The Comeback

*By Stephen Fraser*

**A major conservation project has brought puffins back home to the United States.**

Stephen Kress will never forget the first time he saw Atlantic puffins in the wild. The year was 1967. Wow! he thought at the sight of thousands of the toy-like creatures on a shoreline of the Canadian province of New Brunswick. *These birds are amazing!*

Two years later, while working as an instructor at an Audubon camp on Hog Island off the coast of Maine, Kress learned he was in a place where Atlantic puffins had flourished more than 100 years previously. Now they were all gone.

Kress knew a local treasure had been lost. He has since made it his life’s work to return that treasure. His efforts have become a model for seabird conservation efforts worldwide.

**Land and Sea**

Atlantic puffins are short, stocky birds with black and white feathers, orange legs, orange feet, and large, triangular, orange-red beaks. An adult puffin stands only about 25 centimeters (10 inches) tall.

Atlantic puffins are “all-purpose birds,” says Kress; they live on land and at sea. On northern shores of the Atlantic Ocean, they scamper over the rocky ground and burrow like groundhogs. At sea, their abilities to drink salt water and dive more than 60 meters (200 feet) allow them to live in the open water for years at a time.

In the ocean and the air, puffins are mostly silent. On land, they growl. The noise “sounds like a chain saw,” says Kress.
In its beak a puffin parent carries fish that it will feed to its chick.

The coastal burrows that Atlantic puffins inhabit are built for breeding. Before that happens, though, a male and a female puffin go on a series of “dates,” says Kress, which may stretch out to a yearlong “engagement” of nest building.

Once they’ve mated, a puffin couple, which may remain together for life, raises one chick at a time, caring for it equally. Puffins eat fish, such as hake, herring, and sand eels, in summer and zooplankton (tiny marine animals) in winter. But chicks are fed mainly fish, which is higher in protein than zooplankton.

A puffin emerges from the burrow that the bird and its mate dug for their family.

To feed their young, some seabirds, such as albatross and penguins, eat fish and then regurgitate the partially digested meal into the mouths of their
offspring. By contrast, puffin parents provide their chicks with whole fish they’ve carried crosswise in their bills, sometimes five or six at a time. The most fish that a single puffin has been observed carrying is 61.

When a puffin chick matures, it heads out to sea, where it spends about two or three years before returning to land to find a mate and breed in a colony. The first nesting usually happens when the birds are about 5 years old. Puffins live to about 20 years of age, though some live to 30 or more.

![AP Images](image-url)

Wooden decoys like the one at right were used to lure puffins to Eastern Egg Rock island off the coast of Maine.

**Relocation Effort**

During his stay on Maine’s Hog Island in 1969, Kress learned that puffins had been hunted to extinction there. At one time, in fact, only a single pair lived in all of Maine. By 1969, the island had been overrun by the puffins’ enemies—gulls. Still, Kress couldn’t help but wonder whether the puffins might be transplanted from elsewhere and reestablished on the island. No one had ever attempted anything like that before.

In 1972, Kress began his restoration project by digging burrows and shooing away gulls on Eastern Egg Rock Island. Then he made a series of trips to one of the biggest puffin colonies in Canada. Helped by two assistants, he extracted puffin chicks from their burrows, enduring occasional bites from distressed parents. With the chicks stored safely in soup cans, Kress and his crew carried them back to the United States, where they deposited one into each hand-dug burrow. For the next year, the researchers looked after the chicks, feeding them every day.

When the chicks eventually *fledged*—developed feathers and wing muscles that enabled them to fly—they did what young puffins naturally do: They left
home for the open sea. From then on, Kress could only wait for the birds to return. One, two, three, four, five years went by.

Finally, on July 4, 1981, Kress sighted what he had long been hoping for: a pair of puffins caring for a chick on Eastern Egg Rock. “After 100 years of absence and nine years of working toward this,” Kress wrote in his journal that evening, “puffins are again nesting at Eastern Egg Rock—a Fourth of July celebration I’ll never forget.”

**Model Program**

Today, Kress is vice president for bird conservation for the National Audubon Society. Thanks to his Project Puffin, Eastern Egg Rock is now home to more than 100 pairs of nesting puffins. Altogether, about 1,000 pairs live in Maine.
A puffin flaps its wings 400 times a minute—a very high number for a bird of its size.

Kress’s translocation techniques have involved more than digging burrows and transporting chicks. Puffins are social animals—they live in groups. So Kress set up wooden puffin decoys and broadcast puffin calls to lure puffins to the Maine islands. When the birds began arriving, he erected mirrors to create the illusion of bigger, more enticing colonies.

Countless seabirds have since benefited from Kress’s ingenuity. Seabird conservationists around the globe have adopted his techniques to reestablish almost 50 species in 14 countries, including petrels in New Zealand and albatross in Japan. “That was always my hope,” says Kress, “to extend this beyond the puffin.”
1. Which of the following statements is true about Atlantic puffins?

A  They prefer to live on land.
B  They only eat plants.
C  They have orange legs and feet.
D  They are aggressive.

2. How does the passage describe Kress’ relocation effort for the puffins?

A  a groundbreaking, successful process
B  a step-by-step process
C  something that would only work for puffins
D  too difficult to replicate for other sea birds

3. How do you think Kress might have felt while he was waiting to see if the puffins would return?

A  nervous, but hopeful
B  doubtful and unsure
C  unconcerned and confident
D  excited and enthusiastic

4. Read the following sentence: “Atlantic puffins are short, stocky birds with black and white feathers, orange legs, orange feet, and large, triangular, orange-red beaks.”

