

Uncovering the Past

FOCUS QUESTION

What can we discover
by exploring the world
around us?

NOTICE AND WONDER

Look at the story you will read in this lesson. What do you notice?
What do you wonder? Discuss your ideas with a partner.

WORD PAIRS

Match each word on the left with a word on the right.
Tell your partner why you connected these words.

rock
dig
scientist

paleontologist
fossil
chisel

___ means ___, which
is similar to ___.

___ is related to
___ because ___.



***Digging In,
Parts 1–3***

by Brooks Benjamin

Digging In

PART I

by Brooks Benjamin

Dear Journal,

June 25

- 1 I've been robbed. By my DAD. We were supposed to be spending the first weekend of summer at the beach, but my dad just came in to tell me he has an even better surprise.
- 2 Spoiler alert: IT'S NOT BETTER.
- 3 We're not even going anywhere really. We're staying home, in New Mexico, so he can study rocks for three days, and I have to accompany him. Why do I have to go? I'm almost a teenager! (in 2 years, 4 months, 13 days). I know how to take care of myself. I make mac and cheese all the time! They put the directions ON THE BOX.
- 4 I just don't understand him. I wish they put directions on parents sometimes, especially paleontologist ones because I don't get the whole digging in the dirt thing.

—Maddox

**Stop & Discuss**

How does Maddox feel about the trip with his dad?

Underline at least one detail that shows how he feels.



Dear Journal,

June 26

- 5 Dad woke me up at five this morning. Getting up that early during summer has to be breaking some sort of law.
- 6 When we finally got to the excavation site and I stepped out of Dad's truck, I nearly passed out. The sun is like a million degrees hotter out here in the desert. Even in my lightest T-shirt, I'm baking from the inside out. If you find a Maddox-shaped rock out in the desert, don't blame Medusa. Blame the sun ... and my dad.
- 7 All around me it's just dirt, sharp rocks, burning sun, and probably snakes. Can you see the peril I'm in?
- 8 Also, I'm the only kid here. There are a few college students and another professor who works at the same university my dad teaches at. Her name's Aisha. She seems nice, but she's WAY too excited about hammering rocks. She even brought her tool kit to dinner like she thought I wanted to see it.
- 9 The tools weren't extraordinary. Just regular tools, but smaller. A mini pickax, mini shovels, tiny little brushes, scrapers like they use at the dentist ... whatever.
- 10 She showed me a picture of something she uncovered that could be a dinosaur fossil and said I could help her excavate it tomorrow if I wanted to. I don't know. Maybe I'll check it out. It will probably be less boring than spending all day in the tent.

—Maddox



Stop & Discuss

What does Maddox think about the site so far? Predict what he will do next.

Use details from the text to explain your ideas.



Determine Word Meanings

- Use multiple strategies to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases.
 - Look inside a word for word parts you know.
 - Look around a word for context clues about the meaning.
 - Look beyond a text to understand references to characters from well-known stories, such as myths. Such references are called **allusions**.

Reread/Think

Reread Part 1 of “Digging In.” Use word parts, background knowledge, and context clues to figure out the meanings of words and phrases. Record this information in the chart.

Word or Phrase	Word Parts or Background Knowledge	Context Clues	Meaning
accompany (paragraph 3)	<i>com</i> = with or together		
excavation site (paragraph 6)	<i>ex/cava/tion</i> = out + hole or space + process or act of		
Medusa (paragraph 6)	In an Ancient Greek myth, humans turn to stone when they look at Medusa.		
peril (paragraph 7)	Spanish <i>peligro</i> = English <i>danger</i>		

Talk

Share your ideas about the words in your chart. Explain how you figured out their meanings.

___ is a clue about the word ___. That clue helped me figure out the word means ___.

The word ___ means ___.

Write

Write three sentences using words from the chart. Underline these words in your sentences.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

WRITING CHECKLIST

- ☐ I used at least three words from the chart in my sentences.
- ☐ I used the words correctly and underlined them.
- ☐ I used complete sentences.
- ☐ I used correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.



