

Name _____

Date _____

“Daniel Webster’s First Case”

Perhaps you have heard the name of Daniel Webster, one of the greatest lawyers who ever lived in our country. Someday you may read his speeches, and then you will learn how well he could speak before a judge when a man was tried for his life, or when any other great case was in court.

Here is a story about Daniel Webster’s first case. It was his very first, for Daniel was at this time only ten years old.

Daniel’s father was a poor farmer. Besides Daniel, he had an older son, Ezekiel. Both boys used to help him do farm work.

One day Ezekiel set a trap to catch a woodchuck, which for a long time had been stealing his breakfast from the Websters’ garden. At last he caught the woodchuck.

“Now,” cried Ezekiel, “We’ll kill the thief. You’ve done harm enough, Mr. Woodchuck, and now you shall die!”

Daniel, who had a kind heart, begged his brother not to kill the poor thing, but to take him into the woods and let him go. Ezekiel refused to do this. And so, as they could not agree, the two lads went to their father and asked him what should be done.

“Well,” said old Mr. Webster, “here is the prisoner. Let us try him for his life. Ezekiel, you shall be the lawyer against him. Daniel, you shall be the lawyer for him. You may both speak. I will be the judge.”

Ezekiel began. He spoke about the harm the woodchuck had done in the garden. He told how much time and trouble it took to catch him. He asked if the prisoner would not surely take to his bad habit again if they should let him go. And he ended with these words: “The prisoner must die. And, to pay for the harm he has done, let us sell his skin!”

Ezekiel spoke well, and old Mr. Webster seemed to think he was right. Now he turned to his younger son and said, “I’ll hear now what you have to say, Daniel.”

Daniel was very much afraid that his brother had won the case. But seeing the poor woodchuck trembling in his prison, the boy’s breast swelled with pity. Looking the judge full in the face with his deep black eyes, Daniel began.

“Ezekiel has spoken well, but he forgets some things. I say the woodchuck has the right to life, to food, and to freedom. God made him to live in the bright sunshine, in the free fields and woods.



“He is not like a cruel fox, for he kills nothing. He only eats a little of our corn, and I am sure we have plenty. Has he taken anything but the little food he needed to keep him alive? And is not that food as sweet to him as the food on Mother’s table is to us?”

“You can’t say he has broken laws, as humans often do. He has only done what is in his nature to do. How, then, can you blame him? Look at the poor, trembling creature, and answer me this: How dare you take away that life that you can never give back again?”

Daniel paused. There were tears in his father’s eyes—tears that rolled down his sunburned cheeks. The plea for mercy had touched the old man’s heart. Forgetting that he was the “judge,” he started up, and cried in a loud voice, “Zeke, Zeke, you let that woodchuck go!”

If ever you are tempted to tease or hurt a poor creature, remember Daniel Webster’s first case. Think of his words of mercy, and “let the woodchuck go.”

1. Where does the action in this story take place?

- A. in a courtroom
- B. on a farm
- C. in the woodchuck’s cage
- D. in a prison

2. In this story, what problem does Daniel face?

- A. He wants a new pet.
- B. The woodchuck makes too much noise at night.
- C. The woodchuck is stealing from the Websters’ garden.
- D. He wants to save the woodchuck’s life.



3. What do you think Mr. Webster was feeling after he heard Ezekiel's final words, "The prisoner must die. And, to pay for the harm he has done, let us sell his skin!"?
- A. Ezekiel was very mean.
 - B. Ezekiel was right.
 - C. Daniel was going to be right.
 - D. Ezekiel and Daniel were wasting his time.

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4. Daniel gave a powerful speech that convinced his father to let the woodchuck go. All of the following are true of the reasons Daniel used **except**:
- A. The reasons Daniel used are more truthful than the reasons Ezekiel gave.
 - B. The reasons Daniel used made his father feel sorry for the woodchuck.
 - C. The reasons Daniel used make the woodchuck seem harmless.
 - D. The reasons Daniel used make killing the woodchuck seem wrong.

5. The author wrote, "But seeing the poor woodchuck trembling in his prison, the boy's breast swelled with pity." What do these words tell you about Daniel?

- A. He is easily scared.
- B. He is caring.
- C. He is timid and shy.
- D. He is a cruel boy.

6. Which of the following shows that Mr. Webster is fair?

- A. He listens to Ezekiel tell his story first.
- B. He listens to both of his sons' opinions before making a decision.
- C. He can't make a decision on his own.
- D. He cries once he heard Daniel's plea.

7. What problem does Mr. Webster face once the woodchuck is caught?

- A. He has to help resolve the argument between his sons.
- B. He has no food because the woodchuck had eaten it all.
- C. He doesn't know how much to charge for the woodchuck's skin.
- D. He has to convince his sons not to kill the woodchuck.

8. What is the lesson in this story?

- A. Do not plant corn near the woods.
- B. Do not argue with your brother.
- C. Do not hurt helpless animals.
- D. Do not put woodchucks in prison.



“Why the Larks Flew Away”

A family of four young larks once lived with their mother in a nest in a wheat field. At first the nest was very safe, for it stood on the soft ground and was hidden by the wheat.

When the wheat began to ripen, the mother lark watched carefully for any sign of the coming of the reapers. She feared that the sharp knives would cut the nest and injure the young larks.

