

OUR STORKS

by G. A. Skrebitski



¹ *The author, who was born in Russia, learned to understand and love nature as a small boy. This is a true story of what took place in a small Russian village where he and his family lived one year.*

² Not far from our house there was an old tree. Early in the spring a white stork flew up and perched in the tree. The big bird spent some time inspecting it; then it flew away.

- 3 The next morning there were two storks in the tree—a male and a female—busily building a nest on a thick bough.
- 4 When the nest was ready, the female laid three eggs and began sitting on them. The male spent his time flying to the marsh nearby for food or standing near the bough with one leg tucked up under him. He could stand on one leg for a long time, and he even slept that way.
- 5 After the baby storks hatched, the parents were busy all day long. The grownup storks took turns flying to the marsh to bring back frogs, little fish, and lizards for the babies. While one stork flew away to the marsh, the other guarded the nest. When it saw its mate returning, the stork that was guarding the babies tilted its head back and clapped its beak loudly. Like most storks, it had no voice. It greeted its mate by clicking its beak rapidly.
- 6 The stork that had returned fed the babies. Then it sat down by the nest while its mate flew off to the marsh for more food.
- 7 The babies were growing, and so were their appetites. Soon both parents began to fly together to bring food to their young.
- 8 Then one day one of the stork parents disappeared. We never learned what happened to it. The lone grownup stork had to work from morning to night to feed its babies. They were getting very large and demanded more food. We felt sorry for the poor grownup stork, but we didn't know how to help it.
- 9 One day a friend and I went fishing. On the way home we saw the baby storks stretching their heads out of the nest and opening their beaks. Since the big stork was not around, we decided to try feeding the babies some fish.
- 10 When we climbed the tree, the baby storks got so excited they almost fell out of the nest. Then one of them saw a little fish in my hand. The baby bird stretched toward the fish, grabbed it with its beak, and swallowed it. Before long all three had gobbled up the fish.
- 11 We were climbing down the tree when the parent stork returned. It flew quickly to the nest and looked it over. After checking, it seemed to be satisfied that everything was all right.
- 12 After that, we fed the baby storks every day. The grownup stork seemed to understand that it was not needed. It spent less and less time bringing food to its babies. It would fly off to wander in the marsh; then it would return to doze on the tree.
- 13 Before long the young storks began to fly out of the nest. Whenever we appeared outdoors they flew down from the nest toward us demanding food.
- 14 One morning the young storks went with us to the marsh. They began catching frogs and soon forgot about us. From then on they flew to the marsh every morning to hunt for food.
- 15 As summer ended, all the storks began gathering in flocks, preparing to fly away. Our storks stopped spending every night in the tree. We decided that they had joined some flock, and we forgot about them.
- 16 One day, as we were returning from a fishing trip, we noticed a flock of storks in the meadow. Suddenly three storks separated themselves from the flock. When they started coming towards us, we realized that they were our storks.
- 17 We held up some fish and those big birds ran up to us, each grabbing a fish, tossing it into the air, catching it, and swallowing it. Then they tilted their heads back and rattled their beaks. After they ate their fill, they returned to the flock.
- 18 That was the last time we saw them, for the weather quickly turned cold and they flew south with their flock.

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COMPREHENSION

A Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 1 This story is mainly about
 - a** why storks build nests in trees.
 - b** how two children help care for baby storks.
 - c** why storks join flocks to fly south.
- 2 Storks are different from other birds because they
 - a** have no voices.
 - b** eat fish.
 - c** can fly higher.
- 3 When the baby storks were first born,
 - a** the grownup storks took turns bringing food.

- b** both parents flew together to bring food.
- c** two children fed the baby storks.

- 4 When one grownup stork disappeared,
 - a** the other stork could easily feed the babies.
 - b** the other stork needed help to feed the babies.
 - c** Both **a** and **b**
- 5 "Our Storks" is a good title for this story because
 - a** the children really owned a flock of storks.
 - b** the white storks belong to all of us.
 - c** the storks seemed to remember the author and his friend.

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

B Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- 1 came to rest; sat (2)
- 2 examining; carefully looking at (2)
- 3 branch; one of the main branches (3)
- 4 soft, wet land; swamp (4)
- 5 swiftly; with great speed (5)
- 6 desires for food; hungers (7)
- 7 called for; needed (8)

C **too** = also

two = the number after *one*

Words that sound alike but have different spellings and meanings are called homophones. *Too* and *two* are homophones.

Look at each word in **bold type**. Note the paragraph number. Look at the paragraph and find the homophone for the word in **bold type**. Which of the homophones fits in the blank in the sentence? Write the word.

- 8 **mail** (3)

The _____ stork guarded the nest.

- 9 **loan** (8)

My friend asked me to _____ her a book about birds.

- 10 **whether** (18)

The _____ got cold, and the storks flew away.

THINK ABOUT IT

D Read each sentence. If the sentence is only about a grownup stork, write *grownup*. If it is only about a baby stork, write *baby*. If it is about both, write *both*.

- 1 It has a beak.
- 2 It flies to find food in marshes.
- 3 It has no voice.
- 4 It cannot fly.
- 5 It cannot feed itself.

E Metaphors are figures of speech that compare two things but do not use the words *like* or *as*. Metaphors sometimes exaggerate. In other words, they make something seem bigger, better, worse, or more important than it really is.

Mary Lou is *a lamb*.

This means Mary Lou is gentle.

Read each sentence. The words in **bold type** are metaphors. One of the words in parentheses () tells what the metaphor means. Write the word.

- 6 The boys were **fountains of kindness** to the birds. (caring, made of marble)

- 7 The smallest stork was **a pig**. (hungry, bashful)

- 8 **An army** of storks flew south for the winter. (numerous, military)

- 9 The remaining grownup stork sat like **a rock** on the branch. (hard, unmoving)

- 10 The storks were **streaks of lightning** when they flew across the field. (fast, electric)

F The stork heard the cat's *meow*.
The little squirrel *squealed*.

Some words imitate the sounds they refer to. *Meow* and *squealed* are two such words.

Read each sentence. Which word imitates a sound? Write the word.

- 11 The stork started clicking its beak to greet its mate.
- 12 The baby storks heard an owl whoosh past the tree.
- 13 The baby storks could hear the rustling of the leaves on the ground.
- 14 The stork splashed loudly as it waded in the water.
- 15 The baby storks rattled their beaks as if to say thank you for the fish.