

## Non-Fiction: Comprehension Practice 8

Read the text and then answer the questions.

### The dawn chorus

#### The dawn chorus

In spring, as the days lengthen, birds burst into song around first light in a phenomenon that is known as the 'dawn chorus'. Birds sing throughout the day, but at dawn they sing together to create an amazing symphony.

#### Early birds

The dawn chorus begins an hour or so before sunrise and may continue for an hour afterwards. It can be heard from March through to July and is at its peak in May, after the main arrivals of birds visiting for the summer.

Worm-eating birds, such as song thrushes, blackbirds and robins start to sing earlier in the chorus than smaller, insect-eating birds, such as wrens and warblers. The order they join in is believed to be related to the size of the birds' eyes. Those with larger eyes can see better in lower light levels, so are the first to make themselves heard.

#### Singing together

Most of the dawn chorus can be attributed to male songbirds. They sing to defend their territories and attract females. But why first thing in the morning? It is thought that the low light levels at dawn make it a bad time for a bird to forage for food, but a good time to make a lot of noise while still avoiding predators. Also, at dawn the density of the air makes it clear and still which allows sound to carry farther.

#### The songs

The songs of birds are learned, not inherited. Within a couple of months, young birds develop a basic song which they then refine over the next year by listening to other more mature adults of their own species. Some birds, such as the house sparrow, have just one song. By comparison, other birds, such as song thrushes and nightingales have several different songs in their repertoire.

1 What is the dawn chorus?

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2 How long in the morning can the dawn chorus go on for?

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3 Tick (✓) **two** boxes to show which statements below are true.

Only male birds sing.

The smaller a bird's eyes, the earlier it will start to sing.

Bird song can be heard over a greater distance in the early morning.

The dawn chorus is quieter in May.

Blackbirds start to sing before wrens.


[2]

5 Tick (✓) the best description of the text **The dawn chorus**.

It contains mostly opinions.

It contains mostly facts.

It contains about half facts and half opinions.


6 Compare these texts.

Text 1	Text 2
Can you believe that some amazing birds can mimic the sounds they hear? Take starlings, for example. These clever little critters can copy human sounds like telephone rings or car sirens and then reproduce them in their own sweet melodies. How about that for a good party trick?	One species of bird, the starling, is known to be an excellent mimic. These birds are frequently heard incorporating sounds which they have encountered in their environment, for example, telephone ring tones and car sirens, into their own songs.

The information in both texts is the same but the language used is different.

Tick (✓) the text you prefer to read.

Text 1


Text 2

Explain why you chose that text.

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Read the text.

### The Nightingale

Where most other species of songbirds sing at dawn, nightingales also sing in the middle of the night, which is how they got their name. Nightingale, a name which has been used for well over a thousand years, means night songstress. It is thought they sing at night because they are relatively plain birds that do not rely on visual appearance to attract a mate. They have a drab, brown plumage with only a slightly brighter chestnut-coloured tail and a sandy underbelly.

Although rather indistinct in appearance, the nightingale is greatly admired for its beautiful, melodic songs. In the past, it was thought to be the female that sang, but it is the male bird which is vocal. Unpaired males sing loudly, through the night, trying to attract a mate. The nightingales that sing at dawn are not serenading females but defending their territory. Once its eggs hatch though, a male bird will cease most of his singing to avoid attracting unnecessary attention to his nest.

The exquisite song of the nightingale is particularly noticeable at night because no other birds are singing. This is why the nightingale became an important romantic symbol for poets, writers and composers throughout the ages, dating as far back as Homer. They are a symbol of nature's profound beauty.

7 (a) Why was the nightingale given its name?

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(b) Nightingales are three colours. Name **two** of them.

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8 Tick (✓) **two** boxes to show which statements are **FALSE**.

Nightingales only sing at night.

Nightingales sing less when their young emerge from the eggs.

Nightingales are admired because they are such beautiful-looking birds.

It is the male nightingales that sing at night.

It is easy to hear nightingales at night because there is no other birdsong.


9 Suggest a reason why the male nightingale wants to avoid attracting unnecessary attention to its nest.

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**10** These questions refer to both texts

**(a)** What is the purpose of the **sub-headings** in the text **The dawn chorus**?

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**(b)** In the text **The Nightingale**, paragraphs are used.

Draw lines to link each paragraph with its main topic described in the boxes.

1st paragraph

The nightingale's song.

2nd paragraph

The symbolism of the nightingale.

3rd paragraph

The nightingale's name.

## **Section B: Writing**

***Spend 25 minutes on this section.***

**11** The reading texts **The dawn chorus** and **The Nightingale** are both reports taken from information books.

Write your own report for an information book.

It could be about:

something that changes **with the seasons** in your country, for example.

- trees
- weather
- animals

something or someone that is **inspired by nature**, for example.

- a piece of music
- a poem
- a painting / sculpture
- a book