

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 was 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

- Roamed = vagabunda
- scientist = científico
- buried = enterrado
- geological = geológico
- remains = resto
- bottom = fondo
- crushed = aplastada
- erosion = erosión
- skeleton = esqueleto
- surrounding =
- tree = árbol
- hardens = endurecer
- breccia = Breccia
- fossils = fósiles
- equals = iguales
- timer = ^{mas} cronómetro
- equals = iguales
- size = talla
- algae = algas
- wonderful = ^{mas} maravilloso
- paleontology = ^{pa}leontología

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!



- 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.

A fossil is what is left of an animal or a plant a long time after it dies. To be considered a fossil, the remains must be at least 10,000 years old.

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

La Brea tar pits are one of the most famous places to find fossils located in California.