

English in Mind Second edition

Level 5 Unit 6

Lesson Plan

Light fantastic: why birds burst into song at dawn as spring arrives

THE INDEPENDENT

AIMS

- to read extensively and study a text related to the Unit theme
- to help students understand the main ideas of a scientific article
- to build students' vocabulary by exploiting main language areas of cause and effect and passive tenses

Total time (approx): 1 hr 40 mins

(Note: Some exercises can be set for homework)

Tell students to read the article quickly to see how many of their guesses were correct. Tell them not to read the article in detail at this stage, or worry about understanding every specific idea completely. Attention should be focused on getting a general idea of the main content. Elicit feedback from the class while ticking off any correct guesses on the board.

Key: Birds sing in response to 'the increased light levels resulting from the lengthening days' (para 3) and 'in order to attract mates, mark territories and fend off rivals' (para 11).

Time: 10 mins

Lead-in

- 1 Before handing out the article and worksheet, tell students that they are going to read an article entitled 'Light Fantastic' (write this on the board). Ask them to discuss in pairs what they think the article may be about. The phrase is originally from Milton (*to trip the light fantastic* means to dance in an imaginative or 'fantastic' manner), but students may also recognise it from the title of a book by Terry Pratchett (1986) and an album by Sophie Ellis-Bextor (2007). Accept all contributions.

Time: 5 mins

Reading comprehension (1): gist task

- 2 This exercise gives students practice in skimming a text quickly to familiarise themselves with the main ideas of the article. It also provides an opportunity to introduce some key vocabulary.

First, tell students that the article gives scientific reasons why birds sing. Ask them to discuss the question 'Why do birds sing?' and to write down three possible reasons. Write the students' ideas on the board.

Depending on the level of the class, you could use this feedback stage to elicit key words from the text, e.g.

light levels hormones the brain genes breeding/mating the dawn chorus

Reading comprehension (2): key facts

- 3 In order to check understanding of the scientific processes described in the article, ask students to scan the article in order to complete the simplified sentences. Again, emphasise to them that they don't need to read every word, but let their eyes move quickly across the page to find the information they require.

Key:

- The hypothalamus is a part of the *brain*.
- Cells* on the hypothalamus produce a thyroid-stimulating hormone.
- When the days lengthen, this hormone stimulates the release of *sex hormones*.
- These sex hormones prepare the birds physically for *breeding*.

Time: 10 mins

- 4 In order to check students' understanding of the research about birdsong, ask them to read the text carefully and decide if the statements on their worksheets are true or false.

Key: a T b F c F d F e T f T

Time: 15 mins

Vocabulary: cause and effect

- 5 The article uses many expressions to link actions/causes with effects/results. This exercise focuses students' attention on the particular language used in the text for this function: X affects Y, Y is affected by X.

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Write on the board:

A good teacher *responds to* _____Students' results *are affected by* _____

Ask students to suggest ways of completing the sentences, then get them to go through the text and find any more verbs or expressions that link a cause or action with an effect or result.

Elicit the main verbs/expressions and write them on the board:

Key:

responds to (para 1), *triggers* (para 4), *has an effect on* (para 4), *are affected by* (para 5), *in response to* (para 7), *stimulates* (para 7), *prepare* (para 7), *are activated* (para 10), *in order to* (para 11)

- 6 To help students understand the meaning of the phrases and make their own sentences, ask them to complete the sentences on their worksheets without looking back at the text. Encourage them to use their own words rather than attempting to match the text exactly. If they find it too difficult, let them look back at the text. Feedback: go through the sentences together with the class. Possible answers appear in the Key.

Key:

- a Songbirds produce a hormone that *responds to* **increasing light levels in spring**.
- b Cells produce a hormone which *triggers* **the birdsong in spring**.
- c Thyroid-stimulating hormone is produced by these cells *in response to* **longer periods of daylight**.
- d The hormone *stimulates* **the release of sex hormones** that *prepare* **the birds physically** for spring.
- e The genes involved in *triggering* **birdsong** *are activated in* **two waves**.
- f Birds sing *in order to* **attract mates**.
- g Scientists are not sure what *effect* the hormone *has on* **human behaviour**.

Time: 20 mins

- 7 To personalise the vocabulary and so make it more meaningful, ask students to complete the practice sentences about themselves and compare their answers in pairs. Nominate students to give a few examples as a whole class activity.

Time: 10 mins

Grammar: passive forms

- 8 The text uses many passive verb forms. The examples of passives used in this exercise are not difficult but should encourage students to think about differences in usage. Ask students to look at the examples on their worksheets and in pairs to identify which type of passive is being used. If they find this quite easy ask them to explain why the present simple is used in the examples in paras 4, 5 and 10 (facts, always true, routine) and the past simple in para 11 (specific event in the past, now finished).

Key:

- a para 4, simple present singular
- b para 5, simple present plural
- c para 8, past simple singular
- d para 10, simple present singular
- e para 10, past simple singular
- f para 10, simple present plural

Time: 5 mins

- 9 This exercise offers students an opportunity to practise and produce passives sentences more freely. Ask them to write two sentences in the passive about themselves or their country. One must be true and one must be false. Two examples are given, but you may want to model this by giving two sentences about yourself first. Students have to guess which of your sentences is true/false. Monitor for grammar and spelling as they are writing. Ask students to tell their facts to the class. The class then has to guess which statements are true/false.

Time: 10 mins

Discussion

- 10 To finish the lesson and to consolidate new language learned from the reading, ask students to look at the list of questions on their worksheet and discuss their own reactions to the seasons. This could be done in pairs, small groups or as a whole class, depending on time.

Time: 10 mins

Article at www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/light-fantastic-why-birds-burst-into-song-at-dawn-as-spring-arrives-798380.html

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