One morning she had to leave the nest to find some breakfast for her little ones.

“Be good children and stay in the nest,” she said. “If the farmer and his son pass through the field, listen very carefully to what they say.”

“Yes, Mother,” cried the four baby larks.

The mother lark flew away. A few minutes later, the little larks heard the farmer and his son passing along the narrow path near the nest.

“This wheat is ripe enough to cut,” said the farmer. “John, go down the road to neighbor Smith’s farmhouse and ask him to come tomorrow to help us reap the grain.”

When the mother lark came home, she brought some fat worms for breakfast. She found her babies chirping excitedly.

“Mother, Mother!” they cried. “The men are coming to cut the wheat. We must move away tonight!”

“What did the farmer say?” asked the mother lark.

“The farmer told his son to go over to neighbor Smith’s house and ask him to help cut the grain.”

“My dear children,” laughed the mother lark, “as yet we have nothing to fear.”

When the baby larks had eaten their breakfast, the mother lark showed them how to exercise their wings.

The next morning before leaving, the mother lark said once more, “Stay in the nest, and if the farmer passes through the fields, be sure to listen to what he says.”

“Yes, Mother,” cried the little larks.

Away flew the mother, and again the farmer and his son passed through the fields.

“Did you ask neighbor Smith to help us cut the grain?” inquired the farmer.

“Yes, Father,” replied the son, “and I expected him here already.”

“The wheat is ripe and it should be cut without delay,” replied the farmer.

“Mount your horse and ride to your cousins’ house. Ask them if they will help us.”



This frightened the baby larks so much that when they saw their mother coming, they began to chirp more loudly than ever.

“What is the trouble?” called the mother as she hastened toward the nest.

“We must surely go away today!” cried the young larks. “The farmer’s son has gone to bring his cousins to cut the wheat. We shall be killed if we stay here.”

Again the mother laughed. “If the farmer waits for his cousins to help him, the wheat will not be cut today.”

The third morning, the mother left the nest to search for food. At noon the farmer and his son came into the field.

“See how late it is,” said the farmer, “and still not a man has come to help us. I see we must do the work ourselves. Let us go home and get everything ready. Tomorrow, before the sun is up, we shall begin to reap.”

Soon after the farmer had gone, the mother lark came flying over the wheat field. The little larks told her all that they had heard.

“Now, indeed, it is time for us to be off,” she said. “Shake your wings and get ready to fly. When a man makes up his mind to do his own work, it is sure to be done at once.”

9. What is the setting of this story?

- A. a farm house at dinner time
- B. a farm that has recently been reaped
- C. a bird house in a garden
- D. a wheat field just before harvest

10. Why does the mother lark want to know when the wheat fields will be reaped?

- A. She wants to use the cut wheat to build a new nest.
- B. She is worried that the noise will frighten the baby larks.
- C. She knows that her nest will be hidden once the wheat is reaped.
- D. She is afraid that the reapers’ knives will hurt the baby larks.



11. Whom does John ask first to help cut the wheat?

- A. his neighbor
- B. his cousins
- C. his father
- D. his brother

12. Why does the mother lark tell her baby larks, "If the farmer and his son pass through the field, listen very carefully to what they say"?

- A. She wants to know when the farmer will be reaping the fields.
- B. She doesn't want the baby larks to get bored.
- C. She wants the baby larks to improve their hearing.
- D. She likes to know secrets.

13. Why doesn't the mother lark move her family when John asks his cousins and neighbor Smith to reap the fields?

- A. She doesn't know where to move.
- B. She knows that people can't rely on others to get their work done.
- C. She is too busy to find food.
- D. She doesn't think that the reapers are dangerous.

14. What does the farmer finally decide to do about his fields?

- A. He asks neighbor Smith to help him reap the fields.
- B. He decides to talk to the larks to warn them.
- C. He decides not to reap the fields that season.
- D. He decides that he and his son will reap the fields themselves.



15. What does the mother lark do in the story that shows that she is wise?
- A. She leaves her babies alone in the nest when she goes to search for breakfast.
 - B. She doesn't listen to the baby larks tell her what happens while she is gone.
 - C. She tells her babies not to chirp so loudly when the farmer is nearby.
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16. What is the moral of this story?
- A. You should listen to other people's conversations to find out important things.
 - B. You should always be prepared for something surprising to happen.
 - C. If you want work to be done well, you should do it yourself.
 - D. If you want to be safe, don't build your house in a wheat field.



Words to Know Glossary

Arctic – the cold region around the North Pole, north of the Arctic Circle

bedrock - the rock that lies just below the soil in the earth's crust.

cygnets (SIG-nets) – baby swans

disguise (dis-GIZE) – something that hides a living thing's identity

extinct – no longer living on Earth

fungi (FUHN-gye) – living things, such as mushrooms or molds, that get their food by breaking down dead plant and animal matter

lichen (LYE-ken) – small, crusty living things made up of fungi and algae growing together

plain (playn) – an extensive region of level, flat treeless land

predators (PREH-duh-turz) – animals that hunt and eat other animals

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tundra (TUHN-druh) – a cold, treeless plain near the top of the world

17. According to the glossary, what is the definition of lichen?

- A. animals that are hunted and eaten by other animals
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18. According to the definition in the glossary, which sentence could describe an event in the tundra?

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