

Dinosaurs - Giants of the Past

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Dinosaurs were amazing creatures that ruled the Earth for over one hundred sixty million years. These **prehistoric** animals first appeared about two hundred thirty million years ago during the Triassic period. The word dinosaur means terrible lizard in Greek, though many were not actually scary at all.

Some dinosaurs were as small as chickens, while others were the largest animals to ever walk on land. Scientists called **paleontologists** study dinosaur bones to learn about how these creatures lived long ago.

Dinosaurs came in many different shapes, sizes, and types with special **characteristics**. The Tyrannosaurus Rex was a fierce **predator** with sharp teeth and tiny arms. Triceratops had three horns and a large bony frill to protect its neck from attackers. The Brachiosaurus was a gentle **herbivore** that used its long neck to eat leaves from tall trees. Velociraptors were small but fast hunters that worked together in packs to catch their prey.

Scientists have discovered dinosaur **fossils** on every continent around the world including Antarctica. Fossils form when dinosaur bones are buried and slowly turn into rock over millions of years. The first dinosaur fossil was officially named in eighteen twenty-four in England by scientists. Today, new dinosaur species are discovered almost every month as **excavations** continue worldwide. Museums display these incredible fossils so everyone can see these magnificent ancient creatures up close.

About sixty-six million years ago, a massive **asteroid** hit Earth and changed everything forever. The impact caused fires, tsunamis, and blocked out the sun with dust and smoke. Without sunlight, plants died and then the dinosaurs that ate them starved to death. This **extinction** event killed about seventy-five percent of all species on our planet. However, some small creatures survived and eventually evolved into the animals we know today.

Amazingly, dinosaurs did not completely disappear from Earth after the asteroid impact. Scientists now know that birds are actually living **descendants** of certain dinosaur species. When you see a chicken or sparrow, you are looking at a modern dinosaur relative today. Studying birds helps scientists understand how dinosaurs might have **behaved** millions of years ago. The age of dinosaurs may be over, but their legacy continues in the skies above us.

A. Vocabulary

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|--------------------------|---|
| 1. prehistoric _____ | a. scientists who study ancient life forms |
| 2. paleontologists _____ | b. relatives that come from an ancestor |
| 3. characteristics _____ | c. an animal that only eats plants |
| 4. predator _____ | d. when a species completely dies out |
| 5. herbivore _____ | e. preserved remains of ancient living things |
| 6. fossils _____ | f. an animal that hunts other animals |
| 7. excavations _____ | g. a large rock that travels through space |
| 8. asteroid _____ | h. digging to find buried objects |
| 9. extinction _____ | i. features that describe something |
| 10. descendants _____ | j. from a time before written history |

B. True or False

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|--|---|--|
| 1. Dinosaurs ruled Earth for over 160 million years. _____ | 2. All dinosaurs were very large animals. _____ | 3. T-Rex was a plant-eating dinosaur. _____ |
| 4. Fossils have been found on every continent. _____ | 5. The first dinosaur was named in 1824. _____ | 6. An asteroid caused the dinosaur extinction. _____ |
| 7. Birds are descendants of dinosaurs. _____ | 8. Dinosaurs disappeared about 100 million years ago. _____ | 9. Velociraptors hunted alone, not in packs. _____ |

C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: prehistoric, paleontologists, predator, fossils, excavations, extinction, descendants

- Dinosaurs were _____ animals that lived millions of years ago.
- Scientists called _____ study dinosaur bones to learn about the past.
- The Tyrannosaurus Rex was a fierce _____ with sharp teeth.
- Dinosaur _____ form when bones slowly turn into rock.
- Birds are living _____ of certain dinosaur species.

D. Comprehension Questions

- How long ago did dinosaurs first appear on Earth?
- What does the word dinosaur mean in Greek?
- How did an asteroid cause dinosaurs to become extinct?
- What percentage of species died during the extinction event?
- How do we know that birds are related to dinosaurs?

E. Discussion Questions

- If you could see any dinosaur alive today, which would you choose and why?
 - Why do you think people are so fascinated by dinosaurs?
 - Do you think scientists will ever be able to bring dinosaurs back to life?
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Answer Key

A. Vocabulary: 1-j, 2-a, 3-i, 4-f, 5-c, 6-e, 7-h, 8-g, 9-d, 10-b

B. True/False: 1-T, 2-F, 3-F, 4-T, 5-T, 6-T, 7-T, 8-F, 9-F

C. Fill Blanks: 1-prehistoric, 2-paleontologists, 3-predator, 4-fossils, 5-descendants

D. Comprehension: 1. About 230 million years ago; 2. Terrible lizard; 3. It caused fires and blocked the sun, killing plants and then dinosaurs; 4. About 75 percent; 5. Scientists have discovered that birds evolved from certain dinosaur species