

Name _____
Date _____

Ostriches

Ostriches are the largest and heaviest birds on earth. They can grow to be as tall as 9 feet (2.75 meters) and can weigh as much as 250 pounds (113 kilograms). Even though they have wings, they cannot fly. Instead, ostriches have long, powerful legs that help them to run very fast when they feel threatened. Ostriches use their wings to propel themselves forward and to help them change direction.



Ostriches are native to Africa, where they still live in desert areas and dry, open grasslands called savannahs.

Ostriches can also be found in zoos all over the world. Humans have domesticated ostriches, so now ostriches live on farms in over a dozen countries, including the United States, China, India, Japan, Brazil and Costa Rica. They are raised for their meat, skin, and feathers.

Ostriches like to live in small groups called herds. The male ostrich is called a rooster; the female, a hen. Baby ostriches are called chicks. The female ostrich lays the eggs, but both the male and the female take turns sitting on the eggs to keep them warm. An ostrich egg hatches about 42 days after it is laid. An ostrich egg is the largest of all eggs, weighing 3.5 to 5 pounds (about 1600-2300 grams). It would take an hour and a half to hard boil an ostrich egg!

People used to think that ostriches buried their heads in the sand when in danger, but this is not true. When ostriches sense danger, they try to hide by holding their heads close to the ground. The color of their feathers blends in with the color of the sand, which makes it difficult for predators to see them. Even so, we still use the expression "to bury your head in the sand" to describe someone who refuses to recognize or deal with a problem.

1) According to the passage, ostriches use their wings to

- A. fly faster than most other birds
- B. move forward and change direction
- C. keep their eggs warm in the nest
- D. scare potential predators away

2) According to the passage, ostriches were originally found in

- A. Africa
- B. Brazil
- C. Asia
- D. the United States

- 3) As used in paragraph 2, which is the best SYNONYM for **domesticated**?
- A. stolen
 - B. consumed
 - C. saved
 - D. tamed
- 4) In paragraph 3, the author tells us that “it would take an hour and a half to hard boil an ostrich egg.” This author says this in order to
- A. prove the hypothesis that no one could actually eat an ostrich egg
 - B. reinforce the idea that ostrich eggs are quite rare
 - C. illustrate the fact that ostrich eggs are very big
 - D. clarify the point that farmers raise ostriches for meat, not eggs
- 5) Using the information presented in the passage, we can understand that the expression to “bury your head in the sand” means to
- A. lay your head close to the ground when in danger
 - B. refuse to acknowledge a problem
 - C. hide from approaching predators
 - D. hope for a bad situation to become better
- 6) The main purpose of this passage is to
- A. clarify a commonly misunderstood expression
 - B. argue that ostriches are smarter than most people think
 - C. describe how ostriches have come to be found in many different countries
 - D. provide general facts about ostriches and their habits

7) Choose another bird. Compare and contrast this bird to the ostrich. If you do not know very many facts about another bird, feel free to create an imaginary species.

Answers and Explanations

1) B

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

In paragraph 1, we learn that even though ostriches “have wings, they cannot fly.” Instead, they “use their wings to propel themselves forward and to help them change direction.” From this information, we can understand that ostriches use their wings to move forward and change direction rather than to fly. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

As explained above, the passage tells us that ostriches cannot fly. This means **(A)** is incorrect.

In paragraph 3, we learn that “both the male and the female take turns sitting on the eggs to keep them warm.” However, the passage does not say that ostriches use their wings to do this. This makes **(C)** incorrect.

The passage does not provide information to support choice **(D)**. Therefore it is incorrect.

2) A

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

In paragraph 2, we learn that “Ostriches are native to Africa, where they still live in desert areas and dry, open grasslands called savannahs.” Even if we do not know that “native to” means belonging to a specific place, we can figure out that ostriches were originally found in Africa. This is because the sentence says that Africa is “where they still live,” meaning that ostriches came from Africa in the past and are still there today. This means **(A)** is correct.

Brazil, Asia, and the United States are all listed as places that have ostrich farms, but since ostriches must be brought to farms by humans, this discounts the idea that ostriches were originally found in any of those places. Therefore **(B)**, **(C)**, and **(D)** are incorrect.

3) D

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

domesticate (*verb*): to tame an animal and keep it as a pet or for farm produce. In paragraph 2, the author writes, “Humans have domesticated ostriches, so now many ostriches live on farms in over a dozen countries, including the United States, China, India, Japan, Brazil, and Costa Rica. They are raised for their meat, skin, and feathers.” From this information we can understand that *domesticated* is related to living on farms, and it must have a meaning similar to “raised.” *Tamed* is the word that has the closest meaning to raised. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Although humans might have *stolen* ostriches, the passage does not provide information to support this idea. So **(A)** is incorrect.

Humans raise ostriches for their meat, so some people do eat, or *consume*, them. However, in the above quotation, the author discusses how people raise ostriches on farms, not how people eat them. This makes **(B)** incorrect.

There is no information in the passage to make us think that ostriches were in danger in the wild, so it does not make sense to believe that humans *saved* them. This means **(C)** is incorrect.

4) C

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

To answer this question correctly, we need to use the surrounding context as a guide. In paragraph 3, we learn that “an ostrich egg is the largest of all eggs, weighing 3.5 to 5 pounds.” In the next sentence, the author tells us that “It would take an hour and a half to hard boil an ostrich egg.” From this information, we can understand that the author mentions the time it would take to cook an ostrich egg in order to illustrate the previous point, which is the fact that ostrich eggs are very big; big things take longer to boil. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Although ostrich eggs are very big, the passage does not provide information about whether a person could eat them, so **(A)** is incorrect.

The passage does not provide information about how rare ostrich eggs are, so **(B)** is incorrect.

The passage does tell us that farmers raise ostriches for meat, but that information is in the previous paragraph and does not say anything about eggs, so this sentence does not clarify that point. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

5) B

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In the last paragraph, we learn that people used to think ostriches buried their heads in the sand, even though that is not actually true. Then the author writes, “Even so, we still use the expression ‘to bury your head in the sand’ to describe someone who refuses to recognize or deal with a problem.” From this we can understand that the expression means to refuse to acknowledge, or recognize, a problem. Therefore **(B)** is the correct choice.

In the final paragraph, the passage does say that “When ostriches sense danger, they try to hide by holding their heads close to the ground,” and that the reason ostriches hold their heads close to the ground is to make “it difficult for predators to see them.” However, according to the passage, hiding from predators is not what the associated expression means. Therefore **(A)** and **(C)** are incorrect. Hoping for a bad situation to become better may be an example of refusing to acknowledge a problem, but it is too specific to be the meaning of this expression. This means **(D)** is incorrect.

6) D

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In order to answer this question correctly, it is helpful to examine the topics of each paragraph, because all paragraphs in a passage must serve to further the author’s purpose. In paragraph 1, the author provides facts about how big ostriches are and how they move. In paragraph 2, we learn where ostriches came from and where they live now. In paragraph 3, we learn about ostriches’ social habits, their young, and the size of their eggs. In the final paragraph, the author explains how a common misconception about ostriches led to a familiar saying, and identifies ostriches’ actual behavior in the presence of danger. Taken together, we can see that the author’s purpose is to provide basic facts about ostriches and the way they live, or their habits. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Although the author does clarify a commonly misunderstood expression in the last paragraph, the other three paragraphs discuss facts about ostriches. This lets us know that **(A)** is incorrect. The author’s tone is neutral. He or she presents facts rather than argues a point, so **(B)** is incorrect. Only paragraph 2 describes where ostriches came from and where they can be found now, so **(C)** is incorrect.