Name: _____ Date: _____

Leafcutter Ants Run a Fungus Farm

Circle group

Walk through a tropical forest. You may see a long green line on the ground. It looks like tiny sails. Each sail is a piece of leaf. An ant carries each one.

The ants do not eat the leaves. They take them to a nest under the ground. There, the leaves are food for a garden.

The garden grows a fungus. Workers chew the leaves into a soft mash. They spread it out like a bed. They add bits of fungus, and it grows. The ants eat the fungus. It feeds the whole colony.

Every ant has a job. Big workers cut leaves with sharp jaws. Small workers clean the garden. Some tiny ants ride on the leaf pieces.

The ants and the fungus need each other. The fungus gets food and a safe home. The ants get a meal.

Questions

1. What do leafcutter ants carry?

_____

_____

2. What do the ants use the leaves for?

_____

_____

3. What do the ants eat?

_____

_____

4. What do the small workers do?

_____

_____

5. How do the fungus and the ants help each other?

_____

_____

6. Why does the writer say the ants have farmed longer than people?

_____

_____

Words to know

fungus: a living thing, like a mushroom, that is not a plant or an animal
colony: a large group of animals that live and work together
tropical: from the hot, wet parts of the world near the equator
jaws: the parts of the mouth used to bite and chew

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: _____

Leafcutter Ants Run a Fungus Farm

Triangle group

Walk through a tropical forest and you may see a long green line moving across the ground. It looks like a parade of tiny sails. Each sail is a piece of leaf, and each one is carried by a leafcutter ant.

Here is the strange part. The ants do not eat the leaves. They take them underground to a nest and use them as food for a garden.

The garden grows a kind of fungus. Workers chew the leaf pieces into a soft pulp and spread it out like a bed. They add bits of fungus, and the fungus grows. The ants eat the fungus, and it feeds the whole colony, including the young.

Every ant has a job. Larger workers cut leaves with sharp jaws. Smaller workers clean the garden and pick off anything that does not belong. Some of the tiniest ants even ride on the leaf pieces as they travel home.

The ants and the fungus need each other. The fungus gets fresh food and a safe place to grow. The ants get a meal that they could not make from leaves alone.

People were farming for thousands of years. Leafcutter ants have been doing it for much longer.

Questions

1. What do leafcutter ants carry across the forest floor?

_____

_____

2. What do the ants use the leaves for?

_____

_____

3. What do the ants eat?

_____

_____

4. What jobs do the smaller workers do?

_____

_____

5. How do the fungus and the ants help each other?

_____

_____

6. Why does the writer say the ants have been farming longer than people?

_____

_____

Words to know

fungus: a living thing, like a mushroom, that is not a plant or an animal
colony: a large group of animals that live and work together
pulp: a soft, wet mash
tropical: from the hot, wet parts of the world near the equator
jaws: the parts of the mouth used to bite and chew

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: _____

Leafcutter Ants Run a Fungus Farm

Square group

Walk through a tropical forest and you may notice a long green line winding across the ground, resembling a parade of miniature sails. Each sail is a fragment of leaf, and each is carried by a leafcutter ant.

Strangely, the ants do not eat these leaves. They carry them down into an underground nest and use them to feed a garden. The garden grows a kind of fungus. Workers chew the leaf fragments into a soft pulp and spread it out like a bed, then add bits of fungus, which spread and grow. The ants eat the fungus, and it nourishes the entire colony, including the young.

Every ant has a task. Larger workers slice the leaves with sharp jaws, while smaller workers tend the garden, cleaning it and removing anything that does not belong. Some of the tiniest ants even ride on the leaf pieces as they travel home.

The ants and the fungus depend on each other. The fungus receives fresh food and a protected place to grow, and the ants receive a meal that they could not make from leaves alone. Long before people began to farm, leafcutter ants had been doing it for a very long time.

Questions

1. What do leafcutter ants carry across the forest floor?

_____

_____

2. What do the ants use the leaves for?

_____

_____

3. What do the ants eat?

_____

_____

4. What tasks do the smaller workers perform?

_____

_____

5. How do the fungus and the ants depend on each other?

_____

_____

6. Why does the writer say ants were farming before people?

_____

_____

Words to know

fungus: a living thing, like a mushroom, that is not a plant or an animal
colony: a large group of animals that live and work together
pulp: a soft, wet mash
tropical: from the hot, wet parts of the world near the equator
jaws: the parts of the mouth used to bite and chew

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: Leafcutter Ants Run a Fungus Farm

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

Circle: Leafcutter Ants Run a Fungus Farm

Easier · 140 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 1

1. Pieces of leaves.
2. To grow a fungus garden underground.
3. The fungus.
4. They clean the garden.
5. The fungus gets food and a safe home, and the ants get a meal.
6. Leafcutter ants have been growing gardens for much longer than people have.

Triangle: Leafcutter Ants Run a Fungus Farm

This passage · 202 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.3

1. Pieces of leaves.
2. They use the leaf pulp to grow a fungus garden underground.
3. The fungus that grows in their garden.
4. They clean the garden and pick off anything that does not belong.
5. The fungus gets food and a safe place to grow, and the ants get a meal.
6. Leafcutter ants have been growing gardens for a much longer time than people have farmed.

Square: Leafcutter Ants Run a Fungus Farm

Harder · 201 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 6.4

1. Fragments of leaves.
2. They chew them into pulp to feed an underground fungus garden.
3. The fungus that grows in their garden.
4. They tend the garden, cleaning it and removing anything that does not belong.
5. The fungus gets fresh food and a protected place to grow, and the ants get a meal.
6. Leafcutter ants have grown gardens for far longer than people have farmed.