

19. The Ugly Duckling

Mother Duck was really proud of her six new ducklings. They were soft, fluffy and yellow. Such fine little ducklings! But the seventh one was very different. It was bigger and its feathers were gray and shaggy. It looked so ugly!

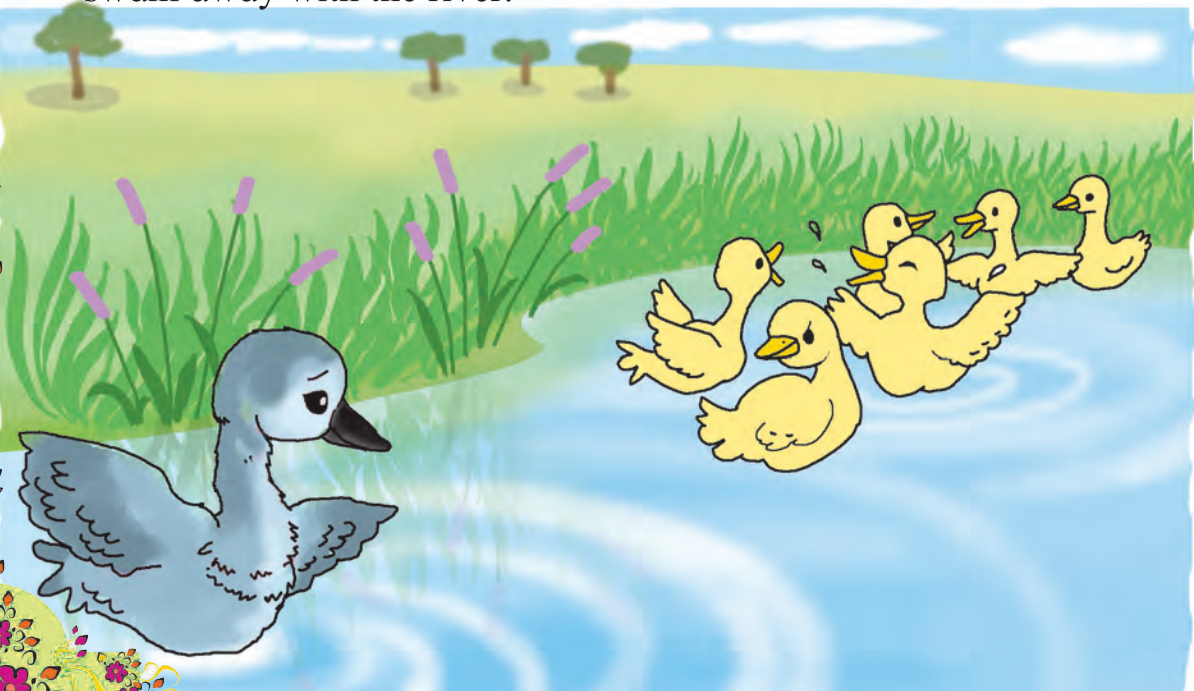


“All the same,” Mother Duck thought, “It’s my baby duckling.” She loved it dearly. But the other six brothers and sisters didn’t like the ugly duckling. When it waddled towards them, they turned their backs and ran away.

The little ducklings would go for a swim, every day, to a lake nearby. The ugly duckling wanted to join the others but they didn’t want him. They always swam away from him. He was left all alone.

The ugly duckling swam better than the other ducklings which did not please them at all. They teased him about his ugliness. His only friend was his mother. Other ducks told his mother, “All your ducklings are smart. But this big fellow looks so different. Why is he so ugly?” His mother only said, “He is mine, and I love him too.”

At last, feeling very lonely and sad, the ugly little duckling decided to leave the lake. He made his way to the river’s edge and swam away with the river.



Wherever the poor duckling tried to seek shelter, he found that he was always ridiculed by others – smaller birds, animals, even human beings poked fun at him. He became lonelier and more miserable.

