

Science Reading Selection: Where Did All the Dinosaurs Go?

Dinosaurs lived on Earth during the Mesozoic Era, between 225 million and 65 million years ago. Some were as long as several school buses; others were as small as chickens. Although dinosaurs are classified as reptiles, they may be more closely related to our modern day birds than to today's reptiles.

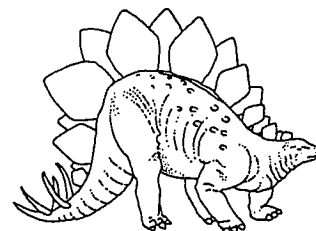
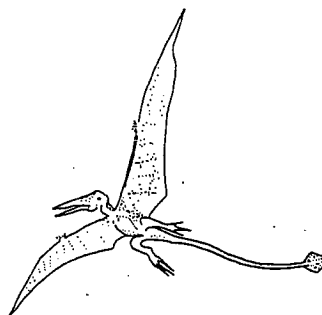
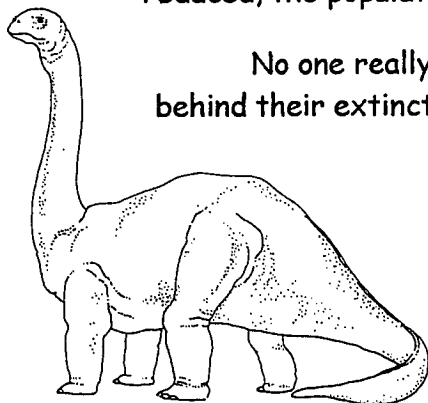
The climate during most of the Mesozoic was almost tropical. Earth had one large land mass that was beginning to break up into the different continents, and the dinosaurs could move easily from one place to another over these land connections. The most common plants were cone-bearing trees, ferns, cycads, and mosses. Crocodiles, frogs, lizards, insects and a few small mammals lived on the land. Some reptiles could fly, but there were still no birds.

By the end of the Mesozoic Era, the climate had become cooler and drier. Trees, such as oaks, maples, poplars and redwoods, grew in the forests and flowering plants were common. Birds and snakes were present and modern fish and huge turtles lived in the sea. And the dinosaurs disappeared from the fossil record.

What happened to the dinosaurs? Did the change in climate and plant and animal life have anything to do with their extinction? Scientists have several theories about their extinction that are based on climate change.

One theory is that a large star exploded and the radiation given off caused the Earth to experience cold weather for thousands of years. The dinosaurs simply could not survive the cold conditions. Another theory is that the new species of plants that developed during the latter part of the Mesozoic Era were inedible to the herbivorous plant-eating dinosaurs. The plant-eaters starved and died, and in doing so deprived the carnivores (meat eaters) of their food supply. Eventually, they also became extinct. Other scientists think that a giant asteroid may have collided with the Earth and produced a massive dust cloud that blocked out sunlight for several months. Deprived of solar energy for a long period of time, most of the plants were unable to photosynthesize and died. Without an adequate food supply, the herbivores also died off. With the number of their prey greatly reduced, the population of meat eaters also disappeared.

No one really knows what happened to the dinosaurs. The actual explanation behind their extinction may be a combination of many theories.



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PART I: COMPREHENSION:

1. Why would the Mesozoic Era be called the "Age of Dinosaurs"? _____

2. Why would the dinosaurs have been classified as reptiles? _____

3. Describe the climate during the Mesozoic Era. _____

4. What geological event made migration between land areas easy for the dinosaurs? _____

5. Explain how the plants and animals of the Mesozoic reflected the climate conditions of the time? _____

6. What natural event occurred at the end of the Mesozoic that signaled a major change in the dinosaurs' environment? _____

7. What animals took over the dinosaurs place in the environment when they disappeared? _____

8. What is the main factor behind the first extinction theory? _____

