

1 Read the following text and answer the questions.

Fossils: Clues to the Past

by Cindy Sherwood



Everybody **knows** that dinosaurs once **roamed** the earth. But how do we know that **fact**? Dinosaurs **lived** many millions of years ago and there were no photos **taken** of them (or any people **around** to **take** those photos!) **Yet** scientists do have **proof** of dinosaurs, thanks to fossils.

A fossil is what is **left** of an animal or a plant a long time **after** it dies. Fossils are the **buried** parts of **living** things that have **been** preserved from a different geological time period. You can **think** of fossils as the ancestors of today's animals and plants. To be **considered** a fossil, the **remains** must be at **least** 10,000 years old.

Usually when an animal or plant dies, it decomposes. That **means** it rots away to **nothing** over time. But sometimes, an animal gets buried at the **bottom** of an ocean in **layers** of sand or mud **called** sediment. Over many years, the animal's **skeleton** gets crushed by more **layers** of sediment. **Eventually**,

the sediment **hardens** into rock over the **bones**, which **decay**. When that **happens**, minerals **slowly** replace the **bones** and make a **cast** of the **skeleton** in the same **shape** as the original. Millions of years later, the rock **surrounding** the skeleton surfaces after an **earthquake** or after **erosion** from **wind** and rain.

The fossil is **then** just **waiting** to be **found**, perhaps by **someone** like you **digging** it up **from** the **ground**! There are **some** other, **more** unusual ways for fossils to **form**. Scientists have **discovered** **skeletons** of animals that **died** instantly when a volcano **erupted**, their **bones** preserved in the ash. **Small** bugs or **insects** caught in tree sap can become fossils when the sap **hardens** into a golden material called amber. And animals trapped in **sticky** natural **asphalt** or tar can turn into fossils. The most famous example of these fossils can be found right in the **middle** of California's biggest city, Los Angeles. Scientists have **uncovered** more than three million fossils from the Ice Age at the La Brea Tar Pits, including **saber-toothed** cats and **mammoths**. And **scientists** there **continue** to dig up more fossils all the time!

Huge dinosaur skeletons are **probably** the **most** famous kinds of fossils. The **largest** ever found is a dinosaur called sauroposeidon (sore'-oh-puh-sie'-dun). Scientists **think** this type of dinosaur was 60 feet long and weighed 60 tons—that equals 120,000 **pounds**! But fossils are not always **huge**. The **tiniest** dinosaur fossil was found in China. Microraptor was only about a foot long, **which** is about the **size** of a **box** of **cereal**. Even tinier are the smallest fossils ever discovered, blue-green **algae** that lived on some rocks in Africa more than three billion years ago. Blue-green **algae** are also the very **oldest** fossils ever **found**.

Fossils **give** us a **wonderful** **window** into our past. Today the science of **studying** fossils **is** **alive** and

well. **Paleontology** (pay-lee-un-tall'-uh-gee) is the **study** of the **history** of life on earth, **using** fossils as the **evidence**. So if you love dinosaurs and you **want** to know more about what **happened** on earth **thousands** or millions of years ago, **maybe** someday you can **make** your **living** by **digging** up fossils!



Activity pag 201 Traducción

English	Spanish	English	Spanish
Recognize	Reconocer	everywhere	partes
Yep	Si	affects	afecta
was	estaba	things	cosas
guy	chico	garage	garaje
crazy	loco	When	Cuando
also	ademas	five	cinco
had	tenido	dad	Padre
Just	Solo	him	él
Scientist	cientifico	compass	Brújula
genius	genio	stare	mirar fijamente
changed	comdio	needle	aguja
sciences	ciencia	compass	Brújula
developed	desarrolló	seemed	parecio
may	mayo	understand	comprender
seen	visto	needle	aguja
But	Pero	moved	movido
everybody	todos	learned	aprendier

a Which of the following statements is true about fossils?

- 1 The oldest fossils on record date back to the time of the first humans living in North America.
- 2 Only large animals, like dinosaurs, mammoths, and sabertoothed cats, are capable of becoming fossilized.
- 3 It is becoming harder and harder for scientists to find fossils, so paleontology is a dying profession.
- 4 You are likely to find a fossil after it has been brought to the surface by wind or rain erosion, or even a natural disaster.

b Where are you most likely to discover a fossil?

- 1 in North America, only
- 2 in Asia, only
- 3 all continents except Africa
- 4 anywhere on earth

c Using the information in the article, describe one way a fossil can form.

Fossils are formed in different ways, but most are formed when a plant or animal dies in a watery environment and is buried in mud and silt. Soft tissues break down quickly leaving hard bones or shells behind. Over time, the sediment builds up on the surface and hardens into rock.

d In your own words, describe what the La Brea Tar Pits are.

La Brea Tar Pits are an area in central L.A. where scientists have found millions of fossils.