

The Animal School: A Parable

Once upon a time the animals decided they must do something decisive to meet the increasing complexity of their society. They held a meeting and finally decided to organize a school.

The curriculum consisted of running, climbing, swimming and flying. Since these were the basic behaviours of most animals, they decided that all the students should take all the subjects.

The duck proved to be excellent at swimming, better in fact, than his teacher. He also did well in flying. But he proved to be very poor in running. Since he was poor in this subject, he was made to stay after school to practice it and even had to drop swimming in order to get more time in which to practice running. He was kept at this poorest subject until his webbed feet were so badly damaged that he became only average at swimming. But average was acceptable in the school, so no body worried about that – except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of her class in running, but finally had a nervous breakdown because of so much make-up time in swimming – a subject she hated.

The squirrel was excellent at climbing until he developed a psychological block in flying class, when the teacher insisted he start from the ground instead of from the tops of trees. He was kept at attempting to fly until he became muscle-bound – and received a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was the school's worst discipline problem; in climbing class, she beat all of the others to the top of the tree used for examination purposes in this subject, but she insisted on using her own method of getting there.

The gophers, of course, stayed out of school and fought the tax levied for education because digging was not included in the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to the badger and later joined the groundhogs and eventually started a private school offering alternative education..

Alas the author is unknown (a student at the University of Toronto)