

**DON'T  
LET THE  
PIGEON  
DRIVE THE  
BUS!**

**THE MUSICAL!**

Art © Mo Willems

Main  
Street  
Theater

**ALL  
THEATER FOR YOUTH  
STUDY GUIDE**



# DON'T LET THE PIGEON DRIVE THE BUS!

## MEET THE AUTHOR

### WHO IS MO WILLEMS?

Mo Willems was born in Des Plaines, Illinois, a small city outside of Chicago. He began drawing and creating at a young age. His family relocated to New Orleans, Louisiana when he was a boy. He lived there through high school. During high school he created a comic strip which was printed in the school paper. He attended New York University's Tisch School for the Performing Arts where he received a degree in animation. The illustrations in his picture books have a traditional, American animation style.

Mo began his career as a writer for the show **Sesame Street**. He won six Emmy Awards while working with **Sesame Street**. Besides his animation and television work, he also tried his hand at stand-up comedy, recorded essays for the radio and created several television shows.

In 2003, Mo Willems wrote his first children's book, **Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus**. The book was beloved by critics, children, parents, and librarians around the world. For this title he was given the prestigious Caldecott Honor. The next book, **Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale** also received the Caldecott Honor. Since that time, Mr. Willems has written more than 50 titles. Besides the Pigeon books, Willems's Elephant and Piggie books are also wildly popular. Some other titles by Mo Willems that you might recognize include **Leonardo and the Terrible Monsters**, **Edwina**, **The Dinosaur Who**

**Didn't Know She Was Extinct**, and **Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed**.

Mr. Willems lives in Massachusetts with his family. Besides his three Caldecott Honors he has also won two Carnegie Medals for animation and three Theodor Seuss Geisel awards.



### FUN FACTS

- Did you know that the Pigeon is hidden in every one of Mo Willems's books?
- Most of Mo Willems's Pigeon books only have two characters. One is ALWAYS the Pigeon.
- Mo Willems's biggest inspirations are the Charlie Brown and Snoopy characters created by Charles M. Schultz.

## ON WORK ETHIC:

"I draw in my notebook every day and then I can go back and pick out the things that work. Also, I recommend taking a walk. I like to walk. I get ideas while walking."

PBS News Hour. "Author Mo Willems Answers 3 Questions from Kids." YouTube, YouTube, 18 Dec. 2019, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMORPw6bvI4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMORPw6bvI4).

## ON WRITING FOR KIDS:

"What I discovered, what shocked me, is that it's harder to write for kids. Because you don't have cultural modifiers. You can't reference bands, or cultural experiences. You're stuck with core, fundamental, philosophical thoughts, anger, jealousy, that kind of thing."

CBS This Morning. "Mo Willems and the Art of Children's Books." YouTube, YouTube, 18 June 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-edlINft1hY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-edlINft1hY).

## ON IDEAS:

"I think a mistake that people make is that they think ideas are things that you get, like shoes, and they're not. Ideas are things that you grow. Every day you go back and you take your sketchbook and you're planting a little seed. Some of them don't grow at all, but every now and then one of those seeds slowly, slowly becomes a beautiful tree that bears fruit that you can cut down and burn for profit."

CBS This Morning. "Mo Willems and the Art of Children's Books." YouTube, YouTube, 18 June 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-edlINft1hY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-edlINft1hY).

## ON THE DICHOTOMY OF MEANING:

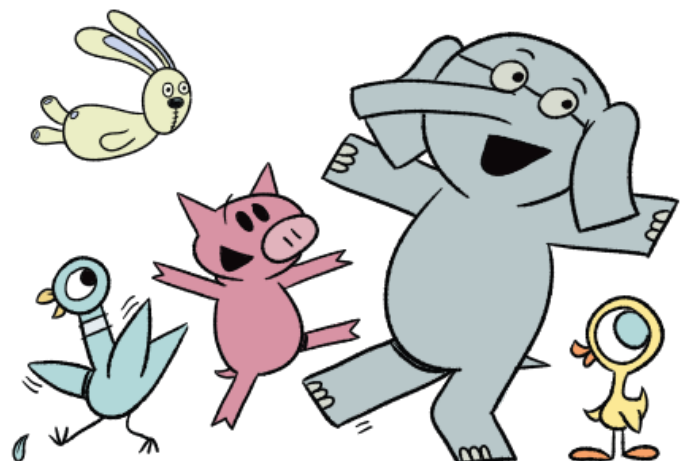
"The first two reviews of *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* were, 'It's a great book because it teaches kids never to give up and to always struggle and try to achieve their goals.' And the next review said, 'What's great about this book is it teaches kids the value of the word "No" and knowing when to stop.' And those are both right!"