Digging In

PART 2

by Brooks Benjamin

Dear Journal,

June 27

- 1 The sun **MUST** be closer to Earth here. What else could explain this blazing heat? At least our tents are at the base of the mountains, so we're in the shade later in the day. But in the middle of the day we don't stand a chance!
- 2 I decided to go with Dad to see if Aisha had discovered a T-Rex skull or something, but I had no idea I had to trek up the steepest mountain ever. Under the hot sun. Tripping over loose rock. For hours and hours. It was an odyssey.
- 3 Two whole bottles of water later, I finally made it.
- 4 Thankfully, there were tents where I could rest in the shade and regain my strength. Dad stayed with me while I got my energy back and guzzled another bottle of water. But no matter how fast I drank, it wasn't enough.
- 5 Aisha walked over to talk to Dad, and when she was finished, do you know what she did?
- 6 She looked right at me and said, "Ready to get to work?"
- 7 She was serious! I told her I just came to see the dinosaur fossil, and she told me I had come at the perfect time because she was about to uncover it.
- 8 I asked her if I could rest a little longer first. I wasn't really tired anymore, but I wanted to make sure I wrote all this down before I stepped out into the sun and melted.

—Maddox




Stop & Discuss

How does Maddox feel about working with Aisha?

Underline details that support your response.

Dear Journal,

June 27

- 9 Okay, you know I never **exaggerate**, so when I say this next part, you know it's true. Seeing Dad and Aisha working with all those tools was actually kind of cool. They'd chisel away at some of the rock, scrape a section here, brush a section there.
- 10 Dad pointed to a part of the rock that was a different color and told me this was the fossil.
- 11 I asked him why they couldn't just **pry** the thing out with the little shovel, and they laughed.
- 12 "It's all about patience," Dad said.
- 13 Maybe that's why I'm not a paleontologist.
- 14 Except he handed me one of the tools and asked if I wanted to give it a try. My throat was parched again, and my clothes were sweat-glued to my skin. I needed more water.
- 15 But I took the brush. I had to feel what it was like to be so close to a real fossil, even if it was just for a second. 

exaggerate = say something is worse or better than it really is

pry = to pull something away from something else

Stop & Discuss

How does Maddox's attitude change? Why does it change?

Underline the sentence that *first* tells you Maddox's attitude has changed.





- 16 Aisha began trimming pieces of rock away with a tiny knife, and I was in charge of sweeping away the dust. We settled into a rhythm where she'd trim and I'd sweep, she'd trim and I'd sweep, and before I knew it, we had nearly the whole thing uncovered.
- 17 Dad and Aisha took some more measurements and wrote some stuff down. And that's when he looked at me and told me we may have just found a tooth fossil!
- 18 From an actual dinosaur!
- 19 AND I ACTUALLY GOT TO HELP UNCOVER IT!

—Maddox



Stop & Discuss

How can you tell that Maddox's feelings about helping at the site are changing?

Support your response with details from the text.

I can tell Maddox ___ because ___.





Determine Word Meanings

- Use context clues and background knowledge to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words.
- Background knowledge may include knowledge about word parts, words from other languages, and allusions to other stories, such as characters from mythology.

Reread/Think

Reread Part 2 of “Digging In.” List any context clues or background knowledge that can help you determine the meanings of the words in the chart. Then record a meaning for each word.

Word	Context Clues and Background Knowledge	Meaning
odyssey (paragraph 2)		
trek (paragraph 2)		
regain (paragraph 4)		
guzzled (paragraph 4)		
parched (paragraph 14)		





Digging In

PART 3

by Brooks Benjamin

Dear Journal, June 28

- 1 I didn't sleep much last night because I was way too excited! This morning, I even got up before Dad. Right now, we're eating breakfast, and everyone's talking about the objects they dug up, but my mind is focused on that tooth. I can't stop thinking about the fossil I helped unearth.
- 2 I've seen dinosaur fossils a million times in movies or TV shows or at the museum. But it's totally different when you see a fossil still in the ground.
- 3 At least it is for me. It's like something in my brain clicked, and I realized that these creatures stomped around in the same places we do today.
- 4 We're going to the site now, so I'll check in later.

