

The rooks' parliament



The origins of the collective term 'a parliament of rooks' lie in the fact that rooks are most commonly seen in flocks, and will sometimes form large groups in which one bird will 'speak' at length. Although young rooks look similar to crows, the adult rook has a longer beak and black feathers while the crow's feathers are black with a green and purple sheen.



Rooks are not stunted crows. They are black,
 Hunch quietly on fields in plough.
 I woke as a child to their raw
 Kind cawing. The shooters then came
 5 Claimed they were pests. We lifted them back,
 Their eyes' light a chilling blue flame.

The marksmen were wrong. Rooks eat pests.
 The blunt-headed crows in their pairs
 Rip road-kills; while rooks' beaks, slim, bare,
 10 Prod every clod in their slow crowd.
 Rookeries crown rough roadside trees
 With clambered sticks, thriving and loud.

A strange story hovers like birds,
 That their field circlings form grave
 15 Assemblies where wisdom is made
 To rule their land well, with a caw.
 We cannot. Dare they? I am glad
 We do not shoot rooks any more.

Alison Brackenbury

1 a) Why do you think the poet starts with a statement of what rooks are not like before saying what they are like?

1 mark

b) What does the statement tell us of her expectations of people's knowledge and opinions?

1 mark

2 What adjective in the first verse attributes a human emotion to the rooks?

1 mark

3 A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that usually describes one thing is used to describe another.

a) What metaphor does the poet use in the opening verse?

1 mark

b) What is it that the poet describes using this metaphor?

1 mark

4 Which phrase tells us that rooks build their nests high above ground?

1 mark

5 We talk about a 'flock of birds', but rooks have their own collective noun: 'a parliament of rooks'. Look in a dictionary to find the origin and meaning of the word 'parliament'.

a) It comes from _____

meaning _____

1 mark

b) Why do you think the poet chose the phrase as this poem's title?

1 mark

6 What is the meaning of 'grave' in the third verse (line 14)?

1 mark

7 In your own words, explain why the poet is 'glad we do not shoot rooks any more'. Include one example of how they benefit our environment.

1 mark