Kaplan, Emily, and Mo Willems. "Mo Willems on the Lost Art of Being Silly." Edutopia, George Lucas Educational Foundation, 21 Feb. 2020, [www.edutopia.org/article/mo-willems-lost-art-being-silly](https://www.edutopia.org/article/mo-willems-lost-art-being-silly).

## ON BIG ISSUES:

"In an online video, Willems says that today's heavy burdens of injustice, illness and other woes can be confounding. But maybe by tackling 'just a little bit of the world,' he suggests, we can move the needle to kindness and beauty."

Elber, Lynn. "Uninvited Pigeon Invades Author Mo Willems' TV Special." AP News, Associated Press, 12 Sept. 2020, [apnews.com/article/entertainment-lifestyle-us-news-ny-state-wire-mo-willems-8192852459ddc9bbe8d0d16d9a5ebe90](https://apnews.com/article/entertainment-lifestyle-us-news-ny-state-wire-mo-willems-8192852459ddc9bbe8d0d16d9a5ebe90).



**READ THE BOOK OUT LOUD WITH YOUR CLASSROOM. AFTER READING IT STRAIGHT THROUGH ONCE, TURN THROUGH THE PAGES AND:**

- Teach your students how to recognize a title and author's name on a book. In this case, the author is also the illustrator. You can explain what that means.
- The simple drawings and how they show you where the story take place, who the people in the story are and changes in the Pigeon's feelings.
- Point out that words in all capital letters and the use of exclamation points tell the reader to read those parts with more excitement and intensity.
- Look at the different faces that Pigeon makes. Ask the children what the different faces mean. Have them explain how they can tell.
- Ask the children how it made them feel that pigeon wanted them to help him do something that the grown up in the story didn't want him to do because it was not safe.
- Ask the children if they ever wanted to do something very badly, but weren't allowed.
  - What were some of things that you wanted to do, but weren't allowed to do?
  - How did you feel when you were told, "no?"
  - Why do you think that you're not allowed to do these things that you want to do?
  - What kinds of things do you say or do to try to make your (parent, teacher, babysitter) change their mind?

## **WHAT CAN YOU DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT *DON'T LET THE PIGEON DRIVE THE BUS?***

### **DISCUSS RESPONSIBILITIES.**

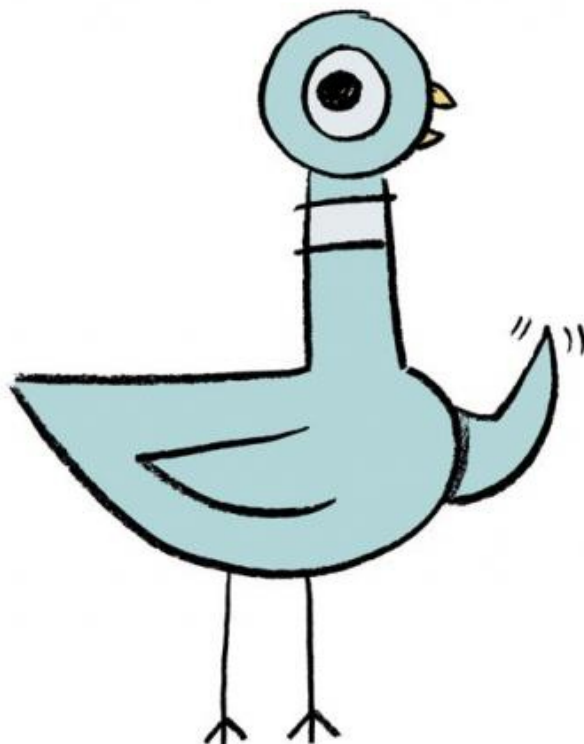
What are your responsibilities at home? How about at school? Do other kids have different responsibilities than you? Why does the driver say “no” to the pigeon? If the driver had let the pigeon drive, what might have happened?

