

The Eagle's Egg

by Cyrus Crowley

- 1 The space at the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Farm that contained two bald eagles resembled a prison cell with Plexiglas windows in place of steel bars. Bob, the district supervisor for the park, nicknamed the female eagle "Infertile Myrtle." He hadn't named the male yet, even though he arrived only two days after the park had received Myrtle.
- 2 Myrtle sat on a nest in the deadwood limbs that rested on two metal joints mounted to the left corner of the room. She made it from straw scattered on the floor the day they brought her from the nursery to "her new home." Beneath her, the male toddled among the dried branches on the ground.
- 3 Bob stood in front of the eagle display peering at the male who had waddled over to the water trough and had begun to dip his beak into the artificial stream. Bob removed his beige windbreaker and rolled up the sleeves of his light blue oxford. He did not have to work at the farm that day, but he had come to the aviary to make sure that no one was slacking off and to check up on the new hire.
- 4 While Bob watched the male drink, a balding man with a dark ring of remaining hair who was wearing a Hawaiian shirt, digital camera, and Bermuda shorts sauntered over to the eagle exhibit. He aimed the lens of his camera at the female and snapped a shot. The tourist and Bob were the only two people inside the eagle exhibit; it was early and few people had paid three dollars to see captive eagles when they could have seen them in the wild at various spots in the Land between the Lakes for free.
- 5 "Wow. Genuine bald eagles," the tourist said aloud. Bob glanced at him. "What an idiot. Of course they're genuine. What did he expect? Shuttlecocks stuffed with cotton," Bob thought.
- 6 The male cawed and stretched his wings. He eyed a branch a few feet above him and then he hopped, flapping wildly for guidance and struggling to stay airborne, and then landed clumsily on the limb.
- 7 "Why can't it fly?" the man asked.
- 8 "Because his wings have been clipped," Bob replied. "This guy has to be kidding. What does he think? The bird forgot how to fly," he thought to himself.
- 9 "Why would someone clip the wings of our national bird?" the tourist said.
- 10 "Because there isn't enough room for them to fly and because both of them broke their wings before they came to us," Bob retorted.
- 11 "You work here?" the man asked feeling proud of his powers of deduction.
- 12 "Yes, I'm off duty," Bob said.
- 13 "Oh. You come to work even when you're off? Are you a workaholic or what?" the man asked.
- 14 "I had to pick up something I left here on Friday," Bob said. "That sounds believable," Bob thought to himself.

- 15 “How did they break their wings?” the tourist asked.
- 16 “The male flew into a power line and the. . .”
- 17 “Wow. A power line. That must’ve hurt. What a shocking experience.” The man said laughing at his insipid joke. Bob didn’t laugh. He didn’t even feign a smile. He simply studied the tourist. Uncomfortable, the tourist said in a very serious tone, “Doesn’t that say something about how civilization is screwing up the environment?”
- 18 “No,” said Bob, “it says something about how eagles can’t see in all directions when they’re pursuing prey.”
- 19 “And the other one. How did he break his wing?” the tourist said.
- 20 “It’s not a he; it’s a she. The female caught a stray bullet,” Bob replied.
- 21 “Wow. A bullet. Why would someone shoot a bald eagle—the symbol of our country?” the man paused and then he smirked as something dawned on him. “Maybe some poacher wanted to take its liver or something. You know, for Chinese Medicine. I hear things like this all the time. I hear gallbladders from bears go for a couple grand,” the tourist said as if he had cranked into place the last color of a Rubik’s cube.
- 22 “I hate to disappoint you,” Bob sneered, “but it most likely was unintentional. There are stiff fines for shooting a threatened species. And furthermore, there aren’t any bald eagles in China; so, I don’t think that one of those Asian nostrums would call for eagle livers.”
- 23 “Are there bear in China?” the man said in his defense.
- 24 Bob didn’t know. Studying wildlife of distant countries never appealed to him. He had enough animals to learn about on his own soil. “Yes, China is a sizable country. Some regions do have bear populations,” Bob said, hoping that his confident tone would convince the tourist to drop the subject. He knew for certain that panda were in China; that would be his cover if the man pressed him for specifics.
- 25 “What’s that one sitting on?” the tourist asked pointing to the female.
- 26 “A nest,” Bob said.
- 27 “No, I mean what’s it sitting on in the nest? Is that an egg?” the tourist said.
- 28 Bob chuckled. “No, the female is infertile and bald eagles don’t mate in captivity,” he said.
- 29 “Look closer,” the man said pointing to a bulge in the nest. Bob looked. He saw grayish mound peeping at him under Myrtle’s breast. He pulled his keys out of his pocket and opened the door to the eagles. He approached the nest but Myrtle kept clucking and pecking at his hands when he reached in her direction. The male joined her. Bob closed the door.
- 30 “I’ll be back in minute,” Bob said.