—Maddox





Dear Journal,

June 28

- 5 Dad's pretty sure we're looking at a tooth fossil from the BIGGEST DINOSAUR THAT EVER ROAMED NORTH AMERICA! He said the dinosaur was titanic!
- 6 This dinosaur may have had a massive body, but its head was pretty small. Even weirder, it was a plant-eater. But we found the tooth in the DESERT, so that means millions of years ago, New Mexico was covered in plants! How cool is that?
- 7 I couldn't wait to get back to work.
- 8 This time, I got to do more than just brush away dust. Dad told me to put stuff ON the actual fossil, and when I asked what it was, he said it was glue.
- 9 He explained that fossils have lots of little cracks in them, and the glue helps "reinforce their structure." I think he meant that the glue helps everything stick together so that the fossil is stronger.
- 10 We chiseled a little ditch around the fossil to free it from the rock. Dad said that keeping SOME rock attached to the fossil was important because the rock would contain clues about what dinosaur it was and when it was alive. He said finding fossils isn't just about finding fossils. It's about finding everything else AROUND the fossils, too.
- 11 Anyway, today's our last day, and Dad promised me we'd do something fun after this. But you know what I told him?
- 12 A few more days here wouldn't be that bad.

—Maddox





Respond to Text

Reread/Think

Reread Part 3 of “Digging In.” Choose the best response to each question.

1. PART A

What is the meaning of *unearth* as it is used in paragraph 1?

- A. remove dirt from
- B. tell everyone about
- C. find a new home for
- D. take a photograph of

PART B

Which context clue from paragraph 1 **best** supports the answer to Part A?

- A. “breakfast”
- B. “dug up”
- C. “focused on”
- D. “tooth”

2. The word *titanic* comes from Ancient Greek mythology. A Titan was a member of a family of giants. What does this information help you understand about the dinosaur mentioned in paragraph 5?

- A. It had many brothers and sisters.
- B. It had many stories written about it.
- C. It was very unusual.
- D. It was very large.



Reread/Think

- 3.** What lesson does Maddox learn in this part of the story?
- A.** It is more fun to see fossils in a movie than in the real world.
 - B.** Looking for fossils is an exciting way to learn about the past.
 - C.** Most fossils are found in hot places like deserts.
 - D.** Cleaning fossils is best left to the experts.

Write

Paragraph 9 contains the phrase *reinforce their structure*. Explain what this phrase means in the context of the story. Describe how context clues and word parts help you understand the meaning of the phrase.

- ☐ I explained how
I used context clues
and word parts
to figure out the
meaning of the
phrase.
- ☐ I used complete
sentences.
- ☐ I used correct
spelling, punctuation,
and capitalization.

WRITING CHECKLIST

- ☐ I explained the meaning of the phrase *reinforce their structure*.
- ☐ I explained how I used context clues and word parts to figure out the meaning of the phrase.
- ☐ I used complete sentences.
- ☐ I used correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.



Respond to the Focus Question

What can we discover by exploring the world around us?

Reread/Think

Think about what happens to Maddox in the three parts of "Digging In."

Revisit parts of the story to help you remember. In the space below, describe what Maddox discovers about himself by exploring.

Talk

Share ideas about what Maddox discovers about himself by exploring.

Where would you like to explore? What do you think you might learn from that experience?

Maddox learns
that ____

I would like to explore ____.
I think I would learn ____.

Write

Work with your group to create a podcast script about Maddox's discoveries.

One person will be Maddox. The other group members will be interviewers.

Work together to write the interviewers' questions and Maddox's answers.

Include one question that asks Maddox what advice he has about trying new experiences.