
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE CROWS THAT REMEMBER HUMAN FACES

High-Interest Nonfiction Reading Passage

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ Reading Passage
- ✓ Comprehension Questions
- ✓ Answer Key
- ✓ Teacher Guide

GRADES 4-6 • LEXILE ~750L • DOK LEVELS 1-4

Reading they'll actually do.

TERMS OF USE

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WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ High-interest nonfiction reading passage (300-400 words)
- ✓ 6 comprehension questions spanning DOK levels 1-4
- ✓ Complete answer key with explanations
- ✓ Teacher guide with standards, pacing, and extensions

Questions or feedback? Leave a review or message us through TPT!

THE CROWS THAT REMEMBER HUMAN FACES

Crows never forget a face—especially if that face belongs to someone who wronged them. Scientists at the University of Washington have discovered that American crows can recognize and remember individual human faces for years, hold grudges against people who have threatened them, and even pass this knowledge to other crows who have never personally encountered the dangerous human.

The research began when scientists wanted to study crow behavior but needed to capture and band wild birds for tracking. They wore distinctive rubber masks while trapping crows on campus. Years later, crows would still scold, dive-bomb, and mob anyone wearing those same masks—even people who had never interacted with the birds. The original crows had taught their offspring and neighbors to recognize the 'dangerous' human faces.

Brain imaging studies revealed something remarkable about how crows process faces. When crows see a threatening human face, the same areas of their brain activate that handle fear and memory in mammals. The crows aren't just recognizing patterns—they're processing human faces using neurological systems similar to how we recognize each other. In a very real sense, crows see us as individuals.

This grudge-holding ability makes perfect evolutionary sense. Crows that remember dangerous individuals—predators, nest-raiders, or hostile humans—survive longer than those who forget. And sharing this survival knowledge with offspring and neighbors through social learning helps protect the entire community from known threats.

But crows don't just remember enemies. They also remember and reward kindness. Some crows bring 'gifts' to people who regularly feed them—shiny objects, colorful buttons, bits of metal, and other trinkets. In Seattle, one family received years of small presents from grateful crows after a young girl began sharing her lunch with the neighborhood birds. The crows would leave their offerings on the family's bird feeder.

Crows are among the most intelligent birds on Earth, capable of using tools, solving multi-step puzzles, and understanding cause and effect relationships. Their facial recognition abilities add sophisticated social intelligence to an already impressive cognitive toolkit.

The next time you see a crow watching you from a telephone wire, remember: it's probably evaluating whether you're friend or foe. And whatever it decides, it almost certainly won't forget.

Word Count: 362 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: Scientific American

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1

How did researchers test crow facial recognition?

- ☐ A) They showed crows photographs
- ☐ B) They wore masks while capturing crows, then tested reactions years later
- ☐ C) They trained crows to pick faces from a lineup
- ☐ D) They painted their faces

2

What do brain scans show about how crows process faces?

- ☐ A) They use a different brain than other birds
- ☐ B) The same areas light up that handle fear and memory in mammals
- ☐ C) They can't see faces clearly
- ☐ D) Only male crows recognize faces

3

How do crows share information about dangerous humans?

- ☐ A) Through written messages
- ☐ B) They teach other crows to recognize the threat
- ☐ C) Through special calls
- ☐ D) They can't share this information

4

What do crows sometimes bring to kind humans?

- ☐ A) Food
- ☐ B) Feathers
- ☐ C) Shiny objects, buttons, or bits of metal
- ☐ D) Leaves

5

Why does grudge-holding make evolutionary sense?

- ☐ A) It helps them find food
- ☐ B) Crows that remember dangerous individuals survive longer
- ☐ C) It makes them more aggressive
- ☐ D) It helps them migrate

6

What implications might crow intelligence have for urban wildlife?

- ☐ A) No implications
- ☐ B) Animals may be observing and remembering our behavior
- ☐ C) We should capture all crows
- ☐ D) Crows are too smart for cities

ANSWER KEY

The Crows That Remember Human Faces

1. B) They wore masks while capturing crows, then tested reactions years later

DOK 1 — Recall.

2. B) The same areas light up that handle fear and memory in mammals

DOK 1 — Recall.

3. B) They teach other crows to recognize the threat

DOK 2 — Inference.

4. C) Shiny objects, buttons, or bits of metal

DOK 2 — Inference.

5. B) Crows that remember dangerous individuals survive longer

DOK 3 — Analysis.

6. B) Animals may be observing and remembering our behavior

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Crows That Remember Human Faces

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1 — Refer to details and examples in a text
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4 — Determine meaning of words and phrases
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8 — Explain how author uses evidence
- NGSS — Connections to scientific practices

PACING OPTIONS

- Quick Read (10-15 min): Passage + questions 1-4
- Standard (20-25 min): Full passage + all questions
- Deep Dive (35-40 min): Add discussion + extension

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If you knew crows were watching and judging your behavior, would you act differently around them?
- Crows bring gifts to people who are kind to them. What does this suggest about animal emotions?
- Should cities consider crow intelligence when making urban planning decisions?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Observe birds in your area for a week and record their behaviors around humans.
- Design an experiment that could test whether local birds recognize individuals.
- Research other animals known to recognize human faces and create a comparison chart.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Struggling: Pre-teach vocabulary, partner reading
- Advanced: Add research, compare to related events
- ELL: Visual supports, pre-teach context

SOURCE

- Scientific American / University of Washington research