

Reading Comprehension — Nature's Engineers

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Nature's Engineers

Deep in a Canadian forest, a quiet stream is about to be transformed. The builders arriving on the scene are not people, but beavers — and they are among the most remarkable engineers in all of nature.

A beaver is a large rodent with a flat, paddle-like tail and bright orange front teeth that never stop growing. Those teeth are tools: with them, a beaver can gnaw right through a tree. Working mostly at night, beavers fell trees, drag branches and pack them together with mud and stones to build a dam across the stream.

Why build a dam? The dam holds back the water, creating a deep, calm pond. In the middle of this pond the beavers build a dome-shaped home called a lodge, with its entrance hidden safely underwater. Here they are protected from wolves and other predators that cannot easily reach them.

But the beaver's work changes far more than its own home. The new pond becomes a habitat for fish, frogs, birds and insects. By flooding the land, beavers create wetlands that many other creatures depend on. For this reason, scientists call the beaver a 'keystone species' — an animal so important that a whole habitat depends on it.

It is no wonder the hard-working beaver became one of the proud symbols of Canada.

Questions

1. What kind of animal is a beaver? (1 mark)
2. What are the beaver's front teeth used for? (1 mark)
3. When do beavers mostly work? (1 mark)
4. Find and copy a word in paragraph 2 meaning "to cut down a tree." (1 mark)
5. Why do beavers build dams? (2 marks)
6. How does the lodge keep beavers safe? (2 marks)
7. Why do scientists call the beaver a 'keystone species'? (2 marks)
8. Summarise how a beaver changes its environment and why it matters. (3 marks)

Answer Key / Mark Scheme

1. A large rodent.
2. Gnawing through trees (cutting wood).
3. Mostly at night.
4. "fell."

- 5.** To hold back the water and create a deep, calm pond.
- 6.** Its entrance is hidden underwater, so predators like wolves cannot easily reach it.
- 7.** Because a whole habitat depends on it — its pond and wetlands support many other creatures.
- 8.** A beaver fells trees and dams a stream, making a pond and wetlands; this creates habitat for fish, frogs, birds and insects, so many species depend on its work.