### **THE TEXT STYLE PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND VOICES IN STORYTELLING.**

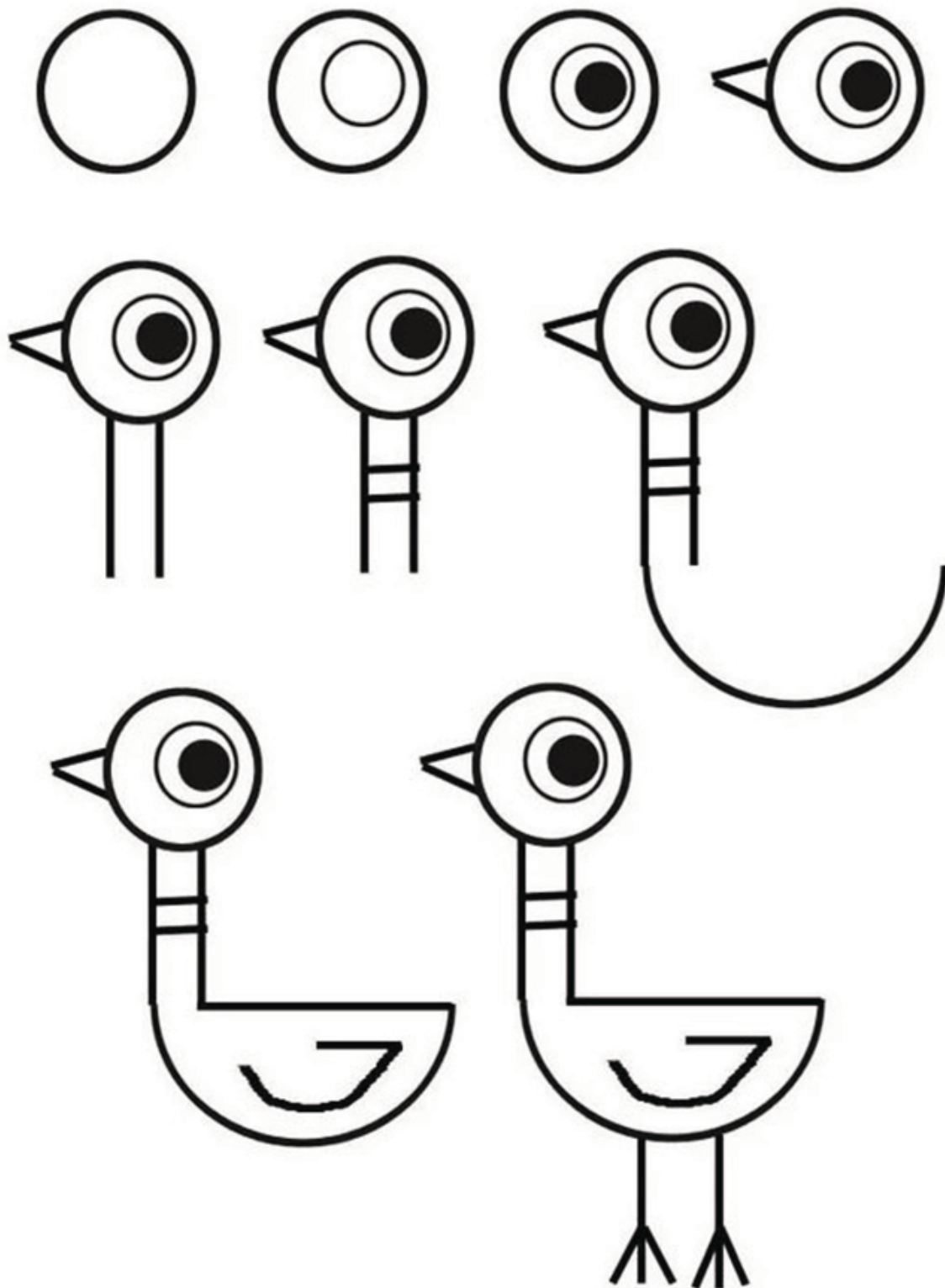
Did the play get louder and more exciting at the same times that the book did?

### **HOW DO THINGS CHANGE FROM BOOK TO A PLAY?**

You can speak with your class about the things that were the same in the play, and the changes that were made to make it more accessible for stage.



**DRAW THE PIGEON! STEP-BY-STEP**



### **NOW THAT YOU KNOW HOW TO DRAW PIGEON, WHY NOT MAKE UP YOUR OWN PIGEON STORY!**

Teachers of younger students can make this a group project, and first and second grade students can write their words to fill in the slots. These are the parts of the story that you must decide on:

#### **WHAT WILL THE PIGEON BE TRYING TO DO?**

*(Be sure to think of something that pigeon—and kids—should not do.)*

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#### **WHERE WOULD THE PIGEON TRY TO DO THIS?**

*(Think of where the pigeon would be to do what he wants.  
Does he want to fly a plane? If so, he would be at the airport.)*

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#### **WHO WILL BE THE OTHER CHARACTER IN THE STORY?**

*(After you have picked what to do, who would he be talking to?  
If he wanted to fly a plane at the airport, he would probably talk to a pilot.)*

