



# Crows: Friend or Foe?

By Jennifer Kleiman

Student Edition

This free story provided by:





Welcome to Junior Great Books! Our stories are chosen to make you wonder, ask questions, and discuss your ideas about the things you read. Good authors weave together the elements of their stories so readers need to think about what is happening and why. If you want to become a good reader, you need to look closely at the elements in these stories, think about what you read, and discuss with your classmates what you discover.

We hope you enjoy this story and the related classroom activities and discussion. All are designed to increase your skills as a reader and thinker. So have fun and learn things!

## **Great Books Foundation**

**A nonprofit educational organization  
35 E. Wacker Drive • Chicago, IL 60601  
greatbooks.org • 800.222.5870**



In this unit, you'll read about how smart crows are, and some of the clever and annoying things they do when they live among humans. Before you read, answer the questions below.

### What Do You Know?

What do you already know about crows?

---

---

---

---

---

### What Do You Think?

Do you have a good or bad opinion of crows? Why?

---

---

---

---

---

Each time you read the text, return to what you wrote here to see if new information changes or adds to your answers.

#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

☐

After you finish this page, check the box above and go to the next page.

1. As you read, mark a ? wherever you are **confused or curious** about something.
2. After reading, look at the places you marked. Write your questions in the margins.
3. Circle two questions to bring to the sharing questions activity:
  - A question about a part that **confuses you the most**.
  - A question about a part that **interests you the most**.

## Crows: Friend or Foe?

Jennifer Kleiman

The **highlighted words** will be important to know as you work on this unit.

### QUESTIONS

To some people, crows are loud, scary, and even a **nuisance**. But Aesop's fable "The Crow and the Pitcher" presents a more positive opinion of crows. In this tale, a thirsty crow comes to a narrow pitcher partly filled with water. It can't reach the water with its beak, so it carefully drops pebbles into the pitcher until the water rises high enough to drink! Clever crows are not just characters in ancient stories though. Scientists now know that crows are among the smartest creatures on the planet.



**nuisance:** a bother; an annoyance



Crows and humans have a lot in common. Like humans, crows are great problem solvers. They can count, figure out complicated puzzles, and even make and use tools. And like humans, crows are **social** animals. They use language to communicate with one another and may even have different **dialects**. This means that crows in one family group would sound different from crows in other family groups. Crows can learn from one another, teach one another, and even pass down the information they learn to their young.



## QUESTIONS

Crows can live in just about any **habitat**. But they often choose to live near people. In fact, crows and humans have a long history together. Like other smart, social animals, crows have **adapted** to life with people, finding clever ways to take advantage of human activity. In cities, crows have been spotted dropping nuts near crosswalks for passing cars to run over and crack open. When traffic stops, the crows simply hop into the street and snap up their meal. They are also clever **scavengers**. Crows will eat just about anything. In the city, garbage is often on the menu. Crows have even been known to memorize garbage truck routes. The birds use this information to grab a snack on garbage day.

---

**social:** liking to be with others; friendly

**dialects:** different forms of a language spoken by different groups

**habitat:** the place where an animal or plant normally lives and grows

**adapted:** adjusted

**scavengers:** animals who eat garbage or dead plants and animals

## Crafty Crows

Although we live side by side with crows, our relationship with them is often anything but peaceful. They steal our food, eat our crops, open trash cans, and make nests in places that cause problems for people. In Tokyo, crows build nests on top of utility poles. Sometimes those nests accidentally cause blackouts in the city. Workers remove the nests when they find them. But does this stop the crows?

Nope. The crows build **decoy** nests on the poles to fool the workers.

Their intelligence is what makes crows so tricky. Every year, thousands of crows **migrate** through Chatham, Ontario. The huge number of crows becomes a nuisance for local farmers, who must chase them from their crops. One year, a farmer got fed up and shot at one. After that, the crows figured out exactly how low they could fly to avoid being shot. Guess how many crows were shot after that? Not a single one.

