

Maria the Mockingbird Script

Note: Group separation is for Grades 4-6 version of this lesson.

Story Introduction

Good morning Texans! Texas is a large state with beautiful lakes, winding rivers, creeks, hills, mountains, beaches, and valleys, providing habitats for many wildlife species. I am going to tell you a story about **Maria the Mockingbird**. She is an example of a living thing. All living things are organisms that have basic needs of food, water, shelter, and space. In addition, they can produce young or offspring. Maria the Mockingbird is a songbird that has lived in the great state of Texas for many years. Join me in a flight with Maria!

The neighborhood where Maria lives is filled with lovely homes, city parks, and schools, all of which are abiotic, meaning they are nonliving. On one edge of the city, there is a **farm** and on the other edge, there is a large ranch. Maria does not usually fly across the whole area daily. It mostly depends upon her food needs. Her **nest** is sheltered in a large **oak tree** behind an **apartment building**, with a lovely creek running behind it. The grounds surrounding the apartment building consist of a well-kept ecosystem, for which Maria is very grateful. Much of the land that Maria depends upon is privately owned land, meaning that individual owners are responsible for its care and maintenance. Surprisingly, about 95% of Texas land is privately owned.

Group One

Early one morning, Maria leaves her nest feeling very hungry. After getting a quick drink from the creek, she decides to fly over a **house** in her neighborhood where she sees a 4th grader filling up a backyard **bird feeder**. She is thrilled to see such a kind act of stewardship as she watches the young student fill the family's feeder. She sees many birds and a **squirrel** sitting on a nearby fence waiting to enjoy the food. Maria thinks about stopping to consume some birdseed to provide energy for her journey, but the chattering squirrel makes her think twice. The chattering noises it makes serve as warning that a predator, such as a **domestic cat**, might be nearby. Maria understands that a predator might want to eat her! She chirps her thanks to the student for helping the wildlife in the area, and then flies onward.

Group Two

Soon, Maria flies over a nearby **school**. She is aware that students at the school keep water in a **birdbath**, and she is very thirsty by then. As she drinks, she notices a class of students and their teacher planting a **butterfly garden**. They are planting native plants that are sure to attract **butterflies**. Even though the school garden is located on public land, Maria is delighted knowing the teacher is modeling stewardship by helping her students plant a garden that will help care for wildlife. Butterflies will drink nectar from the plants, providing them with their basic need of food. In turn, the butterflies will help the environment by pollinating the plants. More native plants will soon grow. They will have plenty of space, another basic need of living things, to spread. Once Maria drinks enough water, she is ready to move on.

Group Three

Just ahead, Maria looks down and focuses on a young child having lunch with his parents in the park. It is a city park, making it public property, and she is always concerned about people disposing of their trash properly. She stops to rest on a nearby fence and listens to other **songbirds**, as she mimics

their songs. Next, she observes the child swinging and sliding on the **playground** and his parents watching him as he laughs. Maria knows he must be very happy to be there. After a while, the parents let the child know it is time to leave. The child is instructed to help clean up the **picnic table** and carry the trash to the park **trashcans**. One can is for trash. Another can is for items such as plastic bottles and aluminum cans, which can be recycled. Maria is thrilled to witness this family of stewards caring for the land as they properly dispose of their trash.

Group Four

Not far from the park, located at the end of the city, is a well-managed ranch. A stream runs through it and Maria knows it is important for the water to be kept free of pollutants, such as trash and chemicals. As she flies near the stream, she perches herself at its edge, and watches the rancher as he removes trash from the water. As she sips, she sees a **white-tailed deer** drinking further down the creek. Not far from the deer, she watches a **northern raccoon** catch and eat a fish. It will soon be time for Maria to eat, so she flaps her wings and away she flies. On the opposite side of the ranch, Maria remembers where she can find some delicious **berries**. She especially likes visiting this ranch, knowing that it provides homes for many populations of living, or biotic, things. Not only is it well-managed private land, but it also has clean, fresh water. Maria understands that the rancher is a scientist, engaged in agriculture to raise livestock. While sitting in the berry bush, she scans the area looking for potential predators and she sees a **coyote** chasing a **cottontail rabbit**. The rabbit escapes into its burrow just in time! Maria knows that a presence of wildlife might be a sign of stewardship. Not far from the rabbit burrow, she discovers a plot of land where native plants are growing for the purpose of feeding wildlife. The owner is indeed a good caretaker.

Group Five

Maria rests a short while and then again takes flight. As she is flying back toward her neighborhood, she wonders what is happening below. She lands on the roof of the community **pool's** storage building. She had heard about the city's new campaign for the protection and conservation of **eastern screech owls** in the area. She soon realizes that a city employee is installing a **nest box** on the trunk of a tree nearby. Maria is pleased knowing the city is using public property for nest boxes. Installing the nest box is an act of stewardship and provides owls with shelter where they can reproduce and raise their offspring. Eastern screech owls will be a welcome addition to the neighborhood because they eat many types of food including pesky **mice**.

Group Six

Before returning to her nest, Maria decides to visit the farm, which is not far away. She lands in a **cornfield** where she enjoys some tasty **insects**. She knows she better enjoy her meal, because **bats** will soon be feeding there too. She knows Farmer John does not need to spray his **crops** with pesticides. The local bats help the farmer by eating almost one-half of their body weight in insects every night. Wow, bats are stewards and they do not even know it! The farmer also understands the importance of being a steward and taking care of the wildlife and land. Maria understands the farmer is a scientist, engaged in agriculture and cultivating soil to grow crops.

As Maria settles into her nest for the night, she thinks about all the caring people she has seen that day and wonders what Texans would do without its land stewards, farmers, and ranchers who care for the land.