If You Can’t Beat ’Em, Eat ’Em!

1 Brightly colored stripes and long, feathery fins make lionfish look right at home in Florida’s coral reefs. But these flashy fish are actually far from their natural habitat. And they’re causing big trouble. Now, wildlife officials in Florida are asking people to strike back. How? By taking a knife and fork to the problem.

Fish Invasion
2 Lionfish are an invasive species in the United States. That term describes any animal or plant that is brought to a new habitat and harms native animals or plants.
3 Lionfish come from the Indian and western Pacific oceans. They were first spotted in U.S. waters off the Atlantic coast of Florida in the 1980s. They were probably aquarium pets that had been released into the wild.
4 Lionfish have no natural predators in these waters. So they quickly multiplied. Now they’re found along much of the East Coast of the U.S. They’ve also been spotted in the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico.
5 These invaders are disrupting the ecosystem around Florida’s fragile coral reefs. Lionfish may look pretty. But they are ferocious predators. They eat just about every small fish in sight. And their big appetites mean trouble for more than just the fish they eat. Native predator fish, such as groupers, are left starving.

Stick a Fork in It?
6 Government agencies that protect fish and wildlife haven’t had much luck in stopping the spread of lionfish. So they’ve turned to the public for help. Ad campaigns in Florida are promoting lionfish as a tasty dinner option.
7 Lionfish are already on the menu at several restaurants in Florida. Cooks have to take special care to prepare them. Their long fins are filled with venom that can sting your skin.
8 Florida is also encouraging fishermen to get in on the act. Residents usually need a special license to fish. But the state makes an exception for people who catch lionfish. Government officials hope these efforts will slow down the exploding number of lionfish.
9 “The likelihood of getting rid of every lionfish is pretty slim,” explains Amanda Nalley. She is a fish and wildlife official in Florida. “What we’re really looking to do is control the population.”
10 Nalley and other experts say people may be the best hope for restoring balance to Florida’s marine ecosystems. After all, we are the world’s top predator.
Directions: Read the article “If You Can’t Beat ‘Em, Eat ‘Em!” Then answer the questions below.

1. Which of the following statements best explains why lionfish have thrived in Florida’s waters?
   A. Now, wildlife officials in Florida are asking people to strike back. (paragraph 1)
   B. They were probably aquarium pets that had been released into the wild. (paragraph 3)
   C. Lionfish have no natural predators in these waters. (paragraph 4)
   D. They eat just about every small fish in sight. (paragraph 5)

2. What is one effect that lionfish are having on the ecosystem in Florida’s coral reefs?
   A. Native predator fish are eating many lionfish.
   B. The populations of native fish are quickly increasing.
   C. Fishermen are no longer able to catch groupers.
   D. Groupers and other native predator fish have much less to eat.

3. According to the article, what is one solution that Florida has come up with to address the lionfish problem?
   A. Allowing residents to fish for lionfish without a license
   B. Introducing new kinds of fish to Florida’s coral reefs
   C. Requiring restaurants to add lionfish to their menus
   D. Running ad campaigns promoting groupers as a good meal choice

4. Which of the following can be concluded from the article?
   A. It is probably not possible to completely remove lionfish from Florida’s waters.
   B. Eating lionfish is the only way to control the invasive lionfish population.
   C. Fishing in Florida’s waters is disrupting its marine ecosystems.
   D. Wildlife officials think that lionfish fit in well in Florida’s coral reefs.
5. Which sentence from the article best supports the answer to question 4?
   A. Brightly colored stripes and long, feathery fins make lionfish look right at home in Florida’s coral reefs. (paragraph 1)
   B. These invaders are disrupting the ecosystem around Florida’s fragile coral reefs. (paragraph 5)
   C. Ad campaigns in Florida are promoting lionfish as a tasty dinner option. (paragraph 6)
   D. “The likelihood of getting rid of every lionfish is pretty slim,” explains Amanda Nalley. (paragraph 9)

6. The article ends by stating that experts think that the solution to the lionfish problem lies with people, the world’s top predator. What do the experts mean? Why do you think the author ended the article with this point? Use details from the article to support your answer.
If You Can’t Beat ’Em, Eat ’Em!

1. Brightly colored stripes and long, feathery fins make lionfish look right at home gliding around Florida’s coral reefs. But these flashy fish are actually far from their natural habitat. And they’re causing big trouble. Now, wildlife officials in Florida are asking people to strike back. How? By taking a knife and fork to the problem.

Fish Invasion

2. Lionfish are an invasive species in the United States. That term is used to describe any animal or plant that is brought to a new habitat and harms native animals or plants.

