

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# 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.



## Preview

Please log in to download  
the printable version of this worksheet.

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!



# Preview

Please log in to download  
the printable version of this worksheet.

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!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Fossils: Clues to the Past

by Cindy Sherwood



1. Which of the following statements is true about fossils?
  - a. The oldest fossils on record date back to the time of the first humans living in North America.
  - b. Only large animals, like dinosaurs, mammoths, and saber-toothed cats, are capable of becoming fossilized.
  - c. It is becoming harder and harder for scientists to find fossils, so paleontology is a dying profession.
  - d. 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.



## Preview

Please log in to download  
the printable version of this worksheet.

3. Where are you most likely to discover a fossil?
  - a. in North America, only
  - b. in Asia, only
  - c. all continents except Africa
  - d. anywhere on earth
  
4. Using the information in the article, describe one way a fossil can form.

---

---

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

---

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Fossils: Clues to the Past

by Cindy Sherwood



The following terms are vocabulary words from the article. Match the vocabulary word with its correct definition by writing the corresponding letter on the line.

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| 1. _____ mammoths | a. small, non-flowering plants that include seaweed and single-celled organisms |
| 2. _____ sediment | b. an object that is made when material is shaped into a mold                   |
| 3. _____ amber    | c. maintained its original condition  |



# Preview

Please log in to download the printable version of this worksheet.

animal's body

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| 7. _____ erosion    | g. ancient, extinct elephants from the time of the Ice Age   |
| 8. _____ evidence   | h. a dark, sticky mixture; natural tar or pitch  |
| 9. _____ skeleton   | i. the breakdown of rock or other material by wind, rain, or water                                     |
| 10. _____ preserved | j. a yellowish, see-through resin material that was produced by now-extinct trees in prehistoric times |

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Fossils: Clues to the Past

by Cindy Sherwood

In the article, "Fossils: Clues to the Past," you learned that fossils help scientists learn about prehistoric animals, including dinosaurs and other extinct creatures, like mammoths and saber-toothed cats.



On the lines below, describe what kind of information scientists can learn about a prehistoric animal from studying its fossil. Base your answer on the information from the article and your knowledge of geology.

---

---



# Preview

Please log in to download the printable version of this worksheet.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## ANSWER KEY

### Fossils: Clues to the Past

by Cindy Sherwood



1. Which of the following statements is true about fossils? **d.**
  - a. The oldest fossils on record date back to the time of the first humans living in North America.
  - b. Only large animals, like dinosaurs, mammoths, and saber-toothed cats, are

# Preview

Please log in to download  
the printable version of this worksheet.



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

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

# ANSWER KEY

## Fossils: Clues to the Past

by Cindy Sherwood

The following terms are vocabulary words from the article. Match the vocabulary word with its correct definition by writing the corresponding letter on the line.



1. **g.** mammoths
- a.** small, non-flowering plants that include seaweed and single-celled organisms

# Preview

Please log in to download  
the printable version of this worksheet.



10. **c.** preserved
- j.** a yellowish, see-through resin material that was produced by now-extinct trees in prehistoric times