

Name _____ Date _____

Adapted from “The Swallow Family”*by Olive Thorne Miller***1**

The barn swallow has a dull reddish breast, and his back is rich blue, almost black. He has a deeply forked tail, and a row of white spots on the shorter tail feathers. When he spreads his tail, it is very beautiful.

2

He is called barn swallow because he prefers a barn for a nesting place. Up on the beams, close under the roof, the pair build their mud cradle. It is interesting to see them at work. When they have chosen a place, they go to some puddle in the road. They stand around it on their tiny feet, holding their wings straight up like a butterfly's. Then they take up some of the wet earth in their beaks, and work it around till it is made into a little pill.* With this pill they fly to the place they have selected, and stick it onto the beam. Then they go back for more. So they go on, till they have built up the walls of the nest, an inch thick, and three or four inches high. Sometimes they put layers of fine grass in, but often they use nothing but mud. Then they line it with feathers which they pick up in the chicken yard.

Some swallows build a platform beside the nest, where one of the pair can rest at night; and when the little ones get big enough to fill up the nest, both parents can sleep there.

4

When the swallows are flying about low over the grass, looking as if they were at play, they are really catching tiny insects as they go. And when they have young to feed, they collect a mouthful which they make up into a sort of little ball. Then they fly to the nest and feed it to one of the little ones.

Therefore, they keep the air clear and free from insects, and they do not harm anything, for they never touch our fruits or vegetables.

***pill:** small circle or ball

6

Barn swallows are social and always go in flocks. They sing, too—a sweet little song, but not very loud. It is charming to hear them in a barn when five or six of them sing together. But one may often hear the little song from a single bird flying over.

7

They are friendly among themselves, and they like to land on a roof and chatter away a long time. In one place where I was staying, they liked to gather on a roof right under my window. They often woke me in the morning with their sweet little voices.

8

One morning the sound was so near, it seemed as if they must be in the room, and I opened my eyes to see. There on the windowsill close to the screen was one of the pretty fellows. He was looking in at the open window, and evidently keeping watch of me. When I moved a little, he gave the alarm, and the whole party flew away.

9

The chatter of barn swallows always seems to me like talk, and men who study bird ways agree that birds have some sort of language. The swallows have many different notes. One is a general warning of danger, but there is another note for a man, another for a cat, and a still different one when they find something good to eat, which they call the others to share.

"The variety of bird speech," says a man who has studied birds a long time, "is very great." And of all bird voices, swallows' are the most like human speech. If you lie on the hay in the barn very quiet, and listen to them when they come in and fly about, you will see that this is true. It seems sometimes as if you could almost make out words.

1 How is paragraph 1 connected to paragraph 2?

- A Paragraph 1 describes how barn swallows look, and paragraph 2 tells how they got their name.
- B Paragraph 1 describes male swallows, and paragraph 2 tells how they play in the mud.
- C Paragraph 1 describes where barn swallows live, and paragraph 2 tells how they look.
- D Paragraph 1 describes their long tail feathers, and paragraph 2 tells how they can fly like butterflies do.

2 Read these two sentences from paragraph 4:

"And when they have young to feed, they collect a mouthful which they make up into a sort of little ball."

"Then they fly to the nest and feed it to one of the little ones."

Which describes the relationship between these two sentences?

- A The sentences make a comparison.
- B The sentences describe two steps in a process.
- C The first sentence explains the cause of the second.
- D The second sentence explains the effect of the first.

3 How are all of the sentences in paragraph 6 connected?

- A They tell about how barn swallows fly.
- B They tell about how barn swallows look.
- C They tell about how barn swallows sing.
- D They tell about how barn swallows travel.

4 Read these two sentences from paragraph 8:

"One morning the sound was so near, it seemed as if they must be in the room, and I opened my eyes to see."

"There on the windowsill close to the screen was one of the pretty fellows."

Which describes the relationship between these two sentences?

- A The sentences make a comparison.
- B The sentences describe two steps in a process.
- C The first sentence explains the cause of the second.
- D The second sentence explains the reason for the first.

5 What is the connection between paragraphs 7 and 9?

- A Both tell about barn swallows talking to people.
- B Both tell about barn swallows singing to people.
- C Both tell about barn swallows talking to each other.
- D Both tell about barn swallows singing to each other.