

NEWS BREAK

Article: **Dental discovery: Mastodon tooth fossil found in creek**

Section: **MAIN, A4**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, September 13, 2026**, of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

Feel free to adapt this lesson for your students. For instance, some educators may assign this as a homework task, while others might facilitate the reading and discussion of questions within small groups or larger class discussions.

****Please take a moment to review all NIE content before classroom use to ensure it is suitable 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.

Learning Objectives:

After reading the article, students will analyze how the discovery of a Pacific mastodon fossil in a protected California open space connects the preservation of natural habitats with the study of Earth's past. Students will be able to explain what the mastodon tooth reveals about extinct species that once lived in North America and why preserving fossils and natural lands is important for scientific research and public education. Students will evaluate the responsibilities of scientists, universities, museums, and land-management agencies in preserving, studying, and sharing significant fossil discoveries and explain how protecting open spaces can help preserve evidence of the past while protecting species and habitats today.

Pre-Reading Discussion:



- What do you think the article will be about, using this picture?
- 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 meaning of the word.

“Lynch, a **geomorphologist** at Balance Hydrologics, said Friday.”

Geomorphologist Guess:

Geomorphologist Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. Brigid Lynch was working along a wooded creek in a mountainous part of the _____ when she noticed something unusual among the rocks.
2. Lynch, a geomorphologist, discovered that the object sitting in the creek was the fossilized _____ of a Pacific mastodon.
3. The discovery was made while Lynch was working on a habitat restoration project designed to help protect the threatened _____ - _____.
4. The fossil was found in a preserve managed by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, an agency that protects more than _____ acres of land in the Santa Cruz Mountains region.

5. According to Chrissy Garcia, curator and manager of Stanford University's specimen collections, the fossil is in particularly good condition because scientists can see both the _____ and the _____ of the tooth.
6. The Pacific mastodon was an extinct, _____-like species that lived in North America thousands of years ago.
7. How long is the tooth that was found? _____ inches long
8. He said there are multiple species of mastodon that roamed for a few million years in North America, up till _____ to _____ years ago.
9. According to paleontologist Ron Tykoski, mastodon fossils can be found with some frequency depending on where you live. He explained that many fossils are discovered simply because someone happens to be in the _____.
10. Scientists at Stanford University will likely try to determine the exact _____ of the fossil and create a _____ copy of it.
11. The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District plans to use the 3D copy of the tooth for public _____ and _____.
12. The discovery of the mastodon tooth is significant not only because it provides scientists with evidence about prehistoric life, but also because it was found while people were working to protect the open spaces and _____ of another threatened species.

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?

Deeper-Dive "Connect & Explain" comprehension questions for small groups, entire classes or journal entries and/ or essay prompts for extended enrichment:

1. The article describes how Brigid Lynch discovered the mastodon tooth while working on a habitat restoration project. Why is it significant that the fossil was discovered while scientists were working to protect the habitat of another species?
2. The article explains that the Pacific mastodon lived in North America thousands of years ago before becoming extinct. What can fossils such as the mastodon tooth help scientists understand about animals and environments that existed in the past?
3. The mastodon tooth was found in a protected open-space preserve in the Santa Cruz Mountains. How does the discovery demonstrate the importance of protecting natural lands for scientific research as well as for living plants and animals?
4. The article states that the fossil is "in great condition" because both the crown and root have been preserved. Why might the condition of a fossil be important to scientists studying prehistoric animals?

5. Scientists at Stanford University will try to determine the exact age of the mastodon tooth. Why is determining the age of the fossil important to understanding the history of the region?
6. The article explains that mastodon fossils are often discovered simply because someone happens to be “in the right place.” What does Lynch’s discovery suggest about the role of observation and curiosity in scientific research?
7. The original fossil will be studied and preserved at Stanford University, while a 3D copy will be given to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. Why might creating a 3D copy be important for public education and outreach?
8. The article focuses on an extinct species while also describing efforts to protect a threatened species. How does the article connect the extinction of the mastodon with the importance of protecting species that are still living today?
9. The article describes responsibilities shared by scientists, universities, and land-management agencies in preserving and studying this specific fossil. What responsibilities do these organizations have when they discover evidence that can teach the public about the natural history of an area?
10. The article suggests that the mastodon tooth is valuable not only as a scientific specimen but also as a tool for public education. Why is it important for discoveries like this to be shared with the public?

Extended Essay Prompts

- The article describes how the discovery of a Pacific mastodon tooth occurred while scientists were working to protect the habitat of the threatened California red-legged frog. Examine how the discovery connects the preservation of natural lands with scientific research and our understanding of the past. In your essay, discuss what fossils can teach us about extinct species and environments and why protecting open spaces is important for both scientific discovery and conservation.
- The article describes how a fossilized mastodon tooth can provide scientists with information about an animal that lived in North America thousands of years ago. Why is preserving fossils important to our understanding of Earth’s history? In your essay, explain what scientists can learn from fossils such as the mastodon tooth and evaluate the responsibilities of scientists, universities, and land-management agencies in preserving and sharing these discoveries.

- The article explains that the mastodon tooth will be preserved and studied at Stanford University, while a 3D copy will be provided for public education and outreach. Why is it important for scientific discoveries to be preserved and shared with the public? In your essay, examine the responsibilities of universities, scientists, museums, and land-management agencies in preserving important discoveries and making them available for future generations.

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