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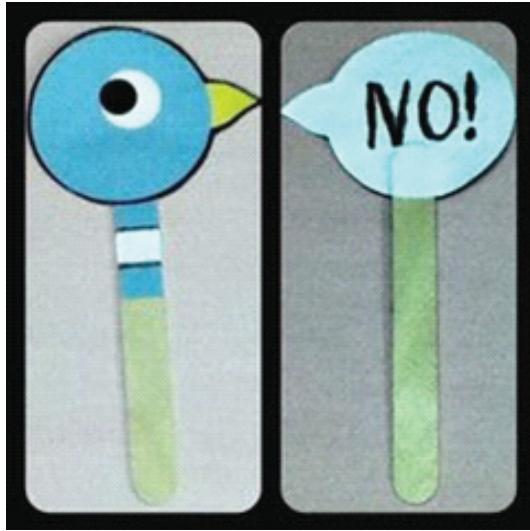
#### **HOW DOES PIGEON TRY TO GET YOU TO DO WHAT HE WANTS TO DO?**

*(Does pigeon make a promise? Or beg? Or maybe throw a tantrum?)*

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#### **HOW WILL PIGEON'S STORY END?**

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### MAKE A PUPPET

#### MATERIALS:

- One popsicle stick (the thicker ones work best)
- One three-inch circle of blue paper
- A large googly eye or dime sized piece of white paper
- One orange or yellow triangle
- School glue
- Black marker

Students will glue the large circle at the top of the stick.

Next, they will attach the triangle to one side of the circle, which is now Pigeon's head!

Add the googly eye, or white circle and for the final step, draw Pigeon's neck.

After the stick has dried, flip it over and have the students write the word NO! on the back.

The children can use these while the book is being read to them, or they can use them to tell their very own Pigeon story.

### BECOME A PIGEON

#### MATERIALS:

- A long, 2-3-inch high strip of card stock paper
- A large circle of blue paper, at least 4 inches around
- A large circle of white paper, about 2-3 inches around
- A small orange or yellow triangle
- School glue or stapler (to be used by teacher)

Measure the strip around each student's head. Staple the strip so that it fits snugly but comfortably.

Have each student adhere the large blue circle (Pigeon's head), the large white circle (Pigeon's eye) and the small triangle (Pigeon's beak).

Now the children can run and play pretending that they are the Pigeon on an adventure.



Pigeon has many feelings during the story *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*. How many can you find? Can you write down the opposite of those traits?

\_\_\_\_\_ **IS OPPOSITE OF** \_\_\_\_\_

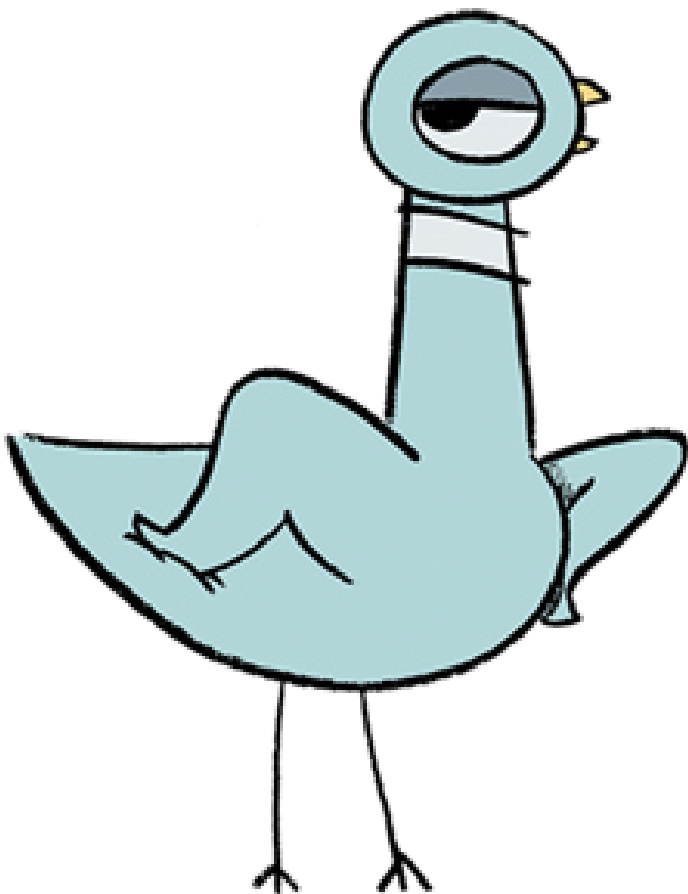
\_\_\_\_\_ **IS OPPOSITE OF** \_\_\_\_\_

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Some responses might be:

