Name: _____ Date: _____

The Green Garden Growing in a Sloth's Fur

Circle group

A three-toed sloth hangs in the rainforest trees of Central and South America. It moves very slowly. Its fur has other living things in it. If you look closely, a sloth can look a little green. Tiny algae grow in its hair.

The algae can grow because of the way sloth hair is made. Each hair has small grooves that hold water. The forest is warm and damp, so the algae have what they need. The green color probably helps the sloth. It blends in with the leaves. Then an eagle is less likely to see it.

Small moths live in the fur too. They flutter up when the sloth is disturbed. About once a week, the sloth climbs down from its tree and digs a small hole on the ground. This is a risky trip. A sloth is clumsy on the ground. While it is there, female moths leave the fur. They lay eggs in its droppings.

When the young moths grow up, they fly up to find another sloth. Scientists are still learning what each animal gets from this. A sloth has a slow, quiet life, but it is full of company.

Questions

1. Why does a sloth look a little green?

_____

_____

2. What do the grooves in sloth hair do?

_____

_____

3. How often does a sloth climb down from its tree?

_____

_____

4. Where do female moths lay their eggs?

_____

_____

5. Why is the trip to the ground risky?

_____

_____

6. How might green fur help a sloth stay safe?

_____

_____

Words to know

algae: very simple plantlike living things that often grow in damp places
droppings: the solid waste that an animal leaves behind

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: _____

The Green Garden Growing in a Sloth's Fur

Triangle group

A three-toed sloth spends most of its life hanging motionless in the rainforest canopy of Central and South America. It moves so slowly that its fur becomes a home for other living things. Look closely at a sloth and you may notice that it seems tinted green, because tiny algae grow in its hair.

The algae can take hold because of the structure of sloth fur. Each hair has small grooves in its surface that hold moisture, and the damp, warm forest gives the algae everything they need. The green color probably helps the sloth, since it blends in with the leaves and makes the animal harder for a hunting eagle to notice.

Algae are not the only guests. Several kinds of small moths live in the fur, fluttering up when the sloth is disturbed. Their life cycle is tied to the sloth in a surprising way. About once a week, a sloth climbs down from its tree and digs a small hole on the forest floor. This is a risky trip for an animal that is clumsy on the ground. While the sloth is there, female moths leave the fur and lay their eggs in its droppings.

When the young moths mature, they fly up into the canopy to find another sloth. Scientists are still studying what each partner gains from this arrangement, but one idea is that the moths and algae help to feed or protect their host. The sloth's slow, quiet life turns out to be crowded with company.

Questions

1. Why does a sloth look slightly green?

_____

_____

2. What do the grooves in a sloth's hair do?

_____

_____

3. How often does a sloth climb down from its tree?

_____

_____

4. Where do female moths lay their eggs?

_____

_____

5. Why is the trip to the ground risky for a sloth?

_____

_____

6. Why might green fur help a sloth survive?

_____

_____

Words to know

canopy: the top layer of branches and leaves in a forest
algae: very simple plantlike living things that often grow in damp places
structure: the way something is built or put together
droppings: the solid waste that an animal leaves behind
host: an animal that other living things live on or in

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: _____

The Green Garden Growing in a Sloth's Fur

Square group

A three-toed sloth spends nearly its entire life hanging motionless in the rainforest canopy of Central and South America. It moves so slowly that its fur has become a habitat for other living organisms. Examine a sloth closely and you may notice a faint green tint, because microscopic algae are growing in its hair.

The algae are able to take hold because of the unusual structure of sloth fur. Each hair has tiny grooves along its surface that retain moisture, and the warm, damp forest supplies everything else the algae require. The green coloring probably benefits the sloth as well, since it blends with the surrounding leaves and makes the animal considerably harder for a hunting eagle to detect.

Algae are not the only residents. Several species of small moths also live in the fur, fluttering upward whenever the sloth is disturbed. Their life cycle is linked to the sloth in a surprising way. About once a week, a sloth descends from its tree and digs a shallow hole on the forest floor, a risky journey for an animal that is so clumsy on the ground. While the sloth is there, female moths leave the fur and lay their eggs in its droppings.

When the young moths reach maturity, they fly up into the canopy to locate another sloth. Scientists are still investigating what each partner gains from this arrangement, but one suggestion is that the moths and algae may help to feed or protect their host. The sloth's slow and quiet existence turns out to be crowded with company.

Questions

1. What causes a sloth to have a faint green tint?

_____

_____

2. What is the purpose of the grooves along each strand of sloth hair?

_____

_____

3. How frequently does a sloth descend from its tree?

_____

_____

4. Where do the female moths lay their eggs?

_____

_____

5. Why is the journey to the forest floor risky for a sloth?

_____

_____

6. In what way might green fur help a sloth survive?

_____

_____

Words to know

canopy: the top layer of branches and leaves in a forest
algae: very simple plantlike living things that often grow in damp places
structure: the way something is built or put together
droppings: the solid waste that an animal leaves behind
host: an animal that other living things live on or in

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: The Green Garden Growing in a Sloth's Fur

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

Circle: The Green Garden Growing in a Sloth's Fur

Easier · 195 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 2.6

1. Tiny algae grow in its hair.
2. They hold water so algae can grow.
3. About once a week.
4. In the sloth's droppings on the ground.
5. A sloth is clumsy on the ground, so a hunter could catch it.
6. It blends in with the leaves, so eagles may not see it.

Triangle: The Green Garden Growing in a Sloth's Fur

This passage · 253 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 6.6

1. Tiny algae grow in its hair.
2. They hold moisture so algae can grow.
3. About once a week.
4. In the sloth's droppings on the forest floor.
5. A sloth is clumsy on the ground, so it could be caught by a hunter.
6. It blends in with the leaves, so eagles are less likely to see it.

Square: The Green Garden Growing in a Sloth's Fur

Harder · 261 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 9.3

1. Microscopic algae are growing in its hair.
2. They retain moisture, which lets the algae grow.
3. About once a week.
4. In the sloth's droppings on the forest floor.
5. A sloth is clumsy on the ground, which could make it easier for a hunter to catch.
6. It blends with the leaves, making it harder for an eagle to notice the sloth.