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# About This Book

The primary goal of any reading task is comprehension. *Document-Based Questions for Reading Comprehension and Critical Thinking* uses high-interest grade-level nonfiction passages, related documents, and critical thinking assessment practice to help you develop confident readers who can demonstrate their skills on standardized tests. In addition, you will build the comprehension skills necessary for a lifetime of learning.

There are five topic areas with six or seven lessons in each. Each lesson consists of three pages: a reading passage, a related document, and an assessment practice page containing multiple choice, true-false-explain, and short-answer document-based questions. This gives your students practice in all of the question types used in standardized testing. The students respond to the document-based questions based on the information gleaned from the passage plus its related document. Such questions improve a student's ability to apply prior knowledge, integrate information, and transfer knowledge to a new situation.

## Readability

These passages have a 3.0–3.9 reading level based on the Flesch Kincaid Readability Formula. This formula, built into *Microsoft® Word™*, determines readability by calculating the number of words, syllables, and sentences. Average readability was determined for each of the five topic areas. The topics are presented in order of increasing difficulty.

The documents are not leveled. Many of them are historical pieces and therefore replicated with the exact wording. Some terminology may be challenging, but most students can handle difficult words within the context given.

## Preparing Students to Read Nonfiction Text

One of the best ways to prepare students to read expository text is to read a short selection aloud to them daily. Reading expository text aloud is critical to developing your students' ability to read it themselves. Since making predictions is another way to make students tap into their prior knowledge, read the beginning of a passage, then stop, and ask them to predict what might occur next. Do this at several points throughout your reading of the text. By doing this, over time you will find that your students' ability to make accurate predictions increases.

Your questions will help students, especially struggling readers, focus on what's important in a text. Also, remember the significance of wait time. Research has shown that the amount of time an educator waits for a student to answer after posing a question has a critical effect on learning. So after you ask a student a question, silently count to five (ten if you have a student who really struggles to put his or her thoughts into words) before giving any additional prompts or redirecting the question to another student.

Talking about nonfiction concepts is also important. Remember, however, that discussion can never replace reading aloud because people rarely speak using the vocabulary and complex sentence structures of written language.



# The Peculiar Platypus

A platypus is an odd mammal. It lives only in Australia. Its wide, flat tail and webbed feet make it a good swimmer. It scoops up worms and shellfish from stream bottoms with its wide, flat bill. It uses the claws on its feet to walk and to dig dirt. It digs long burrows along streams. Some are as long as 50 feet! Each one lives alone in its burrow.