3. Lionfish are native to the Indian and western Pacific oceans. They were first spotted in U.S. waters off the Atlantic coast of Florida in the 1980s. They may have been aquarium pets that were released into the wild.

4. With no natural predators in these waters, the lionfish quickly multiplied. They’re now found along much of the East Coast of the United States. They’ve also been spotted in the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico.

5. These invaders are disrupting the ecosystem around Florida’s fragile coral reefs. Lionfish may look pretty. But they are ferocious predators that eat just about every small fish in sight. And their big appetites mean trouble for more than just the fish they eat. The lack of food is starving out native predator fish, such as groupers.

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10. Nalley and other experts say people—the world’s top predator—may be the best hope for restoring balance to Florida’s marine ecosystems.
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   A. But they are ferocious predators that eat just about every small fish in sight. *(paragraph 5)*
   
   B. With no natural predators in these waters, the lionfish quickly multiplied. *(paragraph 4)*
   
   C. They may have been aquarium pets that were released into the wild. *(paragraph 3)*
   
   D. Now, wildlife officials in Florida are asking people to strike back. *(paragraph 1)*

2. What is one effect that lionfish are having on the ecosystem in Florida’s coral reefs?
   
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   C. Running ad campaigns promoting groupers as a good meal choice
   
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   B. Brightly colored stripes and long, feathery fins make lionfish look right at home gliding around Florida’s coral reefs. (paragraph 1)
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   A. Wildlife officials in Florida are asking people to strike back by taking a knife and fork to the problem. (paragraph 1)
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   D. With no natural predators in these waters, the lionfish quickly multiplied. (paragraph 4)

2. What is one effect that lionfish are having on the ecosystem in Florida’s coral reefs?
   A. Groupers and other native predator fish have much less to eat.
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   D. The populations of native fish are quickly increasing.

3. According to the article, what is one solution that Florida has come up with to address the lionfish problem?
   A. Requiring restaurants to add lionfish to their menus
   B. Allowing residents to fish for lionfish without a license
   C. Running ad campaigns promoting groupers as a good meal choice
   D. Introducing new kinds of fish to Florida’s coral reefs

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A. These invaders are disrupting the ecosystem around Florida’s fragile coral reefs. (paragraph 5)

B. Ad campaigns in Florida are promoting lionfish as a tasty dinner option. (paragraph 6)

C. “The likelihood of getting rid of every lionfish is pretty slim,” explains Amanda Nalley, a fish and wildlife official in Florida. (paragraph 9)

D. With their brightly colored stripes and long, feathery fins, lionfish look right at home gliding around Florida’s coral reefs. (paragraph 1)

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### IF YOU CAN’T BEAT ‘EM, EAT ‘EM!

1. c  2. d  3. a  4. a  5. d  6. Answers will vary.

Sample response: In the article “If You Can’t Beat ‘Em, Eat ‘Em!” experts say the solution to the lionfish problem may be people, the world’s top predator. The article explains, “Lionfish have no natural predators in these waters. So they quickly multiplied.” Experts think humans need to step in and help control the lionfish population. The author most likely ended the article with this point to emphasize that the best, and possibly only, solution to the problem presented in the article is that people help cut down the lionfish population.

1. b  2. c  3. d  4. b  5. a  6. Answers will vary.

Sample response: In the article “If You Can’t Beat ‘Em, Eat ‘Em!” experts say the solution to the lionfish problem lies with people, the world’s top predator. The article explains, “With no natural predators in these waters, the lionfish quickly multiplied.” So people need to step in and help control the population of these fish, since no other predator exists naturally in Florida’s waters. The author most likely ended the article with this point to emphasize that the best, and possibly only, solution to the problem presented in the article is that people help combat the lionfish population.

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Teaching Notes

This passage has been carefully selected to engage students’ interest and has been leveled to meet the needs of all readers. The article comes in three Lexile levels. But because all versions of an article look alike, students need not know they’re getting different levels. To identify the reading levels, simply look at the shape around the page numbers.

△ – below level (700L–800L)
○ – on level (800L–900L)
□ – above level (900L–1000L)

One way to build students’ comprehension is to encourage them to mark up the text as they read—circling, underlining, or highlighting main ideas, supporting details, and key vocabulary words. This simple action helps them process what they’re reading, making it easier to focus on important ideas and make connections. For more test-taking tips, photocopy and distribute the helpful hints below for students.

**TEST-TAKING TIPS FOR STUDENTS:**

- Make sure you understand each question fully before you answer it. Underline key words. Restate the question in your own words.
- Always refer to the text to find answers. It’s a good idea to go back and reread parts of the text to answer a question.
- When you finish, check all your answers. You may find a mistake that you can correct.
- Most important, relax! Some people get nervous before a test. That’s normal. Just do your best.