reading skills and strategies to understand a variety of informational texts (e.g., written directions, signs, captions, warning labels, informational books)

**2.** Understands the main idea and supporting details of simple expository information

**3.** Summarizes information found in texts (e.g., retells in own words)

**Level II [Grade: 3-5]**

**1.** Uses reading skills and strategies to understand a variety of informational texts (e.g., textbooks, biographical sketches, letters, diaries, directions, procedures, magazines)

**2.** Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of informational texts (e.g., textbooks, biographical sketches, letters, diaries, directions, procedures, magazines)

**7.** Understands structural patterns or organization in informational texts (e.g., chronological, logical, or sequential order; compare-and-contrast; cause-and-effect; proposition and support)

**Life Science**

**Standard 7.** Understands biological evolution and the diversity of life

**Level I [Grade: K-2]**

**2.** Knows that there are similarities and differences in the appearance and behavior of plants and animals

**Standard 5.** Understands the structure and function of cells and organisms

**Level II [Grade: 3-5]**

**2.** Knows that living organisms have distinct structures and body systems that serve specific functions in growth, survival, and reproduction (e.g., various body structures for walking, flying, or swimming)

**3.** Knows that the behavior of individual organisms is influenced by internal cues (e.g., hunger) and external cues (e.g., changes in the environment), and that humans and other organisms have senses that help them to detect these cues

**Level II [Grade: 3-5]**

**3.** Knows that an organism’s patterns of behavior are related to the nature of that organism’s environment (e.g., kinds and numbers of other organisms present, availability of food and resources, physical characteristics of the environment)

**ISTE Technology Standards**   
National Educational Technology Standards  
[http://cnets.iste.org/currstands/cstands-netss.html](http://cnets.iste.org/currstands/cstands-netss.html" \t "_new)

**Pre K-2**

**2.** Use a variety of media and technology resources for directed and independent learning activities. (1, 3)

**5.** Work cooperatively and collaboratively with peers, family members, and others when using technology in the classroom. (2)

**10.** Gather information and communicate with others using telecommunications, with support from teachers, family members, or student partners. (4)

**Grades 3-5**

**7.** Use telecommunications and online resources (e.g., e-mail, online discussions, Web environments) to participate in collaborative problem-solving activities for the purpose of developing solutions or products for audiences inside and outside the classroom. (4, 5)

**Procedures for Teachers**

**Introductory Activity**

**Time for Completion:** 20 Minutes

The purpose of these activities is to pique students’ interest in the subject of ugly animals.

1. Pass out the “You Think I’m Ugly?” organizer. This organizer will be used in the Introduction Activity and in Activity One as well. Send students to the “Vote for the Ugliest Animal” section of the Nature website. Ask students to vote for the animal that they consider to be the ugliest. After students have voted, ask them to record their choice and answer the first question in the “You Think I’m Ugly?” organizer. When students have finished answering the question in their organizer, have them share with the class which animal they voted for and the reasons for their choice. Students may choose to read what they wrote when explaining their choice.

**Steps**

**Activity One**

**Time for completion:** Two 50-minute class periods and one homework assignment

In this activity, students will analyze photographs of “ugly” animals and predict how the animals’ unique features may help them survive in the wilderness. Students will also research an ugly animal and use the information to create a critter guide.

1. Ask students to refer to Part Two of their “You Think I’m Ugly?” handout. Review this section with the students. Explain to students that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers for this activity, merely guesses based on their observations and information they might already possess regarding the animal. Begin watching “The Beauty of the Ugly” program at 12:36, pausing the program on the image of the wart hog’s head. Leave the image of the wart hog’s head on the screen as students answer the questions in the handout.Wart hog  
   Why do you think the wart hog has a very hard head?  
   Why do you think the wart hog has a muzzle shaped like a shovel?  
   Why do you think the wart hog has tusks?  
   Why do you think the wart hog has warts?
2. After students have finished answering the questions, have them share their predictions with the class. When students have finished sharing their guesses, resume playing the program from the location where you paused to 15:08.
3. Repeat the same process for the naked mole-rat. Begin watching “The Beauty of the Ugly” program at 29:37, pausing the program on the image of the naked mole-rat. (WE COULD ALSO USE A PROGRAM CLIP HERE IF IT IS AVAILABLE.) Leave the image of the naked mole-rat on the screen as students answer the questions in the handout.Naked mole-rat  
   Why do you think the naked mole-rat doesn’t have any fur?  
   Why do you think the naked mole-rat has buck teeth?  
   The naked mole-rat’s lips shut behind his front teeth. What do you think the reason is for this?
4. After students have finished answering the questions, have them share their predictions with the class. When students have finished sharing their guesses, resume playing the program from the location where you paused to 32:27.**Teacher Note:** You may choose to feed your students some basic information about these animals if they are struggling with this activity. The following is a list of facts that you might choose to share with your students:Wart hogs  
   Habitat – Found in moist and arid savannas  
   Diet – Eats grass and digs for bulbs, tubers and roots during dry season  
   Predators – Humans, lions, leopards, crocodiles and hyenas