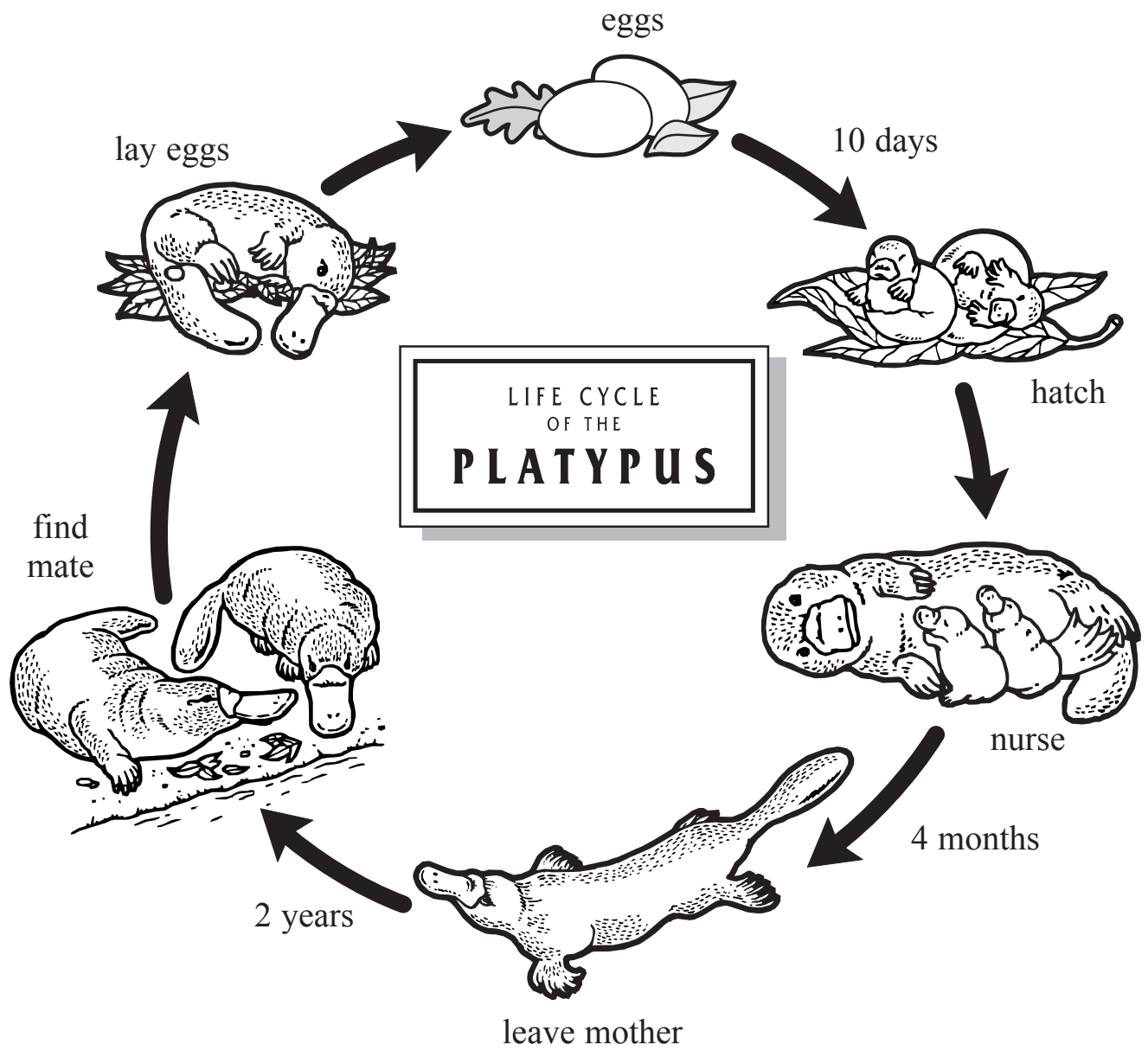
Whenever it is underwater, the platypus closes its eyes and ears. So how does it find its food? It feels things with its bill. It is made of cartilage, just like our noses. Males have spurs on their hind feet. If a predator is kicked with the spur, it gets poisoned! The toxin is so strong that it can kill a dog and make people quite ill. Only four other mammals make poison. (They are all shrews, which look like moles.)

Adult platypuses are less than two feet long and weigh just five pounds. Their thick brown fur makes them look bigger. Hunters used to kill them for their fur. Their numbers dropped. People feared that they would die out. So since the 1920s, it has been against the law to kill one.

Unlike most mammals, the platypus lays eggs. The female uses grass and leaves to make a nest at the end of her burrow. Next she blocks the burrow's opening with dirt. Then she lays two or three eggs. Soon the babies hatch. They drink her milk for four months. Then they go out on their own.

Why is the platypus so different from other mammals? It developed away from other mammals. Long ago the land of Australia broke free from a bigger continent. It slowly drifted to its current spot. The platypuses on Australia slowly changed over time. But they developed differently from other mammals because they were in a unique environment.

# The Peculiar Platypus





# The Peculiar Platypus

1. You can tell that the platypus cannot
  - a. fly.
  - b. swim.
  - c. dig.
2. What do young platypuses share with all other mammal babies?
  - a. They hatch from eggs.
  - b. They can swim.
  - c. They drink their mother's milk.
3. What makes platypuses different from most other mammals?
  - a. They live in Australia.
  - b. They lay eggs.
  - c. They are small.
4. It takes more than two weeks for platypus eggs to hatch. True or False? Explain.

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5. At what age does a platypus first look for a mate?

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6. Do you agree with the law that says no one can hunt platypuses? Why or why not?

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