- 31 He left the aviary. A few minutes later, he returned with thick leather gloves and two cages. The female clawed at the thick hide as he moved her from the nest. An egg the size of a fist rested in the swirled hay. Bob scowled at the sight of it. The birds scratched and thrust their beaks at him, but he deftly placed each inside its tiny coop.
- 32 “Wow! A miracle birth from an infertile bird,” the tourist teased.
- 33 “Well, it doesn’t matter anyway. Miracle or not, we can’t have it here,” Bob said.
- 34 He dropped the egg on the concrete. It hit the ground with a sharp crack. Both birds hysterically flailed their wings smashing them against the bars of their cages, breaking off feathers. The oblong shape wobbled on the cement floor. A pool of ichors formed at the base of the egg. Bob lifted his boot over the embryo inside the broken shell.
- 35 The tourist watched with an expression of horror. “What are you doing? Those are endangered. That’s our national bird!” the tourist yelled. “They’re not endangered. They’re ‘threatened’ and we don’t have a permit or the money to hatch eagle eggs even if we did have one. It takes over month for them to emerge. We’d have to pay people overtime. We don’t have the funds for it,” Bob said.
- 36 Desperate to stop Bob from crushing the eaglet, the tourist pleaded, “But isn’t the whole point of the law, to protect the eagles? Isn’t that why you need a permit?” “No! We’d get fined without a permit! And even if we did have one, I just finished telling you that we don’t have enough money to pay overtime. It probably wouldn’t make it anyway,” Bob growled and then let his boot descend. The tourist winced at the awful squishing sound.
- 37 “You had no right to do that! How did you know it wouldn’t have made it!? You just told me that she was infertile and that eagles don’t mate in captivity,” the tourist said.
- 38 “You thought there were bald eagles in China. Don’t tell me how to do my job!” Bob yelled.
- 39 “Fine! I won’t tell you how to do your job,” the tourist said as he lifted his camera. “I’ll let the papers do it for me!” he said and snapped a picture of Bob with his stained boot resting on the shattered egg. The tourist shot a look of disgust at Bob, turned his back to him, and then stormed away. Bob shook his head and then grabbed a waste can with a discolored rag inside it from a hidden shelf in the room. He slung shiny gobs of the eaglet into the pail. Its wormy organs seemed to wiggle in his gloves, mottling the leather with dark tinges. “Some people will never understand the way things work around here,” he said to himself.

1. It can be inferred that “Infertile Myrtle” was nicknamed as such because she—
 - A is very fertile
 - B had once been fertile
 - C is not fertile
 - D is going to be fertile

2. Which of the following is a synonym for the word scowled in paragraph 31?
 - A smiled
 - B frowned
 - C laughed
 - D gaped

3. The author uses the eagles in this selection as symbols to represent—
 - A respect for the United States
 - B injured birds
 - C birds in captivity
 - D endangered species

4. The reader knows the man talking to Bob is probably on vacation (before he is referred to as a tourist) because he—
 - A is casually dressed and carrying a camera
 - B asks Bob so many questions
 - C is interested in eagles and their role as a national symbol
 - D threatens to expose Bob’s actions in the newspapers

5. In this selection, Bob can best be described as the—
- A narrator
 - B hero
 - C author
 - D protagonist
6. In paragraph 34, the author heightens the horror of the eaglet's destruction through—
- A the use of an objective tone
 - B the use of sensory images
 - C the use of comparison and contrast
 - D the use of rhetorical devices
7. In paragraph 1, the author uses figurative language to—
- A describe the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Farm
 - B illustrate the eagles' living conditions
 - C characterize Bob's personality
 - D develop Myrtle's infertility
8. The tourist plans to tell his story about what happened to the eaglet via the—
- A internet
 - B television news
 - C radio talk shows
 - D newspapers

STAAR One Item Bank - Test and Answer Key

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1.
Answer: C
Objective: 9.01A
Difficulty: 2
2.
Answer: B
Objective: 9.01B
Difficulty: 2
3.
Answer: A
Objective: 9.02C
Difficulty: 2
4.
Answer: A
Objective: 9.05B
Difficulty: 2
5.
Answer: D
Objective: 9.05B
Difficulty: 2
6.
Answer: B
Objective: Fig19B
Difficulty: 3
7.
Answer: B
Objective: Fig19B
Difficulty: 3
8.
Answer: D
Objective: Fig19B
Difficulty: 1