

# Mosses

By Sharon Fabian

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<sup>1</sup> Scientists believe that about 300 million years ago in the Paleozoic era, mosses covered large areas of North America and northern Europe. This was also the time period when cockroaches and reptiles first appeared. It was way before the dinosaurs. It was also the time when most of today's coal and oil was formed.

<sup>2</sup> What are mosses? Mosses are part of a group of primitive plants called bryophytes. They are called primitive because they go way back to the Paleozoic era, and also because they do not have the same structures as more modern plants. Mosses do not have real roots. Instead they have structures called rhizoids that may be only one cell thick, about as thick as a piece of thread. Mosses also do not have a system to transport water up their stems like other plants do. So mosses are usually small and low to the ground. They do have stems and leaves.

<sup>3</sup> Mosses grow close together in a group. A mat of moss on a forest floor may actually be made up of thousands of tiny plants. Usually moss prefers damp, shady places, but not always. In addition to forest floors, moss also grows on rocks, tree bark, and walls. It grows in marshes, bogs, mires, fens, and on sand dunes. Sometimes moss grows in shallow lakes or streams. Moss grows in all parts of the world, from tropical rain forests in Africa, to Antarctica and the arctic region at the North Pole. All together there are over 9,000 different species of mosses.

<sup>4</sup> Like all plants and animals, mosses are part of the ecosystem wherever they live. Moss is good for the soil and helpful to people and animals. For example, there are spiders that make their home in moss. Some birds use moss to make a soft lining for their nest. An insect in New Guinea called a weevil is camouflaged by the moss growing on its back.

<sup>5</sup> Gardeners love peat moss. They use it to hold water in their garden soil and to add nutrients to the soil. In World War I, peat moss was used to dress wounds. Some American Indians even used peat moss for diapers! In Ireland and other parts of Europe, people burn peat, which is built up from many years of decayed moss, for fuel.

<sup>6</sup> The study of mosses is called bryology.

<sup>7</sup> You might think that a simple little plant like moss is not all that interesting, but some people would disagree. For instance, the New York Botanical Garden has produced an electronic catalog with details on about 200,000 samples of moss from Canada, Greenland, and the United States. Moss is very big in Britain too. The damp climate from the ocean there seems to be just right for many species of moss. The British Bryological Society is a group of people who each record information about the mosses in their area. They tramp through marshes, bogs, and fens to catalog as many mosses as they can find. They are creating a moss map of the country.

<sup>8</sup> Well, not everyone is as fond of moss as those British bryologists, but like a lot of other things, the more you know about moss, the more interesting it becomes.

## Mosses

<p>1. Mosses have lived on Earth longer than dinosaurs did.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A True</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B False</p>	<p>2. Bryophytes is another word for mosses.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A True</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B False</p>
<p>3. Moss only grows in damp shady places.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A True</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B False</p>	<p>4. A scientist who studies mosses is a</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Chemist</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Zoologist</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Bryologist</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Paleontologist</p>
<p>5. Moss is good for the soil because</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A It holds water</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B It holds water and it also adds nutrients to the soil</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C It is not good for the soil</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D It add nutrients to the soil</p>	<p>6. A fen is</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A A person who studies moss</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B A reptile</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C A type of moss</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D A place where moss grows</p>
<p>7. Explain how mosses are different from other plants, and how they are like other plants.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	