Select Readings, Second Edition
Intermediate, Chapter 4 Test

Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Can Animals Talk?

In 1977, a young Harvard graduate named Irene Pepperberg brought a one-year-old African gray parrot into her lab, and attempted something very unusual. At a time when her fellow scientists thought that animals could only communicate on a very basic level, Irene set out to discover what was on a creature's mind by *talking* to it. The bird, named Alex, proved to be a very good pupil.

Scientists at the time believed that animals were incapable of any thought. They believed that animals only reacted to things because they were programmed by nature to react that way, not because they had the ability to think or feel. Any pet owner would probably disagree. Pepperberg disagreed, too, and started her work with Alex to prove them wrong.

Pepperberg bought Alex in a pet store. She let the store's assistant pick him out because she didn't want other scientists saying later that she'd deliberately chosen an especially smart bird for her work. Most researchers thought that Pepperberg's attempt to communicate with Alex would end in failure—after all, his brain was only about the size of a walnut.

However, Pepperberg's experiment did not fail. In fact, over the next few years, Alex learned to imitate almost one hundred and fifty English words, and was even able to reason and use those words on a basic level to communicate. For example, when Alex was shown an object and was asked about its shape, color, or material, he could label it correctly. He could understand that a key was a key no matter what its size or color, and could figure out how the key was different from others.

Pepperberg was careful not to exaggerate Alex's success and abilities. She did not claim that Alex could actually 'use' language. Instead, she said that Alex had learned to use a two-way communications code. Alex seemed to understand the turn-taking pattern of communication.

Although African gray parrots usually live to an age of fifty or so, Alex died suddenly when he was just thirty years old. However, in his short time on Earth, Alex helped to prove to many that animals are capable of far more complex communication than many scientists had ever expected.

Alex's last words to Pepperberg were, "You be good. I love you."

1. The reading passage is primarily about _____.
   A. how animals communicate with humans
   B. one woman's successful experiment to communicate with a bird
   C. how parrots are smarter than other animals
   D. how Irene Pepperberg proved her fellow scientists wrong

2. Irene Pepperberg did an experiment with a parrot _____.
   A. in her lab
   B. at home
   C. in a pet store
   D. in nature

3. According to the reading, other scientists believed that animals _____.

©Oxford University Press. Permission granted to reproduce for instructional use.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

A. could only communicate in nature
B. had the ability to communicate with pet owners
C. could communicate if they were programmed to do so
D. didn't have the ability to think

4. In paragraph 3, "deliberately" is closest in meaning to _____.
   A. naturally
   B. on purpose
   C. cleverly
   D. honestly

5. Most researchers thought that Irene's experiment _____.
   A. would prove that the bird's brain was larger
   B. would discover an especially smart bird
   C. would not succeed
   D. would attempt to communicate with her

6. From the reading, we can infer that a brain the size of a walnut _____.
   A. is not very large
   B. is too large for a parrot's head
   C. is believed to be large enough to communicate
   D. is smaller than other parrot's brains

7. Which of the following statements is an opinion?
   A. Many scientists don't believe animals can communicate.
   B. Irene Pepperberg's experiment was very unusual.
   C. A parrot's brain is about the size of a walnut.
   D. Irene Pepperberg had the store's assistant pick out the parrot.

8. Which of the following is <u>not</u> true about Irene's parrot Alex?
   A. He learned to use almost 150 English words.
   B. He could label a number of objects.
   C. He was able to have complicated conversations.
   D. He could understand how one object was different from others.

9. Which of the following is true about Irene's experiment?
   A. She exaggerated Alex's abilities.
   B. She thought she had proved that Alex could 'use' language.
   C. She believed that Alex had learned a turn-taking communication pattern.
   D. Only she could understand Alex's code of communication.

10. From the passage, we can infer that _____.
    A. Alex communicated that he may have actually loved Irene
    B. most parrots die when they're 50 years old
    C. humans cannot understand how to communicate complex ideas to animals
    D. Alex's life was more complex than most people had expected

©Oxford University Press. Permission granted to reproduce for instructional use.

LIVEWORKSHEETS