Flying over my head are plump seabirds with brightly colored beaks and feet. Each bird’s pigeon-sized body looks a little like a football with wings. The wings are too small for gliding. However, by flapping them up to 400 times per minute, the birds stay in the air. These birds are Atlantic puffins.

Atlantic Puffins
By Guy Belleranti

Puffins are excellent swimmers and divers. Using their wings to push along and webbed feet to steer, they dive 50 to 200 feet to find small fish and shrimp-like crustaceans. Puffins keep their eyes open while swimming. A puffin’s eyes are protected by clear inner eyelids called nictitating membranes.

How do puffins get fresh water to drink in salty seas? Well, they have special salt glands above their eyes. These glands remove the salt from the water in their bloodstream. The salt drains out in a liquid through a puffin’s nostrils and down grooves in its bills. The bird shakes its head, and the salt is gone.
In spring, Atlantic puffins come together in colonies on the islands and coastlands of the northeastern U.S. and Canada. Colony sizes range from a few hundred to hundreds of thousands. The feet and beaks of both males and females change from a dull winter gray to a bright orange. The color and the size of beaks may help birds decide on a mate.

Mated pairs work together, digging a burrow with their beaks and shoveling the dirt out with their feet on a steep, often rocky cliff. This location is safer from predators. The burrow is usually about the length of an adult person’s arm. The pair builds a nest of soft feathers and grass inside the burrow. The female lays a single egg. Both parents share the job of incubating the egg and raising the chick. Atlantic puffins often keep the same mates, rejoining one another year after year.

About the Author
Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.
Atlantic Puffins
By Guy Belleranti

1. Based on the information in the article, where are you most likely to see an Atlantic puffin?
   a. Coast of Maine
   b. Coast of Florida
   c. Coast of British Columbia
   d. Coast of Southern California

2. What is an Atlantic puffin’s extra eye covering called, and what does it do?

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Describe three ways an Atlantic puffin is adapted to life at sea.
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

4. What is a group of Atlantic puffins called?
   a. pack
   b. flock
   c. colony
   d. rookery

5. Where do Atlantic puffins dig burrows for their young, and why?
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Super Teacher Worksheets - www.superteacherworksheets.com
Atlantic Puffins
By Guy Belleranti

Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.

_____ 1. burrow  a. sitting on eggs in order to keep them warm until they hatch
_____ 2. preen  b. organs in an animal's body that secrete chemical substances

_____ 6. glands  f. a grooming habit of a bird in which it cleans its feathers with its beak
_____ 7. nostrils  g. thin structures that act as boundaries in an organism
_____ 8. grooves  h. a short gray or white bird that makes cooing sounds and eats seeds and fruit
_____ 9. waxy  i. long, narrow indentations
_____ 10. membranes  j. a mostly aquatic group of animals that includes shrimp, lobsters, and crabs
Atlantic Puffins
By Guy Belleranti

In the article, “Atlantic Puffins,” you learned that puffins have physical adaptations that make them well-suited for life at sea.

Choose another bird species that is well-suited for spending a lot of time at sea. Describe three physical adaptations that help this bird species thrive in or around the ocean. If you need to use the Internet for your research, be sure to check with an adult first, and credit the website you used on the bottom of the page.

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Website I Used: ________________________________________________________________________

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Atlantic Puffins
By Guy Belleranti

1. Based on the information in the article, where are you most likely to see an Atlantic puffin?  a
   a. Coast of Maine
   b. Coast of Florida
   c. Coast of British Columbia
   d. Coast of Southern California

2. What is an Atlantic puffin’s extra eye covering called, and what does it do?
   An Atlantic puffin’s extra eye covering is called a nictitating membrane. It protects the puffin’s eyes underwater so it can keep them open while swimming.

3. Describe three ways an Atlantic puffin is adapted to life at sea.
   (Answers will vary.)
   Examples: Their feathers trap air close to their skin to keep them afloat and to keep cold, wet feathers away from their body. Their wings are used to propel them through the water. Their eyes have special salt glands that help them filter out salt so they can drink directly from the ocean. Oil from their preen glands helps to keep their feathers clean and dry.

4. What is a group of Atlantic puffins called?
   c. colony
   a. pack
   b. flock
   d. rookery

5. Where do Atlantic puffins dig burrows for their young, and why?
   They make their burrows on steep, rocky cliffs to protect their young from predators.
Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.

1. *burrow*  
   a. sitting on eggs in order to keep them warm until they hatch

2. *preen*  
   b. organs in an animal's body that secrete chemical substances

3. *pigeon*  
   c. a tunnel or hole dug by a small animal to live in

4. *incubating*  
   d. having the consistency of wax

5. *crustaceans*  
   e. thin structures that act as boundaries in an organism

6. *glands*  
   f. a grooming habit of a bird in which it cleans its feathers with its beak

7. *nostrils*  
   g. openings in the nasal cavity that allow an organism to breathe air and smell scents

8. *grooves*  
   h. long, narrow indentations

9. *waxy*  
   i. a mostly aquatic group of animals that includes shrimp, lobsters, and crabs

10. *membranes*  
    j. sitting on eggs in order to keep them warm until they hatch