NEWS BREAK

Article:  Fossil of vampire squid’s oldest ancestor is named for Biden

Section:  MAIN, A12

Sunday's News Break selects an article from Sunday, March 13, 2022 of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some teachers might use this as a take-home assignment and others might read and answer the questions in a small group or larger, class discussion.

*Please be sure to preview all NIE content before using it in your classroom to ensure it is appropriate for your students.

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Objectives:

Students will discuss algal blooms and fossilization of octopus millions of years ago. They’ll learn of Whalen’s recent discovery of suction cups on its preserved arms. Whalen and Neil Landman, a curator emeritus at the museum, described the new species in a paper published Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications. They named it Syllipsimopodi bideni. Students will learn more about the new species and how it was discovered.
Pre-Reading Discussion:

- What do you think the article will be about, using only these pictures?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using context clues? A context clue is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the identities and meanings of unknown words.
Tropical storms regularly flushed the bay with freshwater and fine sediments, feeding *algal blooms* and depleting the water of oxygen in certain spots.

*Algal blooms* Guess:

*Algal blooms* Definition:

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. ____ million years ago, Fergus County, Montana, was no stranger to monsoons. Back then, the region was a marine bay, much like the Bay of Bengal in South Asia.
2. Tropical storms regularly flushed the bay with freshwater and fine sediments, feeding algal blooms and depleting the water of ___________ in certain spots.
3. Anything that died in these spots could have the rare posthumous luck of being ______________, undisturbed.
4. When an ancient octopus died in these waters, its soft, squishy body was buried and pristinely ______________.
5. The fossil was originally donated to the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada in 1988 but sat in a drawer for decades until Christopher Whalen, a paleontologist from the American Museum of Natural History in New York, pulled it out of a drawer and noticed what?
6. When he looked under a microscope, what did he see that surprised him?
7. Intrigued, Whalen studied the fossil, expecting it would resemble other cephalopods found in the Montana limestone. But it turned out to be something quite different. What did they find?
8. Who was the new species named after and why?
9. What was named after President Trump?
10. ______ species were named after former President Barack Obama, including several fish and a lichen.
11. The new fossil, which has 10 arms, is the oldest known ______________ to have suckers on its arms. Modern squids and cuttlefish have 10 arms and octopuses have eight.

**Discussion Questions (small/large groups), Journal Prompts or Essay Questions:**

- *What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?*
- *At first, I thought ______________, but now I think ____________?*
- *What things did you already know from prior experience?*

*The suckers may be a small part of S. bideni’s story, but Whalen is indebted to them.* “This was sitting in a museum since the ’80s, and no one realized it was important,” he said. “We chanced on that importance because I happened to notice the arm suckers.”
• Why do you think Whalen pulled it out and studied the fossil more in-depth?
• Do you think there are other fossils that haven't been examined more in-depth? Why or why not?
• What was the most interesting part of this story, for you?

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