

Reading Comprehension: Return of the Beaver

Read the information text, then answer retrieval, vocabulary, inference and language questions.

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Learning objective: I can retrieve information, explain vocabulary and make inferences, using evidence from the text.

✓ I find key details ✓ I explain word meanings in context ✓ I back up my ideas with evidence

Return of the Beaver

Imagine an animal that can cut down a tree with its teeth, build a dam across a river and change a whole landscape. That animal is the Eurasian beaver – and after hundreds of years away, it is back in Britain.

Beavers once lived all over Britain. However, people hunted them for their thick fur, their meat and a substance called castoreum, which was used in medicines and perfumes. By around 400 years ago, beavers had disappeared from the wild in Britain.

In 2009, a carefully planned trial began in Knapdale Forest in Scotland, where a small number of beavers were released. Scientists watched closely to see how the animals affected the land around them. At about the same time, a family of beavers was discovered living on the River Otter in Devon. Nobody is completely sure how they got there!

Why do some people welcome beavers back? Their dams slow down the flow of water. This creates ponds and wetlands, which become homes for insects, frogs, birds and fish. Slowing the water can also help to reduce flooding in towns further downstream, and the ponds can store water during dry weather.

Not everyone is delighted, though. Occasionally, beaver dams flood farmland or block drains, and beavers may fell trees that people value. Because of this, experts work with landowners to manage problems – for example, by fitting pipes through dams so that water levels stay safe.

Beavers are herbivores. They eat leaves, bark, twigs and water plants. Their front teeth never stop growing, and they are coated in a tough, orange-coloured layer containing iron, which helps keep them strong. Today, beavers are a protected species in England and Scotland, and many people hope that these remarkable ‘ecosystem engineers’ are here to stay.

An original information text written for The Teacher Vault.

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1 Retrieval Circle the correct answer.

- 1 Where did the 2009 trial release take place?
(A) the River Otter, Devon (B) Knapdale Forest, Scotland (C) the Lake District
- 2 Which of these did people NOT hunt beavers for?
(A) fur (B) castoreum (C) wool
- 3 What do beavers eat?
(A) fish and frogs (B) leaves, bark, twigs and water plants (C) insects

2 Vocabulary

- 4 "...beavers may **fell** trees..." (paragraph 5). What does **fell** mean here? [1 mark]

- 5 Find and copy one word from paragraph 6 which means *plant-eaters*. [1 mark]

3 Inference and explanation

- 6 Why do you think scientists "watched closely" after the 2009 release? [2 marks]

- 7 Give **two** ways that beaver dams can help people or wildlife. [2 marks]

- 8 Why might a farmer be worried about beavers? [1 mark]

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4 Author's language and structure

9 Why does the writer begin with the word *Imagine*? [1 mark]

10 Paragraph 5 begins "Not everyone is delighted, though." How does this sentence change the direction of the text? [2 marks]

11 Why is the phrase *ecosystem engineers* in inverted commas? [1 mark]

5 Summarise Tick the sentence that best summarises the whole text.

- ☐ Beavers have orange teeth.
- ☐ Beavers have returned to Britain; they bring benefits and some problems that people manage.
- ☐ Beavers should be hunted again.
- ☐ Beavers only live in Scotland.

6 True or false?

	TRUE	FALSE
1 Beavers have never lived in England before.	☐	☐
2 A beaver's front teeth keep growing.	☐	☐
3 Beaver dams can help reduce flooding downstream.	☐	☐

Answer Key

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Question	Answers
1 Retrieval	1 B (Knapdale Forest, Scotland); 2 C (wool); 3 B (leaves, bark, twigs and water plants)
2 Vocabulary	4. to cut down (make a tree fall) 5. herbivores
3 Inference and explanation	6. To find out how the beavers affected the land/other wildlife/people – whether the reintroduction was helpful or caused problems, before releasing more. 7. Any two: create ponds and wetlands (homes for insects, frogs, birds, fish); reduce flooding downstream; store water in dry weather. 8. Dams can flood farmland or block drains; beavers may cut down valued trees.
4 Author's language and structure	9. To hook the reader/make them picture the beaver's amazing abilities and want to read on. 10. It introduces the opposite view/problems after the benefits – 'though' signals a contrast, so the text is balanced. 11. It is a special/borrowed term (used by scientists) – beavers 'build' and change habitats like engineers.
5 Summarise	The second statement: Beavers have returned to Britain; they bring benefits and some problems that people manage.
6 True or false?	1 False – they lived all over Britain until about 400 years ago; 2 True ; 3 True

Teaching note: the text is original. Questions cover the KS2 reading content domains: vocabulary (2a), retrieval (2b), summarising (2c), inference (2d), structure (2f) and language (2g). Accept any well-supported answer that uses the text.