

6.2 *A song stuck in the head*

Aim: Develop reading skills such as understanding vocabulary in context and making inferences

Preparation: Make one copy of Worksheet 6.2 for every S.

Comment: Use after or in place of the reading on page 51.

A Pair work

- Give each S a copy of the reading. Ask Ss which songs are most likely to get stuck in their heads. Elicit one or two examples from the class.
- Ss work in pairs to discuss the question. Then have pairs share their answers with the class.

B

- Explain the task. Read the statements aloud. Have Ss read the article to find the answers.
- Ss work individually to choose the correct answers.
- Go over the answers as a class.

Answers				
1. False	2. True	3. True	4. True	5. False

C Group work

- Explain the task. Read the questions aloud.
- Ss work in small groups to discuss the questions.
- Have groups share their answers with the class. Finally, have the class vote on the song that is most likely to become an earworm.

A Pair work What songs are likely to get stuck in your head? Discuss and share your ideas with the class.

EARWORMS

Sometimes it happens after hearing part of a song as you walk past a café, and sometimes all it takes is hearing a few lyrics. A piece of a song enters your consciousness, and then your brain's auditory cortex tries to supply the rest of the song. Before long, it's stuck in your head. Once stuck, that song becomes a brain itch that can only be scratched by running the song repeatedly through your head. You might even start humming, singing, or whistling it. If you can't get rid of it, you've got an *earworm*.

An earworm is a part of a song that pops into your head and repeats for a few minutes, a few hours, a few days, or even longer. No one knows exactly what causes them, but they tend to occur first thing in the morning, last thing at night, when we're under stress, and more

frequently for women than for men. Not surprisingly, musicians are especially prone. It has been reported that Mozart's children would upset him by playing a few bars of a melody on the piano, after which he would feel the need to continue playing it. Almost everyone experiences earworms, though – not just musicians.

Often, they're songs with a simple, easy-to-remember melody and repetitive lyrics. However, words aren't required and neither is a melody. Sometimes what gets stuck is a rhythm. For many people, earworms begin as something pleasant. It's only when they last too long that they become a burden. That's when some will do almost anything to get rid of them.

Continuing a song, like Mozart did, sometimes works to cure the earworm. This satisfies the brain's

impulse to create a whole. Some say that replacing an earworm with another song, particularly a slower one, can do the trick. However, the risk is that the new song can become an earworm, as well. What seems to work best is occupying the mind with something challenging, like a crossword puzzle. With the brain otherwise engaged, the earworm fades. Sometimes nothing works, though, and the harder you try to get rid of an earworm, the more it gets embedded in the mind.

Ultimately, this is why the creators of advertising often use catchy pop songs. They want the song to be stuck in your head so you'll remember the advertisement. This strategy can backfire, though: Customers can become so irritated that they'll consciously avoid the product and work to forget it.

B Read the article. Are these statements true or false? Choose the correct answers.

	True	False
1. Songs with a monotonous beat are almost always the cause of earworms.	☐	☐
2. Earworms activate a part of the brain that processes auditory information.	☐	☐
3. There is little consensus on what first triggers a song to get stuck in the brain.	☐	☐
4. Engaging the brain in a challenging activity can sometimes cure earworms.	☐	☐
5. People are equally susceptible to getting earworms.	☐	☐

C Group work Discuss these questions. Then share your answers with the class.

1. Who besides advertisers might benefit by creating songs that become earworms? Explain.
2. Make a list of the five songs you think are likely to become earworms. Share your songs with the class. Which song is the most likely to become an earworm?