Name: _____ Date: _____

Fossils Tell a Story

Circle group

A fossil is what is left of a living thing from long ago. Most fossils are found in rock. Some are bones, shells, or footprints. Some are the shape of a leaf pressed in stone.

How does a fossil form? Think of a fish that dies in a shallow sea. Soft parts, like skin, most often rot away. But the bones may be covered fast by mud or sand. Over a very long time, more layers pile on top. Water seeps in. Minerals in the water slowly make the mud hard. They fill the bones. At last, the bones turn to stone.

Much later, wind and water may wear away the rock on top. Then the fossil may show up.

Scientists who study fossils are called paleontologists. They dig with care. They brush away the dirt. Fossils show them which animals and plants lived long ago. They show how living things have changed. A sea animal's fossil on top of a mountain tells us the sea once covered that place.

Questions

1. What is a fossil?

_____

_____

2. Name two kinds of fossils.

_____

_____

3. Why does skin not often become a fossil?

_____

_____

4. How do minerals help make a fossil?

_____

_____

5. What do paleontologists do?

_____

_____

6. Why must the bones be covered fast by mud or sand?

_____

_____

7. What does a sea animal's fossil on a mountain tell us?

_____

_____

Words to know

fossil: what is left of a plant or animal from long ago, often in rock
shallow: not deep
layers: flat sheets of material lying one on top of another
minerals: hard, natural materials found in rocks and in water
paleontologists: scientists who study fossils

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Fossils Tell a Story

Triangle group

A fossil is what is left of a living thing from long ago. Most fossils are found in rock. Some are bones or shells. Others are footprints, or the shape of a leaf pressed into stone.

How does a fossil form? Imagine a fish that dies in a shallow sea. Soft parts, such as skin, usually rot away. But the bones may be covered quickly by mud or sand. Over a very long time, more layers pile on top. Water seeps in, and minerals in the water slowly harden the mud and fill the bones. In the end, the bones turn to stone.

Much later, wind and water may wear away the rock above, and the fossil may show up.

Scientists who study fossils are called paleontologists. They dig carefully and brush away the dirt. Fossils show them which animals and plants lived long ago and how living things have changed. A fossil of a sea creature found on a mountaintop tells us that the place was once covered by the sea.

Questions

1. What is a fossil?

_____

_____

2. What are two kinds of fossils?

_____

_____

3. Why do soft parts, such as skin, usually not become fossils?

_____

_____

4. How do minerals help make a fossil?

_____

_____

5. What do paleontologists do?

_____

_____

6. Why do you think the bones need to be covered quickly by mud or sand?

_____

_____

7. What does a fossil of a sea creature on a mountaintop tell us?

_____

_____

Words to know

fossil: what is left of a plant or animal from long ago, often in rock
shallow: not deep
layers: flat sheets of material lying one on top of another
minerals: hard, natural materials found in rocks and in water
paleontologists: scientists who study fossils

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Fossils Tell a Story

Square group

A fossil is the preserved remains or trace of a living thing from the distant past. Most fossils are discovered in rock. Some are bones or shells, while others are footprints, or the impression of a leaf pressed into stone.

How does a fossil form? Imagine a fish that dies in a shallow sea. Its soft tissues, such as skin, usually decay. Its bones, however, may be buried rapidly by mud or sand. Over an extraordinarily long period, additional layers accumulate on top. Water gradually seeps in, and minerals dissolved in the water slowly harden the mud and fill the bones. Eventually, the bones are transformed into stone.

Much later, wind and water may erode the rock above, and the fossil may finally be exposed.

Scientists who study fossils are called paleontologists. They excavate carefully and brush away the surrounding dirt. Fossils reveal which animals and plants inhabited the Earth long ago and how living things have changed over time. For example, the fossil of a sea creature discovered on a mountaintop indicates that the location was once covered by the sea.

Questions

1. How does the passage define a fossil?

_____

_____

2. Identify two different kinds of fossils.

_____

_____

3. Why do soft tissues, such as skin, rarely become fossils?

_____

_____

4. What role do minerals play in fossil formation?

_____

_____

5. Describe the work of paleontologists.

_____

_____

6. Why do you think the bones must be buried rapidly by mud or sand?

_____

_____

7. What does the fossil of a sea creature on a mountaintop indicate?

_____

_____

Words to know

fossil: what is left of a plant or animal from long ago, often in rock
shallow: not deep
layers: flat sheets of material lying one on top of another
minerals: hard, natural materials found in rocks and in water
paleontologists: scientists who study fossils

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Fossils Tell a Story

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Fossils Tell a Story

Easier · 170 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 2.1

1. What is left of a living thing from long ago.
2. Any two of: bones, shells, footprints, the shape of a leaf.
3. Soft parts like skin most often rot away.
4. Minerals in the water make the mud hard and fill the bones, so the bones turn to stone.
5. They study fossils. They dig with care and brush away the dirt.
6. So they are kept safe and do not get broken up or carried away. Accept any answer like this.
7. The sea once covered that place.

Triangle: Fossils Tell a Story

This passage · 172 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.9

1. What is left of a living thing from long ago.
2. Any two of: bones, shells, footprints, the shape of a leaf.
3. They usually rot away.
4. Minerals in the water harden the mud and fill the bones, so the bones turn to stone.
5. They study fossils. They dig carefully and brush away the dirt.
6. Covering them protects them from being broken up or carried away. Accept any answer along these lines.
7. The place was once covered by the sea.

Square: Fossils Tell a Story

Harder · 182 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 7.7

1. The preserved remains or trace of a living thing from the distant past.
2. Any two of: bones, shells, footprints, the impression of a leaf.
3. They usually decay.
4. Minerals dissolved in the water harden the mud and fill the bones, transforming the bones into stone.
5. They study fossils, excavating carefully and brushing away the surrounding dirt.
6. Burial protects them from being broken apart or carried away. Accept any answer along these lines.
7. The location was once covered by the sea.