

Name _____ Date _____

Excerpt from “The Bird Grown Up: His Intelligence”

by Olive Thorne Miller

Before people knew very much about the ways of birds, it was thought that they did not have to be taught like children, but that they knew everything they needed to know straight from the egg. That is, they were said to act from instinct¹ alone, and not at all from thinking, as we do.

②

Another belief that people had was that birds of a kind were carbon copies; that they looked exactly like each other, all acted in the same way, and all sang the same song.

But since we have begun to study birds more closely, we find these things are not true. We find that birds learn things by being taught, as we do. Also, they find out how to do things themselves, and they are not all alike, as so many machines.

More than this, we see that they do not look nor act exactly like each other. For when we know one robin or one oriole well, we can tell him from any other robin or oriole. And no two of a kind sing exactly the same song.

⑤

A bird is a genius in many ways. One is by the way it acts when it cannot do as it is used to doing. I saw a robin once who wished to build a nest but could not find mud to put into it. It was as dry as a desert, and there were no streams near. Now a robin’s nest must have mud, and the bird seemed puzzled for a while but at last thought of a way to get it.

⑥

She went to a bathing dish that the people of the house kept filled with water for the birds, jumped into it, and got her legs very wet. Then she flew to the road, and tramped around like a soldier in the dust and dirt.

In a short time her legs had a good coating of mud, which she carefully picked off with her bill, and took to the nest she was building.

¹**instinct:** a pattern of activity that an animal is born with

She repeated this action many times until she had as much mud as she needed.

A bird often shows sense by the way she repairs a nest that has been thrown out of place. Sometimes she will add a new stay,² tying the nest to a stronger limb. One sparrow, whose nest broke loose, put so many stays to the branch above that they made a little roof like a tent over it.

Another way a bird shows reason is in seeing the advantage³ of a new place. A pair of swallows lived far out in the West, hundreds of miles from any house. They had no doubt always nested in a cave or a hole in a tree. But one day they found a house that had recently been built. It was a mere shed to be used as a blacksmith⁴ shop by a party of men who were looking over the country.

At once the birds saw how nice it would be to have a roof over their heads. Although there was a big fire and the noise of men at work, they built the nest over the anvil,⁵ and raised their family in safety.

²**stay:** a support or brace

³**advantage:** the good part

⁴**blacksmith:** a person who uses fire to make objects of iron

⁵**anvil:** a heavy iron block on which heated metals are hammered into shape

1 In the first paragraph, what does it mean that it was thought that birds know everything they need to know "straight from the egg"?

- A They know very little.
- B They learn how to hunt.
- C They have to learn new things.
- D They are born knowing everything.

2 According to paragraph 2, what is meant by "carbon copies"?

- A fake
- B alike
- C different
- D opposite

- 3 According to paragraph 5, what is meant by “A bird is a genius in many ways”?
- A Birds are carbon copies.
 - B Birds have different songs.
 - C Birds can learn new things.
 - D Birds act from instinct alone.
- 4 According to paragraph 5, what is meant by “as dry as a desert”?
- A dark
 - B light
 - C dusty
 - D grassy
- 5 In paragraph 6, what does “tramped around like a soldier” mean?
- A stomped
 - B crawled
 - C hopped
 - D danced