



One crow sorrow,  
Two crows joy,  
Three crows a letter,  
Four crows a boy;  
Five crows silver,  
Six crows gold,  
Seven crows a secret  
Never to be told . . .

—Children's Rhyme



The most intelligent of birds, or a noisy nuisance?  
Sacred symbols, or spies from the underworld?  
Whether worshipped or despised, crows and ravens have always seized our attention.

**S**even Crows A Secret explores the fascinating natural history of corvids, and the timeless impact these black rogues have had on the imagination. This film is an off-beat portrait of an eccentric creature, blending remarkable wildlife sequences with animation, poetry, music, art, and interviews. Out of this eclectic mixture comes a new understanding of crows and ravens as extraordinary birds who have played a unique role in cultures around the world.

27 minutes 30 seconds (colour)

Director: John Forrest  
Producer: George Johnson

 Closed captioned.  
A decoder is required.

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# Seven Crows a Secret



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# Seven Crows a Secret

"The crow is a god fallen into a bad reputation that's been foisted onto him by ignorant, unknowing humans."

-Ted Hughes,  
Britain's Poet Laureate



## DID YOU KNOW THAT ...

- crows roost in flocks of as many as 250,000 birds?
- ravens can live more than 50 years?
- corvids can learn as many as 100 words or phrases, and ravens can actually use a human word in the correct context?
- since ancient times, mariners have used ravens to help find land?
- crows love to play jokes, like teasing and tormenting cats, or dive-bombing sleeping cows?
- corvids use their beaks to place ants in their plumage to kill parasites?
- crows use sticks to pry bugs from crevices, and they drop nuts onto the highway so passing cars will crack the shells?



CROW

### CREDITS

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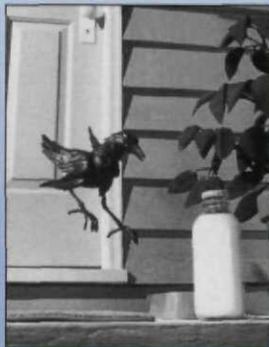
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- crows are among the blackest things in nature: colourless from eyeball to beak, and from crown to claws?
- corvids have a highly developed syrinx, but (unlike songbirds) they use their vocal abilities for mimicry?
- ravens have been taught to count to seven?
- some crow fossils are 25 million years old?
- ravens mate in flight?
- a "raven-stone" is a gallows, or a place of execution?
- human beings are the crow's greatest predator?



RAVEN



## OVERVIEW

This entertaining documentary takes the viewer into the world of crows and ravens, revealing their elegant courtship and mating rituals, feats of aerial acrobatics, and impressive survival skills. Animated sequences illustrate the colourful personas people have projected onto corvids through the ages, with stories from Greek, Norse, and Haida mythology. Biologist Bernd Heinrich describes his life's work with ravens in the world's largest aviary. Artist Leonard Baskin explains the haunting fusion of humans and crows in his art. And Ted Hughes, Britain's poet laureate, muses on the profound importance of crows and ravens as symbols of divinity.

Beyond all the science and speculation, however, the clever crow hovers watchfully, keeping its secrets to itself . . .



# Suggested Activities

## Before viewing the film:

Make a list of students' feelings about crows and ravens. Ask why these birds are so frequently seen as noisy pests. Is there another side to them?

Have the students describe any personal experiences they may have had with corvids. Has anyone heard a talking crow? A raven's croak? How do crows behave in the school yard?

Can anyone think of a particular crow or raven in a book or a movie? How was it portrayed? Is this an accurate depiction of the actual bird?

## After viewing the film:

Ask whether the video has changed students' attitudes toward crows and ravens. What did they discover about the birds that they didn't know before?

Have students write a poem or story that expresses their own memories, feelings, or fantasies about crows or ravens.

List all the stories, legends, fairy tales, or fables students can think of that feature crows or ravens. Then look at how the birds have been characterized in each. Which personality traits



reflect the actual behaviour of corvids? Which have been projected onto the birds by the story-teller? What is it about crows and ravens that calls up these characterizations? Repeat the exercises, looking instead at modern culture: art, films, stories, poems, television programs, cartoons, and comics. Here are some examples:

Vincent Van Gogh's painting "Crows in the Cornfield"

Alex Colville's print "Seven Crows"

Edgar Allen Poe's poem "The Raven"

Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Birds*

The singing crows in Walt Disney's *Dumbo*

*Mad* magazine's "Spy vs. Spy" comic strip

Go on a field trip to study crows in your neighbourhood. Make notes about their behaviour. Do they stay alone? In pairs? In larger groups? What kinds of sounds do they make? What do you think they are communicating? How do crows relate to other kinds of birds and animals? How do they interact with you?

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