The Ugly Duckling
Based on a Tale by Hans Christian Andersen

What do baby ducks look like? How do they act? How are they different from grown-up ducks?

Mother Duck sat on her eggs. She waited and waited. Suddenly, something moved. The eggs were beginning to hatch!

One by one, the ducklings pushed out of their fragile shells. One by one, the ducklings looked at their mother for the first time.

Mother Duck looked at them, too. Most of the ducklings were small, yellow, and fuzzy. But one duckling looked different. That duckling was bigger than the others. His feathers were gray, and his neck was long.

“I have never seen a duckling like you, my dear,” Mother Duck said. “You are certainly different, but I love you just the same.”
“Follow me, sweet ducklings,” Mother Duck said. Then she hopped in the pond, and the ducklings followed.

Mr. and Mrs. Frog saw the ducks swim by. The two frogs were the proud parents of new baby tadpoles. “Mother Duck’s new ducklings are as cute as our tadpoles, except for that last one,” said Mrs. Frog.

“You’re right,” said Mr. Frog. “That is an ugly duckling!”

Mother Duck led the ducklings away. She did not want the ducklings to hear what the frogs said. But it was too late. The gray duckling had heard the frogs.

“Is it true, Mother? Am I an ugly duckling?” he asked.

“You are beautiful,” Mother Duck said. “You are big and strong, and you will surely do well. I am proud of all my ducklings. Don’t listen to those silly frogs!”

The gray duckling wanted to believe Mother Duck. But it was hard. Everywhere he went, the animals reminded him that he was strange.

“What an odd duck!” they said.
The gray duckling was sad. The other ducklings never invited him to play with them. He was alone.

"There must be something wrong with me," thought the gray duckling. "I do not belong."

That night, while the duck family was sleeping, the gray duckling quietly wandered away. He floated down a stream. He saw many new places. He gathered information about other animals and the world around him. But this did not help him. He still felt alone.

Then one day, he saw a group of beautiful white swans with long necks flying in the sky.

"What beautiful birds!" thought the gray duckling. "If only I could fly away, maybe I could find a home where I belong."

The air grew chilly as fall came. Then it was winter. The ponds and streams froze. The gray duckling was often hungry and cold.
At last, winter became spring. One day, the duckling saw several beautiful white swans splashing in a distant pond. They were the same birds with long necks he had seen flying months before!

“I want to swim and play, too,” he thought. “I don’t want to be alone anymore!”

The duckling stretched his wings. He felt stronger and bigger than before. Without even trying, he flew into the air. It felt wonderful to fly!

The duckling flew to the pond, and the white swans gathered around him.

“I know I am ugly and different. . .” started the duckling.

“You are not ugly,” said one of the swans. “You are beautiful! We are here to welcome you!”

The duckling looked at his reflection in the water, and for the first time he saw that they were right. He was a beautiful white swan, just like them. At last, he had found the place where he belonged.