Naked mole-rat  
Habitat – Underground tunnels and burrows in semi-arid grassy regions  
Diet- Roots and tubers  
Predators – Mostly snakes

1. Explain to students that they are going to learn more about the animal they voted for and how its features help it to survive in its environment. Tell students to record information about this animal in Part Three of the “You Think I’m Ugly?” organizer.
2. After students have finished researching their animal, visit the Critter Guide section of the Nature website. Provide time for students to explore the Critter Guide. After students have read several Critter Guides, explain to students that they are going to use the information in their organizer to create a “Critter Guide” for the animal they voted for. Review the categories listed below. Remind students that they will be providing accurate information to go along with these headings.
   * Description
   * Where do they live?
   * What do they eat?
   * Critter Fact
   * Did you know?
   * Photograph or drawing
3. After students have completed their “Critter Guides,” display the guides in the classroom.

**Activity Two**

**Time for Completion:** Three 30 – minute class periods

In this activity students will analyze how seemingly unattractive features in an animal can actually be the “Beauty of the Ugly.” Students will collect information about an animal and incorporate the information into a poem that expresses how the “ugly” can be an animal’s biggest survival asset.

1. Watch the “Beauty of the Ugly” program from 53:08 until the end. Ask students how they think beauty is defined and if they have changed their idea of what makes an animal ugly.
2. Tell students that they are going to write a poem about an “ugly” animal. Students may choose to use an animal from the contest section of the Nature website or select an animal of their own choosing that they consider to be ugly.
3. Pass out and review the “Ode to the Ugly” poem organizer. You may choose to copy the instructions for the poem structure on the board. Each student should have an image of the animal available to look at when writing his or her poem. Review the poem structure.Poem Structure  
   Line 1: I am a (name of animal).  
   Line 2: Three words, or sets of words, that describe the animal’s physical characteristics.  
   Line 3: A positive statement that refers to line 2.  
   Line 4: A sentence that says something negative about the animal’s looks, but shows that it really is a positive. Use the word “but” to link the two parts of the sentence.  
   Line 5: Three words, or sets of words, that describe something the animal eats, or does with its body.  
   Line 6: A positive statement that refers to line 5.  
   Line 7: A sentence that says something negative about the animal’s looks, but shows that it really is a positive. Use the word “but” to link the two parts of the sentence.  
   Line 8: Three words, or sets of words, that describe the animal’s physical characteristics.  
   Line 9: End with something along the idea of “Pretty or not, I’m a (insert animal’s name).  
   Teacher Note: The last line is merely a suggestion. Students may end the poem in any way they choose.

Sample Poem  
I am a wart hog  
Wart sacks, hard head, rubbery snout,  
Hey leopard! Just try to bite my head.  
People hate my warts, but they protect my eyes and mouth.  
Grass, Bulbs, Roots,  
My shovel shaped mouth makes eating them a breeze.  
People think my tusks are tacky, but they keep me safe.  
Big tusks, hair-less skin, tiny eyes  
Pretty or not, I’m a wart hog.

1. Provide time for students to research their animal. After students have finished gathering the information about the animals, check each student’s work to be certain that their information is correct and that they have enough material to draw upon to create their poems. Explain to students that they might want to refer to words that they wrote in their organizer when they are writing their poem. Students may use a variety of sources to gather their information. These may include classroom and library books, periodicals, and videos. The websites listed below contain information that might be helpful. If students are having difficulty finding information on a particular animal, they may choose to use the Google website to search for information on their animal.
   * **Kid’s Planet**  
     [http://www.kidsplanet.org/factsheets/map.html](http://www.kidsplanet.org/factsheets/map.html" \t "_new)
   * **People’s Trust for the Environment**  
     [http://www.ypte.org.uk/docs/animal\_facts.html](http://www.ypte.org.uk/docs/animal_facts.html" \t "_new)
   * **Texas A&M University**  
     [http://insects.tamu.edu/fieldguide/](http://insects.tamu.edu/fieldguide/" \t "_new)
2. After students have completed their poems, have them glue their poem and a photograph or drawing of the animal on a piece of colored construction paper. Hang the poems around the classroom.

**Assessment Suggestions**  
Activity One may be assessed using the “Ugly Critter Guide” rubric.  
Activity Two may be assessed using the students’ “Ugly” poems.

**Extension Activity**  
If you haven’t already, host or participate in a school or statewide “Ugliest Bug” contest. This website provides information on the Okalahoma contest. [http://www.uglybug.org/](http://www.uglybug.org/" \t "_new)

**About the Author**  
Laurel Blaine is founder of Digital Narratives LLC, a curriculum design company. In addition to content development, Digital Narratives also works with young people to enhance their literacy skills as they explore the power of digital storytelling. Over the past decade, Laurel has created educational materials for a diverse range of clients including The Kennedy Center, Oakland East Bay Symphony, Learning Matters/Listen Up! and Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt Museum.