



Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills 8th Edition

Benchmark BOY

Grade 8

Student Materials

Crows

Crows are scavengers. The birds will eat almost anything, from vegetables and fruit, to nuts and seeds. They'll devour insects, frogs, lizards, mice, smaller birds, basically any animal they can fit into their mouths. And they'll happily pick at the flesh of carrion, which probably accounts for why ancient people associated crows with death.

Crows are playful birds, very sociable with their own kind, and they live in large extended family groups. They frequently indulge in silly games, such as carrying a twig high into the air, dropping it, then quickly swooping down and catching it. They've also been observed executing acrobatic backflips in flight.

Though few species of crows migrate, very often, during the fall and winter months, the birds will congregate in large groups, known as roosts. These roosts may range from a few dozen crows to hundreds of thousands. One astonishingly large roost, recorded in Oklahoma, was estimated at over two million crows. Exactly why they gather in such large groups remains a mystery, though researchers suspect that the birds congregate for protection against predators, as well as to communicate with one another and exchange information about where to find food.

Nearly all ornithologists (from the ancient Greek words *ornis* "bird" and *logos* "explanation") agree that crows are vastly intelligent creatures, with large brains in relation to their body size. Their intelligence is near the top of the avian world, alongside that of parrots. Their brains, at least in scale, are larger than human brains. A human brain is about one-and-a-half percent of body mass, while the brain of an American crow is more than two percent of its body mass.

And like us, crows are toolmakers. For example, they'll use straight twigs to poke for grubs, and then use a hooked twig to pull the grub from its hiding place. Crows often drop nuts onto roads and rocky surfaces to crack them open. In Japan, the clever birds deposit walnuts at intersections, placing the nuts right in front of the wheel of a car. Then, after the car crushes the nut, the crows return to peck at the pieces.