

Learning Target: I can read passages about the differences between instincts vs. learned behaviors and use the information gathered to answer multiple choice comprehension questions.

Instincts vs. Learned Behaviors Reading for Meaning

Every living thing has ways of surviving in its environment. Some behaviors are passed down from parents to their young without being taught. These are called **instincts**. Instincts are inherited behaviors that an animal is born knowing how to do. For example, sea turtles hatch on sandy beaches and immediately crawl toward the ocean without being shown. Spiders spin webs to catch food, even if they have never seen another spider do it.

Other behaviors are not inherited, but instead are developed over time through **experience or observation**. These are called **learned behaviors**. Learned behaviors come from practice, trial and error, or being taught. For example, a young lion must practice hunting with its pride before it can successfully catch prey. A dog can be trained to sit or roll over, even though it is not born knowing those tricks.

Sometimes instincts and learned behaviors work together. A bird may have the instinct to fly south for the winter, but it may learn the safest route to take by following its parents. Human beings also show both types of behavior. Babies cry when they are hungry, which is instinct, but they must learn how to speak a language by listening to others.

Understanding the difference between instincts and learned behaviors helps scientists explain how animals survive, adapt, and interact with their environments. It also helps us see the role of both nature and experience in shaping the way organisms act.

Multiple Choice Questions (DOK 3 & 4)

1. Which example best shows the difference between an instinct and a learned behavior?

- A. A spider spinning a web vs. a dolphin learning to jump through a hoop
- B. A bird eating seeds vs. a human eating fruit
- C. A fish swimming in water vs. a turtle crawling on land
- D. A bear hibernating vs. a plant using photosynthesis

2. A baby whale immediately swims after birth, but later it learns how to communicate with its pod using special sounds. What does this show?

- A. Only instincts are important for survival
- B. Communication is always instinctual
- C. Survival depends on both instincts and learned behaviors
- D. Learned behaviors are more important than instincts

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3. Why would instincts be especially important for animals that are born without parents nearby?

- A. Because they can practice behaviors over time
- B. Because instincts allow them to survive immediately without being taught
- C. Because instincts help them copy other animals
- D. Because instincts can change quickly with experience

4. Imagine scientists raise baby birds in an environment where they never hear adult birds sing. What would most likely happen when the birds grow up?

- A. They would still sing the correct songs because singing is an instinct
- B. They would remain completely silent because all singing is learned
- C. Their songs would be unusual because singing requires both instinct and learning
- D. They would only be able to make sounds if trained by humans

5. A farmer notices that his dog herds sheep naturally, even though it has never seen another dog do this. Later, the dog learns to respond to whistle commands to guide the sheep more effectively. What does this show?

- A. Instinct and learned behavior can combine to improve survival or usefulness
- B. Instincts are less reliable than learned behaviors
- C. Learned behaviors are always stronger than instincts
- D. Only instincts matter in farm animals

6. Which scenario best illustrates how instincts and learned behaviors might work together for migration?

- A. A bird flying south every winter without ever changing its path
- B. A young bird following older birds to learn the safest migration route
- C. A fish swimming in circles in a tank because it has no directions
- D. A mammal hibernating in the same cave each year

7. If instincts are inherited, how might scientists prove that a behavior is truly instinctual?

- A. By showing the behavior can be copied from parents
- B. By observing that the behavior happens without practice or teaching
- C. By training an animal to perform the behavior
- D. By waiting until the animal becomes an adult before studying it

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8. Humans often combine instincts with learned behaviors. Which example best demonstrates this?

- A. Breathing is instinctual and requires no learning
- B. Eating is instinctual, but using utensils to eat is learned
- C. Laughing at a joke is instinctual
- D. Learning to ride a bike is instinctual

9. (DOK 4 – Analysis) A scientist studies two groups of young wolves. Group A grows up with adult wolves. Group B is raised without adult examples. Later, Group A hunts successfully, while Group B struggles to hunt. What conclusion is best supported by this experiment?

- A. Hunting is purely instinctual and does not require practice
- B. Hunting is a learned behavior that depends only on teaching
- C. Hunting is partly instinctual but requires learning and practice to succeed
- D. Wolves cannot hunt unless humans train them

10. (DOK 4 – Application) A new environment suddenly removes a food source that an animal's instinctual behavior depends on. Which outcome is most likely for the survival of that species?

- A. They will survive because instincts always adjust immediately
- B. They may struggle unless they can learn new behaviors to find food
- C. They will quickly develop new instincts within one generation
- D. They will stop using instincts altogether and rely only on learning