Name_____Date_____

Adapted from *The Babyhood of Wild Beasts*: "Baby Raccoons"

by Georgia M. McNally

Have you ever seen a little raccoon washing each bit of his food before he eats it? His cleaning methods are amusing indeed. The Germans call him "Wasch-bär," meaning "wash bear."

2

As soon as the babies are weaned[1] and begin taking solid food, they wash or soak each bit of food in water. They use their very human-looking hands quite easily while performing this task. This little fellow can chip an egg with his teeth and drink the contents without spilling a drop. He can remove covers from jars and stoppers[2] from bottles with such ease that one would fancy he had been taught.

3

Mr. Raccoon is a most remarkable feeder. Anything from a live rabbit steak to green corn and raspberries appeals to his taste. They especially like sweets, candy, molasses, sugar, and even butter tempts them.

The babies are born in a hollow tree, which is the favorite home of the raccoon. There are five or six in a litter. The little ones grow rapidly and are soon able to join the nocturnal[3] rambles with father and mother, for Mr. and Mrs. Raccoon are night roamers. Most of their fun and their hunting is carried on at night. They sleep during the day.

I was the happiest girl in the world the day I was presented with a baby raccoon. He was a round, squirming ball of gray fur beautifully striped with black markings, two black eyes as bright as new, shoe buttons, and a little, pointed, black nose. But the most beautiful thing about him was his bushy gray tail striped with black. He sniffed at me hardly daring to make friends in so short a time. I comforted him as best I could and waited for him to make the first move.

[1]**weaned:** able to eat food other than mother's milk
[2]**stopper:** a plug, cork, or other material used in the top of a bottle
[3]**nocturnal:** active at night

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6

I turned him loose in our big country home and he began house-hunting. He found a loose brick at the base of the old chimney and made himself a little home by removing the brick and crawling into the base of the chimney. Here he slept during the day and at night started roaming. He explored the old house from top to bottom, carrying mischief in wherever he went.

7

The raccoon learned to lap milk as easily as a kitten. Our two fat tabby cats breakfasted on warm milk, and the raccoon was greedy. He soon discovered that he was the "boss" of the ranch and used his power to a deadly advantage. As soon as the tabby cats began breakfast, he would leap suddenly from behind the old woodbox and, with an ear-splitting bark, rush at the cats. A flash of tails and the cats had disappeared and the raccoon would greedily eat up their abandoned milk.

He would climb up beside me as I sewed and amuse himself with spools and strings. He loved playthings. I gave him a pretty ball and he became a good ball roller. He would hold it tightly for an hour or so at a time.

He would curl up on the foot of my bed; but he didn't sleep much. The darkness was too exciting for him, so he would quietly drop to the floor and start wandering. He was full of mischief at night. One of his favorite stunts was to pull the stopper out of the ink bottle and pour the contents over the white tablecloth. He could unlatch the door and also turn a doorknob.

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1 What does *fancy* mean in paragraph 2?

A give

B build

C detail

D imagine

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2 According to paragraph 3, what made the feeding habits of the raccoon *remarkable*?

A The raccoon was a very picky eater.

B The raccoon ate anything that looked interesting.

C The raccoon used his hands very cleverly when opening jars.

D The raccoon showed his power by eating other animals' food.

3 In paragraph 6, which is used to describe how the raccoon found a place to sleep?

A house-hunting

B crawling out

C exploring

D roaming

4 What does the author mean by "an ear-splitting bark" in paragraph 7?

A the sound that her dog made when chasing her raccoon with tree bark

B the way her cats would scratch her raccoon's ears when he scared them

C the loud noise her raccoon would make when trying to get the cats' milk

D the way her raccoon would split apart the bark on the trees as he climbed

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5 What happened to the milk at the end of paragraph 7 to make the author describe it as *abandoned*?

A The raccoon stole the milk while the cats were not looking.

B The raccoon spilled the milk so the cats could not drink it.

C The cats left their milk because the raccoon scared them away.

D The cats drank all the milk they wanted and left some for the raccoon.

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