

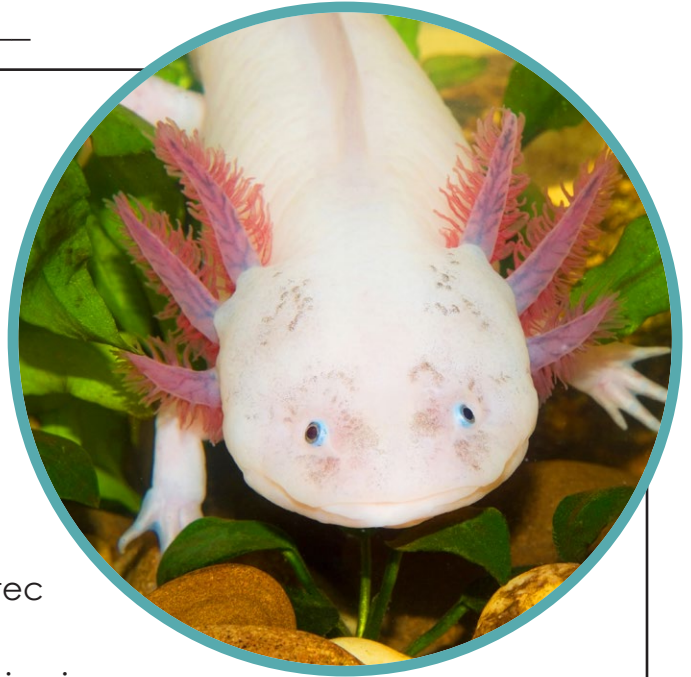
Name: _____

The Amazing Axolotl

by Guy Belleranti

Axolotls have become popular animals. They are interesting and unusual. Sadly, they are also critically endangered.

The word axolotl comes from Nahuatl, an Aztec language. In English, it sounds like AK-suh-lot-ul. In Nahuatl, it is closer to ah-SHO-lote. One meaning is water dog. Some call the axolotl a "walking fish." But the axolotl



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What does the mature axolotl look like? It has a large head. It has a cute, smiling, baby-like face. Its round eyes have no outer eyelids. Instead, they have a thin, transparent eyelid called a nictitating membrane.

The axolotl has a wide body. It also has four legs with small webbed feet. Its long tail is crested with a fin. A mature axolotl's average length is 8–12 inches (20–30 cm).

Perhaps the axolotl's most noticeable feature is its external gills. The feathery gills fan out on both sides of its head. The axolotl can also breathe through its lungs and skin, just like other amphibians. Occasionally, the axolotl might break the water's surface and breathe in a bit of air. However, most of the time the axolotl stays underwater and uses its gills.

The axolotl is nocturnal. That means it is active at night. Although cute, the axolotl is a carnivore! It catches prey using suction like a vacuum. Prey include worms, insects, tadpoles, mollusks, and small fish. Sometimes it also inhales gravel. This helps grind food in the stomach.



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Much of what we know about axolotls has come from lab studies. Remember how axolotls stay in a larval form? Scientists discovered the injection of hormones can make an axolotl complete its metamorphosis into a terrestrial (land-living) salamander.

Another discovery? Axolotls have superpowers. First, they can change shades of color for camouflage. Second—and of great interest to scientists—axolotls have amazing healing and regeneration abilities. An axolotl can regrow limbs, skin, muscles, bones, organs, and even parts of its brain. It is believed to be 1,000 times more resistant to cancer than any mammal. That includes humans!

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1. Which is least likely to affect an axolotl's health?
 - a. cleanliness of water
 - b. water temperature
 - c. the humidity in the air
 - d. the size and quality of gravel

2. What are the different body parts an axolotl can use to breathe?
Which is used most often?



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- c. fluids that make bodies healthier
 - d. a kind of food that promotes growth

 4. Can axolotls fully close their eyes? Explain why or why not.
- _____
- _____
-
5. Why do you think axolotls' abilities are so interesting to scientists? Use evidence from the article to support your answer.

Name: _____

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.



1. _____ b r u n a t z a i n o i
clue: process of making more city-like

2. _____ t i r i c l a c y l
clue: seriously; extremely and importantly



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6. _____ n a c o r v i e r
clue: kind of animal that only eats meat

7. _____ c o n n u r t l a
clue: awake or active at night

8. _____ q a t a u c i
clue: living or found in water

9. _____ t e a m p r o m s h i s o
clue: change in form, as happens in amphibians

10. _____ r e x l a t e n
clue: on the outside

Name: _____

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In the article, "The Amazing Axolotl," you learned the axolotl is critically endangered. There may be as few as 50 left in the wild.

Although wild axolotls are nearly extinct, there are about 1 million kept as pets, in zoos and aquariums, or in labs. Do you think this is a good thing? Why or why not? Use details from the article to support your answer.



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ANSWER KEY

The Amazing Axolotl

by Guy Belleranti



1. Which is least likely to affect an axolotl's health?
 - a. cleanliness of water
 - b. water temperature
 - c. the humidity in the air**
 - d. the size and quality of gravel

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Answers may vary. An example is: Axolotls can regrow body parts and are

1,000 times more resistant to cancer than humans. Scientists might be able to
study them to improve human medicine and health.

ANSWER KEY

The Amazing Axolotl

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line.

Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.



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8. aquatic

a q u a d u c i

clue: living or found in water

9. metamorphosis

t e a m p r o m s h i s o

clue: change in form, as happens in amphibians

10. external

r e x l a t e n

clue: on the outside