Crows learn from their mistakes. This makes them hard to outwit. For example, city workers patrolled the streets of Chatham every night to chase away the crows. The crows eventually learned that the workers left at 11:00 p.m. So the birds simply waited until after 11:00 p.m. to head into town.



A crow's nest is mostly made of twigs. The inside is lined with soft things like weeds and animal hair.

**decoy:** a fake thing used to draw attention away from the real thing

**migrate:** move from one area to another for feeding or breeding

## Crows Never Forget a Face

### QUESTIONS

Clearly, crows keep a careful eye on human activity. But what about individual people? Wildlife researcher John Marzluff has been studying crows for years. Marzluff began to notice that he had a harder time catching the same crow more than once. He became curious. Do crows recognize individual faces? He decided to conduct an experiment to find out.

Marzluff and his team captured a bunch of crows while wearing **identical** masks. The researchers put bands on the legs of the crows they caught. This way, they could recognize the crows later. Then the team released the birds back into the wild.

Months later, the crows had not forgotten them. Whenever the researchers walked by wearing the mask, the crows scolded them. They even followed the masked people, swooping down at them from the treetops. The crows did



Marzluff and his team all wore masks like the one pictured here.

---

**identical:** exactly the same



## QUESTIONS

this even if a stranger wore the mask. They did it even if the person wore a hat with the mask! This proved to Marzluff that the crows were not paying attention to a person's size, movement, or other qualities. Crows spotted their human enemies by looking at their faces.

Marzluff and his team began to notice that the banded crows were not the only ones scolding and following them. Other crows in the area were doing it, too. The banded crows were somehow sharing what they had learned about the “dangerous” humans with other crows. This is called social learning. As far as we know, only humans and a few other animals have this ability.

Marzluff believes that the ability to recognize individuals helps crows **survive** alongside humans. “If you can learn who to avoid and who to seek out, that’s a lot easier than getting continually hurt,” he says.

There was one more shocking discovery that came from this experiment. As the years passed, crows in *other* areas began attacking the masked people, too. Year after year, crows were teaching other crows and their own young to fear the masks. So if you cross a crow, watch out! You might be making enemies with future generations of crows.

## Crow Companions

Learning to avoid dangerous people is one thing. But crows also remember people who are kind to them, and they have even been known to return the favor. Eight-year-old Gabi Mann lives in Seattle, Washington. She began feeding crows in her yard when she was four. In return, the crows began leaving gifts for Gabi. They would bring her buttons,

---

**survive:** continue to live





These are some of Gabi Mann's gifts from the crows. She has ranked them in order of her favorites.

shells, pebbles, beads, and other unusual **trinkets** they found. Once they even returned a camera lens cap that Gabi had lost.

People have even kept crows as pets. Because crows are smart and social, many people think they make great companions. Even the writer Charles Dickens had a pet

## QUESTIONS

**trinkets:** small things with little value

## QUESTIONS

raven, which is a kind of crow. Crows form strong bonds with their human friends. Pet crows even give their owners “names.” The birds make special sounds around their people that they would not usually make.

But crows are still wild animals. These days, it is illegal in the United States to keep a crow as a pet. Many people also think it is cruel. Crows need lots of space and the freedom to fly. Crows have been known to become very unhappy when kept in cages. It looks like crow lovers will just have to **appreciate** them in the wild.

The relationship between crows and people will probably always be complicated. Some people have learned to admire crows for their intelligence. For others, the crow’s cleverness is what makes them a nuisance. Whether you love them or hate them, it’s clear that they’re fascinating creatures.



Quote in text is from  
“American Crows: The  
Ultimate Angry Birds?”  
*Guardian*.

---

**appreciate:** admire; see the worth of



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



After you mark the text with **?**s, write your questions and circle two of them to bring to the sharing questions activity. Then check the box above and go to the next page.



