**Pre-reading**

Before you start reading the novel, consider the following questions:

1. Write down what you know about the writer, Sebastian Faulks, and the novel *Birdsong*.

2. Why do you think Faulks called the novel *Birdsong*?

3. Find out what you can about people’s attitudes to the war before it started, as it began, during it and even now, including how people feel about what happened. Summarise your findings.

**First chapter**

Read the first chapter of the novel, from pages 1–17. As you read, consider the following and fill in your answers as you progress.

4. Look at the description on page 3 of the novel. What is Faulks describing? What sort of atmosphere does he evoke and how does he do this? Why might he have wanted to do this for the reader?

5. What sort of place is the Azaires’ house? What impression does it present? Why has Faulks written about it in such detail?

6. What are your initial impressions of Stephen? What sort of person does he seem to be? What makes you think this?

7. Stephen spends his first evening at the Azaires’ house eating dinner with the family and then with some friends who arrive just afterwards. What sort of atmosphere is there whilst the family eat dinner and then with the friends? Why has Faulks done this? What sort of characters does he present us with in this first chapter? How does he convey their characteristics and personalities? Look at each character in turn and write some notes about them.

8. Remembering that this is a novel primarily about the First World War, why has Sebastian Faulks started it here, years before the war? What impression does it give of the years leading up to the First World War?