



Pre-Reading

Think about the following questions.

1. What birds are the most common in your country?
2. Are any birds considered lucky in your country?
Are any considered unlucky?
3. Where can you go bird watching in your country?

Vocabulary Preview

Write the letter of the word or phrase with the same meaning as the underlined word or phrase.

a. be careful of	d. like you want to
b. possibly	e. soon to happen
c. at first	f. go together with

1. ___ The impending change worried many people.
2. ___ Some people think that black cats accompany witches.
3. ___ Some birds are also thought to potentially bring good luck.
4. ___ I initially thought that black cats were unlucky, but I changed my mind.
5. ___ Beware of that dog. It likes to bite people.
6. ___ Do you feel inclined to go out for dinner tonight?

Superstitions About Birds



Certain birds are, more often than not, considered bad luck, or even a sign of impending death. For example, all over the world, both **crows** and **ravens** have some connection to war, and death. In early times, crows and ravens were thought to accompany the gods of war, or be signs of the gods' approaching arrival. This idea later changed. Crows in particular were thought to be **harbingers** of ill fortune or, in some cases, guides to the **afterlife**. Woe be it to the person who saw a single crow or raven flying overhead, for this was most certainly a **portent** of death in the near future.

Interestingly, though potentially bad luck for people individually, the raven is considered to be good luck for the **crown of England**. So much so, in fact, that a "raven master" is, even today, an actual government position in London. He takes care of the ravens there and also **clips** their wings, ensuring that these birds can never fly far from the seat of the British government. This way, the kingdom will never fall to ill fortune.

Another bird that is thought to play a part in forecasting the fortunes of people is the **swallow**. Depending on how and when it is seen, the swallow can be a harbinger of either good or ill fortune. Perhaps inspired by the swallow's red-brown breast, Christian people initially related the swallow to the death of Jesus Christ. Thus, people who saw a swallow fly through their house considered it a portent of death. Later, however, farmers began to consider swallows signs of good fortune. Any barn that has **swallows** living in it is sure to be **blessed** in the following year. Farmers also have to beware of killing a swallow; that would be certain to end any good luck they might have had.

Though many people think these superstitions are old wives' tales, there is actually some evidence to support them. For example, crows and ravens, being scavengers, appear at the **aftermath** of battles. Thus, large numbers of crows and ravens could be good indications of war in an area. As well, swallows feed on insects that can cause infections in cattle. Thus, a farmer who has many swallows in his barn may actually have healthier animals on his farm. Therefore, the next time you feel inclined to laugh at an old wives' tale, maybe you had better find out if there is any truth to it first!



Reading Time _____ minutes _____ seconds

413 words

² *crow*: a black bird, often seen in fields

² *raven*: a black bird that looks similar to crows, but bigger

⁵ *harbinger*: a thing that brings something

⁶ *afterlife*: a place you go after dying

⁷ *portent*: a sign

¹⁰ *crown of England*: the English monarchy and government

¹² *clip*: to cut; to trim

¹⁵ *swallow*: a brown and red bird that often makes a home in barns or outside buildings

²⁰ *bless*: to give luck or good fortune

²⁵ *aftermath*: the resulting situation

Choose the best answer.

1. What is the main idea of this reading?
 - a. Birds bring bad luck.
 - b. Don't look a crow in the eye.
 - c. There are many superstitions surrounding birds.
 - d. Birds are important to English people.
2. Which birds are considered harbingers of bad luck?
 - a. Crows
 - b. Swallows
 - c. Ravens
 - d. All of the above
3. Which is NOT true, according to the reading?
 - a. Some superstitions are based on reality.
 - b. Seeing a swallow is a sign of war and death in the future.
 - c. Ravens bring good luck for the country of England.
 - d. Crows eat dead animals.
4. How might a farmer attempt to prevent bad luck?
 - a. Catch a raven
 - b. Keep his windows open
 - c. Follow a crow
 - d. Avoid harming a swallow
5. Swallows help keep cattle in barns healthier by _____.
 - a. eating infected skin
 - b. consuming insects
 - c. singing
 - d. making cows happier

Idiomatic Expressions

Find these idioms in the reading.

- **woe be it** [too bad for]
Woe be it to the person who pets this dog. He bites!
- **old wives' tales** [folk beliefs; superstitions]
People used to think that seeing a crow was bad luck. Now they know it's an **old wives' tale**.
- **feed on** [to eat something]
The elephants at the zoo **feed on** peanuts.

Fill in the blank with one of the above idioms. Change its form if necessary.

1. _____ to whoever goes in that house. Ghosts live there.
2. Our cat _____ the mice in the basement.
3. Don't believe that! It's just a(n) _____.

Summary

Scan the passage and complete the chart with the correct information.

Bird	Bad Luck	Good Luck	Evidence
Crows	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sign of the arrival of 1 _____• A single one flying = 2 _____		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These birds are scavengers, so they appear at 5 _____.
3 _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sign of the arrival of the gods of war	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Living near the seat of the British government = 4 _____	
6 _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flying in the house = 7 _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Living in a farmer's barn = the farm will be 8 _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These birds feed on 9 _____, so swallows in a barn 10 _____.

Listening

The Aviary



Listen to the dialog and complete each sentence.

1. The man wants to visit the aviary, which is _____.
2. The woman wants to see _____.
3. The man says it is bad luck to _____.



Discuss the following questions.

1. Do you believe that birds can be evil omens? Why or why not?
2. What is the most well-known bird in your country? Is this bird related to good luck or bad luck in any way?
3. Does your country have a special bird? Describe it.

Grammar

Participle Phrases

A participle phrase can appear in a number of different positions within the sentence. If it comes before the main clause, the participle phrase always refers to the subject of the main clause.

Perhaps (inspired by / inspiring) the swallow's red-brown breast, Christian people initially related the swallow to the death of Jesus Christ.

Any barn that has swallows (to live / living) in it is sure to be blessed in the following year.

Writing

Write your own short paragraph by answering the questions below.

Our National Bird

(1) What is your national bird? (2) What does it look like? (3) Where does it live? (4) Are there many of them in your country? (5) Have you seen one?

Example

My country's national bird is the bald eagle. It is a big brown eagle with a white head. The bald eagle lives all across North America. There are many of these birds living in my country today. However, I have only seen them in zoos.

Vocabulary and Idiom Review

A. Choose the best word or phrase to fill in the blank.

- Researchers believe this new medicine could ____ save thousands of lives each year.
a. individually b. traditionally c. particularly d. potentially
- The image of Italians shown in the movie ____ reality.
a. finds out b. is far from c. is sure to be d. woe be it
- The news broadcast reported on the ____ danger to coastal cities due to the approaching hurricane.
a. depending b. thrilling c. impending d. migrating
- Personally, I'm not ____ to believe in omens or superstitions.
a. blessed b. found c. inclined d. inspired
- The sign by the road warned drivers to ____ of falling rocks.
a. accompany b. beware c. clip d. originate
- He wrote a book comparing ____ about colors between Eastern and Western cultures.
a. indications b. infections c. superstitions d. scavengers
- A common ____ says that acne is caused by a poor diet. This, however, is far from true.
a. over time b. ill fortune c. crown of England d. old wives' tale

B. Choose the correct form of the word to fill in the blank.

- Henry played the ____ for my first violin recital.
a. accompanied b. accompaniment c. unaccompanied
- The students ____ the idea that a final project should replace the exam.
a. initiated b. initial c. initially
- He used ____ parts from other old cars to rebuild his 1957 Chevy.
a. scavenger b. scavenging c. scavenged