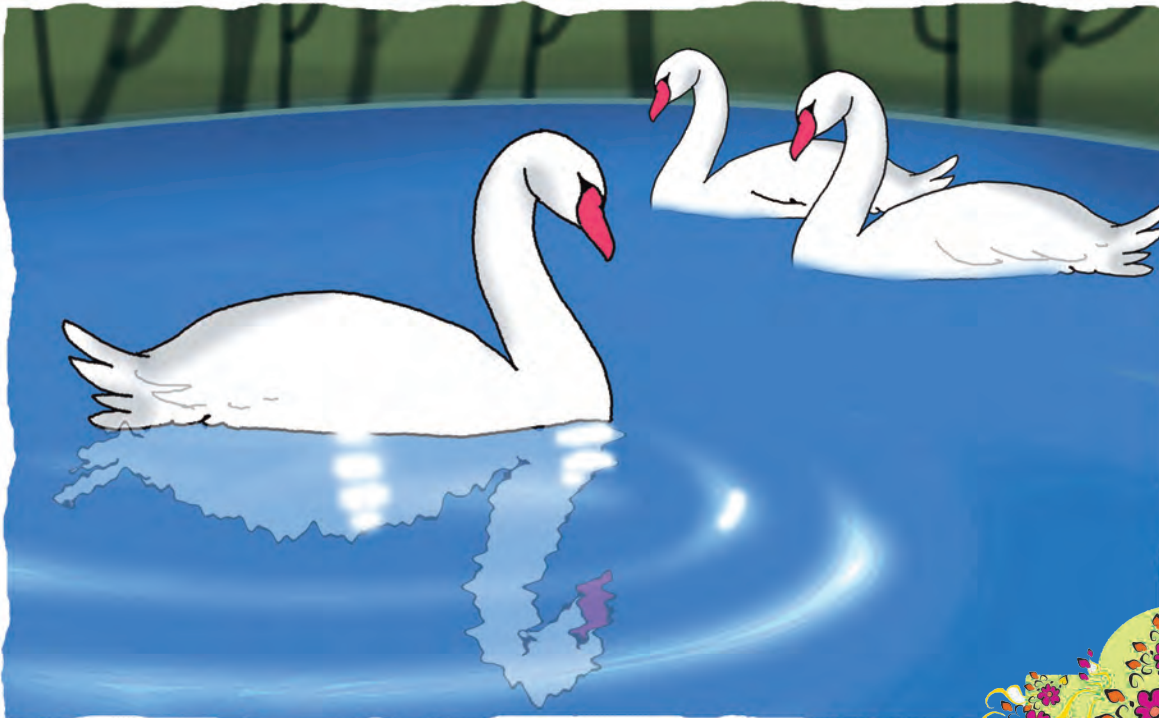
By and by, he grew bigger and stronger. But whenever he looked at his own reflection, he thought, ‘I look so ugly’! He was afraid to look at his own reflection. He hid himself if he saw anyone coming.

One day, when he was hiding among the reeds, he saw a flock of graceful white swans swim past. They were the most beautiful birds he had ever seen. ‘How wonderful to be like them!’ he said to himself.

Then came winter, with cold winds and snow. Without any shelter, the poor duckling was frozen in the snow. A kind man saw him. He broke the snow and saved the duckling.

Soon it was spring. The duckling had now gained a lot of strength. Again, he found his way to the river’s edge and swam further away.

One fine morning, when he flapped his wings against his sides, he rose high into the air. He flew on and on till he found himself in a beautiful, fragrant garden. From a thicket close by, came three



beautiful white swans, rustling their feathers and gliding lightly over the smooth water.

The duckling remembered the lovely birds. He was afraid to meet them but he felt a strange longing to be with them. He made up his mind to approach them, no matter how badly they treated him later on.

He swam towards the beautiful birds and bowed his head down to the surface of water. And what did he see in the clear stream below ? His own image – no longer a dark, gray, ugly bird but a graceful and beautiful swan. The other swans swam round the newcomer and welcomed him.

The bird that had lived a miserable life as an ugly duckling was a swan after all ! He curved his slender neck and cried joyfully from the depth of his heart, “I never dreamed of such happiness as this, while I was an ugly duckling !”

Things to do :

1. Answer the following questions :
 - (a) Why did the ugly duckling decide to leave the lake ?
 - (b) What did he find wherever he tried to seek shelter ?
 - (c) Why was the ugly duckling afraid to look at his own reflection ?
 - (d) Who did he meet in the beautiful garden ?
 - (e) Was he happy in the end ? Which lines tell us that he was happy ?
2. Describe a beautiful swan using your own words. (3-5 lines)
3. Discuss with your friends :
 - * Who is happier – young children or grown-ups ?
 - * What can we do to build our confidence ?
4. Read and learn :

* hen : chicken	* cat : kitten	* dog : puppy	* cow : calf
* sheep : lamb	* duck : duckling	* goose : gosling	* lion : cub
* deer : fawn	* goat : kid	* swan : cygnet	