In the sentence, the word **stocky** means

A  skinny and long
B  colorful
C  thick and sturdy
D  stubborn

5. What would another good title for this passage be?

A  Puffins: Colorful, Loyal, and Smart
B  Puffins: a Model Case for Conservation
C  Puffins: Different from the Average Sea Bird
D  Puffins: Don’t Discount Them Yet!
6. What does Kress mean when he says Atlantic puffins are “all-purpose birds”?

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

7. What is implied about the techniques Kress uses if they’re now a worldwide model?

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Part of Kress’ relocation strategy involved a trip to one of the biggest puffin colonies in Canada ________ he could collect baby puffins and transport them back to Maine

A but
B although
C so
D if

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Puffins build burrows on land for breeding.

Who? puffins

(do) What? _____________________________________________________________

Where? ________________________________________________________________

Why? _________________________________________________________________
Directions: Read the vocabulary word and definition below to complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: ingenuity (in • ge • nu • i • ty): the quality of being inventive, creative, resourceful, and clever.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline all forms of the word ingenuity.

1. An example of Thomas Edison’s ingenuity is the creation of the light bulb.

2. The student’s ingenuity was evident in the creative, new solution she designed for the problem.

3. I wanted a designer with a lot of ingenuity to help me remodel my house.

4. Given all the patents he had secured for various inventions, Bob’s ingenuity is clear.

5. Her ingenuity secured her the business contract. The people who hired her appreciated her creative, unique approach.

10b. Which bridge needed more ingenuity to build?

11. If you’re looking for new ideas or a new solution, would you seek out someone with ingenuity or not?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1110

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: “The Comeback” describes the process Stephen Kress undertook to bring back Atlantic puffins to Maine. The article describes the sea birds and their unique characteristics, and it highlights how Kress’ efforts became a model for sea bird conservation efforts around the world.

1. Which of the following statements is true about Atlantic puffins?
   A  They prefer to live on land.
   B  They only eat plants.
   C  They have orange legs and feet.
   D  They are aggressive.

2. How does the passage describe Kress’ relocation effort for the puffins?
   A  a groundbreaking, successful process
   B  a step-by-step process
   C  something that would only work for puffins
   D  too difficult to replicate for other sea birds

3. How do you think Kress might have felt while he was waiting to see if the puffins would return?
   A  nervous, but hopeful
   B  doubtful and unsure
   C  unconcerned and confident
   D  excited and enthusiastic

4. Read the following sentence: “Atlantic puffins are short, stocky birds with black and white feathers, orange legs, orange feet, and large, triangular, orange-red beaks.”
   The word stocky means
   A  skinny and long
   B  colorful
   C  thick and sturdy
   D  stubborn

4. In the passage, the word “stocky” most nearly means
   A  skinny and long
   B  colorful
   C  thick and sturdy
   D  stubborn

5. What would another good title for this passage be?
   A  Puffins: Colorful, Loyal, and Smart
   B  Puffins: a Model Case for Conservation
   C  Puffins: Different from the Average Sea Bird
   D  Puffins: Don’t Discount Them Yet!
6. What does Kress mean when he says Atlantic puffins are “all-purpose birds”?  

**Suggested answer:** They live on land and at sea.

7. What is implied about the techniques Kress uses if they’re now a worldwide model?  

**Suggested answer:** They must be effective, good, successful techniques.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.  

Part of Kress’ relocation strategy involved a trip to one of the biggest puffin colonies in Canada ________ he could collect baby puffins and transport them back to Maine.  

- A but  
- B although  
- C so  
- D if

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.  

Puffins build burrows on land for breeding.  

Who? puffins  

(do) What? **build burrows**  

Where? **on land**  

Why? **for breeding**

**To the Teacher:** ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.  

Vocabulary Word: **ingenuity** (in · ge · nu · i · ty): the quality of being inventive, creative, resourceful, and clever.  

**Step 1:** Introduce the word  

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (in · ge · nu · i · ty)  
- b. Teacher says: “This word is ingenuity. What is the word?” [All students reply together out loud: “ingenuity.”]

**Step 2:** Provide a child-friendly definition  

- a. Teacher says: “Ingenuity means the quality of being inventive, creative, resourceful, and clever. Ingenuity means inventiveness.”  
- b. Teacher says: “In the passage, Stephen Kress’ translocation techniques were noted for their ingenuity because they have proven to be effective, creative and successful.”  
- c. Teacher says: “What is the word?” [All students reply together out loud: “ingenuity.”]
Step 3: Practice the word

Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the first sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.

Directions: Read the vocabulary word and definition below to complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: ingenuity (in · ge · nu · i · ty): the quality of being inventive, creative, resourceful, and clever.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline all forms of the word ingenuity.

1. An example of Thomas Edison’s ingenuity is the creation of the light bulb.
2. The student’s ingenuity was evident in the creative, new solution she designed for the problem.
3. I wanted a designer with a lot of ingenuity to help me remodel my house.
4. Given all the patents he had secured for various inventions, Bob’s ingenuity is clear.
5. Her ingenuity secured her the business contract. The people who hired her appreciated her creative, unique approach.

Step 4: Check for student understanding

To the Teacher: This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

10b. Which bridge needed more ingenuity to build?

11. If you’re looking for new ideas or a new solution, would you seek out someone with ingenuity or not?

Suggested answer: Yes, because new ideas and new solutions are generally created and/or presented by people who have a great deal of ingenuity – people who are inventive, creative and smart.

Suggested Additional Vocabulary: fledged