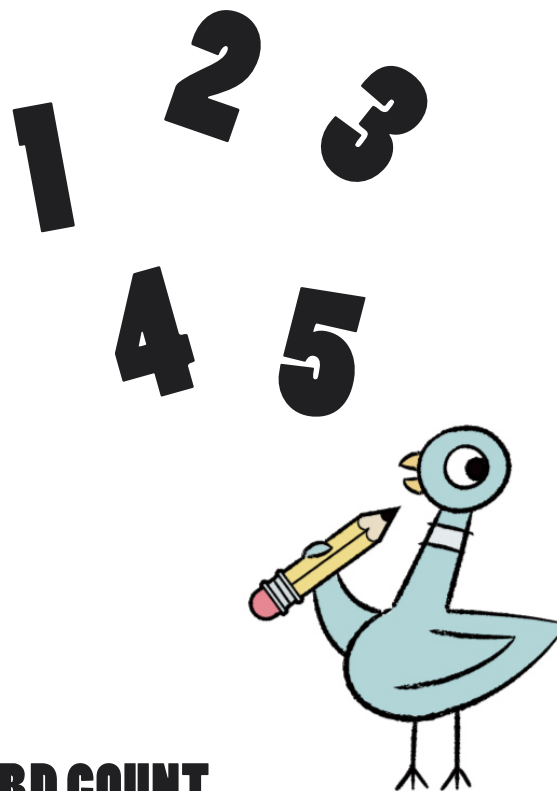
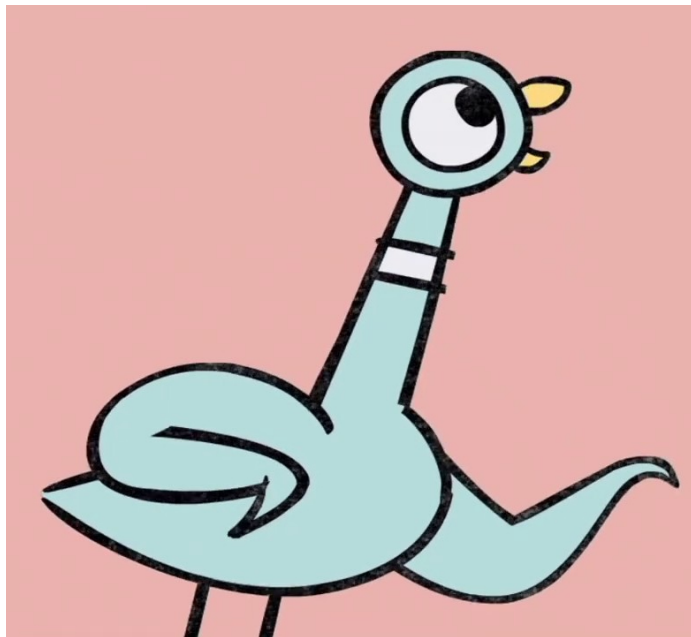
- Happy – Sad
- Angry – Happy
- Frustrated – Patient
- Rude – Polite
- Hopeful – Disappointed
- Sneaky – Follows Rules

### PIGEON WORD PROBLEMS

Write fun, simple Pigeon word problems with your students. You can draw a simple map to show the buildings around town.

Example:

- Four kids get on the bus with Pigeon at the Library.
- Two kids get off of the bus at the Candy Shop.
- One Piggie and three kids get on the bus at the Swimming Pool.
- How many kids are on the bus?
- How many animals are on the bus?



### WORD COUNT

How many times is each word used in the book? Make tally marks to represent each use.

<b>PIGEON</b>	_____
<b>BUS</b>	_____
<b>DRIVE</b>	_____
<b>I</b>	_____
<b>VROOM</b>	_____
<b>JUST</b>	_____

## WHAT COLOR ARE PIGEONS?

Pigeons are usually brown, tan, white and many shades of gray. They often have some black coloring as well. Most pigeons have a small amount of the colors green or purple on them. Some very lucky pigeons have all of those colors!

Which pigeon looks the most like the one in the book? Why?

If you could be a pigeon, what colors would you want to be?



## PIGEONS ARE VERY SMART!

Pigeons are one of the only animals that can recognize their own reflection in a mirror.

Pigeons are very good at knowing which way to go. They can recognize roads and buildings. Some pigeons are used to send messages from one place to another. These are called Carrier Pigeons.

## PIGEONS LOVE TO BE IN GROUPS.

Often they have between 20-30 other pigeons around them!

## PIGEONS CAN HEAR VERY WELL.

This is called a good sense of sound. They can hear things long before other animals and people can hear them. This helps them to get avoid storms and dangerous things.

## PIGEONS CAN FLY VERY FAST!

Pigeons can fly as fast as race car! The fastest a normal driver goes is 65 miles per hour. A pigeon can fly 92 miles per hour!