Name _____ Date _____

Fossils: Clues to Long Ago

Directions: Read about Mateo's trip. Then answer each question.

Fish in the Desert

On a trip to a dry, rocky desert, Mateo and his dad stopped at a fossil museum. Behind the museum, Mateo saw fish fossils in the rock. There was no lake or river near it.

A **fossil** is part of a living thing from long ago, or a mark it left. Bones, shells, footprints, and leaf prints can all be fossils. Fossils are clues about what living things were like and where they lived.

Fish live in water. So fish fossils in dry rock are a strong clue that water once covered the land.

Most living things never become fossils. When a living thing dies, it usually rots away or gets eaten. A fossil can form when mud or sand buries the remains quickly. Then the mud or sand slowly hardens into rock.

1. What do the fish fossils tell Mateo about the desert?

A. The desert has always been dry, just like today.
B. Fish once lived in the dry desert sand.
C. Water probably covered this land long ago.
D. Someone dropped the fish there a few years ago.

2. Which of these is a fossil?

A. A leaf that fell off a tree last fall
B. A fern leaf print in rock that formed long ago
C. A clay model of a bone
D. A dog's footprint in fresh mud from this morning

3. Use the word bank to finish the sentences about how a shell became a fossil.

Word bank
froze • melted • hardened • buried

Long ago, a snail died at the bottom of a shallow sea. Sand quickly _____ its shell. Over a very long time, the sand slowly _____ into rock around it.

4. Most palm trees grow in warm places. Scientists found palm fossils far in the north, where it is very cold now. What do these fossils suggest?

A. Those places have always been cold.

B. People planted palm trees there last summer.

C. Those places were probably much warmer long ago.

D. Palm trees grow best in snow and ice.

5. Trilobites were sea creatures that lived long ago. None are alive today. We know about them from their fossils. What does a trilobite fossil show?

A. They lived on dry land, not in the sea.

B. Some kinds of living things from long ago have died out.

C. They still live in the desert today.

D. All living things from long ago are still alive.

6. A dinosaur footprint is a fossil, but no part of the body is in it. What does the footprint tell scientists?

A. The dinosaur is still alive.

B. Its bones are hidden inside the footprint.

C. Its feet pressed into solid rock.

D. A dinosaur walked there long ago, on soft mud or sand.

7. Mateo says, "All living things became fossils." Which sentence from the passage shows he is wrong?

A. Most living things never become fossils.

B. There was no lake or river near it.

C. Bones, shells, footprints, and leaf prints can all be fossils.

D. Fish live in water.

8. What would happen if a bird died on the forest floor and no mud or sand covered it?

A. It would turn into a fossil in a few weeks.

B. It would sink into the solid ground and harden.

C. It would turn into rock right away.

D. It would probably rot away or get eaten, not turn into a fossil.