

Name _____ Date _____

Adapted from “The Bird Grown Up: The Bird’s Language”

by *Olive Thorne Miller*

1

When the bird is grown up, there are many other interesting things to know about him—one is whether he can talk.

2

It is plain to those who have studied the ways of birds that they are able to tell things to each other, and many writers have said plainly that birds have a language.

If you notice birds in cages, you will find that when two or more of a kind are in the same room, you will hear little chirps and twitters and other notes, not at all like their song. But if one is alone in a room, he hardly makes a sound except when singing.

4

Then see a robin out of doors. He is less afraid of us than most birds, and easiest to watch. If something comes up on him suddenly, he gives a sharp note of surprise. If a cat appears, he has another cry which everyone can understand, a word of warning to all. If everything is quiet and his mate is near, he will greet her with some low, sweet notes.

5

When a partridge mother sees danger, she gives one call, which all her babies know, and at once they run and hide. When the hen speaks to her chicks, they know well whether it means to come to her, or to run away.

Of course birds do not use our words. When it is said that the quail says “Bob White,” it is meant that his call sounds like those words. To some people, the notes sound like “more wet.” One may call it almost anything, like “all right” or “too hot.”

You will read in books about birds that the white-throated sparrow says “Old Sam Peabody,” and other birds say different things. The writer means that the words remind one of the birds’ notes, and so it is useful to know them, because it helps you to know the bird when you hear him.

I have many times seen birds act as if they were talking to each other. You can often see the city sparrows do so.

There is nothing we like so well as a bird's singing. And in all the many species of birds in the world, no two sing exactly alike, so far as I can find out. You may always know a bird by his song. A robin does not sing like a thrush or a catbird. And what is more, not one of the sounds he utters is like those made by any other bird. If you know him well, whatever noise he makes, you will know at once that it is a robin.

10

But there is something still more curious about it. No robin sings exactly like another robin. When you come to know one bird well, you can tell his song from any other birds. Of course, all robins sing enough alike for one to know that it is a robin song, but if you listen closely, you will see that it is really different from all others.

People who have had pet birds have noticed the same thing.

12

There is still another point to know. One bird does not always sing the same song. I have heard a song sparrow sing five or six different songs, standing all the time in plain sight on a fence. In the same way I have known a meadowlark to make six changes in his few notes.

13

Besides their own natural songs, many birds like to copy the notes of others. Our mockingbird is very fond of learning new things, and he does not always choose songs either. He will imitate the noise of sharpening a saw, or the pop of a cork, as readily as the sweetest song. I have heard one sing the canary's song better than the canary himself.

1 What is the connection between paragraphs 1 and 2?

- A Both tell that all birds have the same song.
- B Both tell that birds know how to warn of danger.
- C Both tell that birds can have a language of their own.
- D Both tell that all birds can imitate other birds' songs.

2 What is the connection between paragraphs 2 and 4?

- A Both show how birds use language in different situations.
- B Both explain how birds have the same tone.
- C Both show how people listen to birds.
- D Both show how people train birds.

3 What is the connection between paragraphs 4 and 5?

- A They tell why robins and partridge mothers give calls when they are surprised.
- B They tell why robins and partridge mothers give calls when they see danger.
- C They tell why robins and partridge mothers give calls when they see friends.
- D They tell why robins and partridge mothers give calls when they are happy.

4 What is the connection between paragraphs 10 and 12?

- A Both explain that birds enjoy being quiet.
- B Both explain that birds sing different songs.
- C Both explain that birds like to imitate sounds.
- D Both explain that birds act like they talk to others.

5 What is the connection between paragraphs 12 and 13?

- A One says birds like to sing many songs, and the other describes how the songs sound.
- B One speaks of birds singing their own songs, and the other explains why birds never learn new songs.
- C One speaks of birds changing their songs, and the other speaks of birds imitating other songs and even sounds.
- D One says birds like to sing the same songs over and over, and the other explains how they remember the song notes.