## Instructions

- Read each question and the answer choices carefully.
- Look back at the text to answer the question.
- Fill in the circle next to the answer you choose.
- After you finish the quiz, turn to the next page.

1. Which of these is a way that crows cause problems for humans?
  - Ⓐ They avoid enemies.
  - Ⓑ They collect trinkets.
  - Ⓒ They dislike cages.
  - Ⓓ They eat crops.
2. Which of the following is an example of a crow being a scavenger?
  - Ⓐ a crow bothering humans
  - Ⓑ a crow solving problems
  - Ⓒ a crow eating garbage
  - Ⓓ a crow recognizing faces
3. Which of these is a main idea in the text?
  - Ⓐ Crows do not like to live close to people.
  - Ⓑ Crows do not like people wearing masks.
  - Ⓒ Pet crows make special sounds around their owners.
  - Ⓓ Crows are very intelligent.
4. Which detail from the text supports your answer to question 3?
  - Ⓐ “In Tokyo, crows build nests on top of utility poles.” (p. 24)
  - Ⓑ “Scientists now know that crows are among the smartest creatures on the planet.” (p. 22)
  - Ⓒ “These days, it is illegal in the United States to keep a crow as a pet.” (p. 28)
  - Ⓓ “Marzluff and his team captured a bunch of crows while wearing identical masks.” (p. 25)



1 Go back and reread “Crows: Friend or Foe?” on pages 22–28. As you read, mark an **A** in places where you **admire** crows. Mark an **N** in places where you think crows are a **nuisance**.

2 After you finish reading, look at the places you marked with an **A** and an **N**. Use what you marked to help you write an answer to this focus question:

**After reading about crows, what is your opinion of them?**

---

---

---

3 Give two pieces of evidence to support your answer above.

One piece of evidence that supports your answer:

---

---

---

---

Your evidence can be:

- A detail from the text, like a fact or a quote
- A detail from a photo, chart, or other text feature

Another piece of evidence that supports your answer:

---

---

---

---

---

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

☐

After you reread, make notes, and complete this page, check the box above. When it's time for the discussion, go to the next page.



## Shared Inquiry Discussion

- 1 Use the answer and evidence you wrote on the previous page to participate in the Shared Inquiry discussion.
- 2 After discussion, think about whether your answer changed or stayed the same. Write it below. Then write a piece of evidence that changed or strengthened your answer.

Your answer to the focus question after discussion:

---

---

---

---

Evidence you found or that someone else used that helped you (*circle one*)  
**change your answer / make your first answer stronger:**

---

---

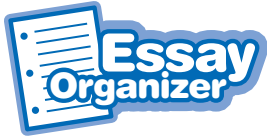
---

---

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

☐

After you finish this page, check the box above and go to the next page.



Write your answer to the assigned essay question, and write three pieces of evidence that support your answer.

Essay question: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Your answer:

Evidence #1:

How this evidence supports your answer:

Your evidence can be:

- A detail from the text, like a fact or a quote
- A detail from a photo, chart, or other text feature
- A fact about the topic (and where you learned it)

Evidence #2:

How this evidence supports your answer:

Evidence #3:

How this evidence supports your answer:



- 1 Look at the questions you wrote in the margins and the class list of questions. Think about questions that came up during your discussion, too. Are there any you still want to know more about?
- 2 Write your questions below, along with some ideas about how you might get started if you wanted to answer them. (For instance, you might look for an answer online, read a book on the topic, or ask an expert.)

Questions you still want answered:	How you might find an answer:





In this unit, you'll read about some young inventors who figured out ways to provide electricity to people who live where it is often hard to get. Before you read, answer the questions below.

### What Do You Know?

What do you already know about how people receive electricity in their homes?

---

---

---

---

---

### What Do You Think?

What are some things you would not be able to do if you had no electricity in your home?

---

---

---

---

---

Each time you read the text, return to what you wrote here to see if new information changes or adds to your answers.

#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

☐

After you finish this page, check the box above and go to the next page.