

Death of the dinosaurs

Level

Pre intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level A2–B1 and above)

Comment

This eLesson looks at the extinction of the dinosaurs and theories about how this came about. Visuals will be of use here, eg a picture of the crater in Mexico. Some of the *Related websites* below include visuals. Lower levels may find the text quite challenging, but the initial quiz is intended to orientate learners to the reading text, by asking general knowledge questions that they are likely to know.

One of the sites indicated has a video clip which acts as a summary of the events. For lower level students it would be very helpful to show this near the start (after doing Exercise 1). Otherwise, show it towards the end of the lesson if appropriate, to consolidate.

How to use the lesson

- 1 Show some visuals of dinosaurs and see if anyone knows the name of them! Do not elicit other details at this stage. Exercise 1 is a pre-reading task in the form of a quiz, to find out how much students know before reading the text. If your students appear to know little about dinosaurs, let them work in pairs or threes. At a relevant point, clarify any key lexis such as *species*, *dinosaur age*, *mammal*, *asteroid* and *volcanic explosion*, writing these on the board. Show a visual of an asteroid, if you can. Check the answers with the full class, managing this stage as a team competition, if appropriate.
- 2 Introduce the text by paraphrasing the first paragraph, describing what was talked about at the science conference in Texas and what was decided.
- 3 Students look at the table in Exercise 2. Ask students to work in pairs to try and to match some of the answers (this is relatively easy, even without reading the text). Referring to the Glossary, students then read the text to find out the answers. Ask stronger students to cover the second column and look for the answers in the text, to raise the challenge.
- 4 Put students into different pairs to work on Exercise 3. This is primarily a comprehension exercise. At higher levels, also encourage students to provide accurate questions. If necessary, write one or two up on the board. For early finishers, provide an additional answer: *because it meant that later mammals and later humans developed*. (Question: *Why was the asteroid a good thing for us?*)
- 5 If appropriate, provide a mini-focus on words used to talk about approximations, either at this point or after the discussion. Ask students to find the following words in the text, all used before a number: *around*, *about*, *approximately*, *between*, *roughly*. Elicit them and write on the board. Ask which ones are different: *between* needs two figures, *about* and *around* are particularly frequent in speech, and *approximately* is often used in more scientific, formal contexts. Ask students to turn over the text and tell them that they will need to write a short answer in response to your questions, using one of the phrases. Then ask students questions based on the text, eg *How fast was the asteroid? How powerful was the impact?* etc.
- 6 Students read Exercise 4 in threes to discuss the points. For early finishers, if they are interested in the topic and quite imaginative, ask the question: *If you were a dinosaur, which one would you be?* Pool some ideas from this exercise as a whole class, putting up relevant lexis on the board as it comes up, where relevant.

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- 7 To round off the lesson, particularly for intermediate and above students, elicit the word *palaeontologist* from Exercise 1. Put students into pairs and give them four minutes to make as many words as possible from the word, eg *pale*, *to*, etc.
- 8 A relevant follow-on homework task for students who are interested in the topic is to do research on different dinosaurs for a mini presentation (in groups of three / four) in the next lesson. They should come prepared with a visual and information on *size, features, eating habits, when / where it lived, other interesting points*. A good selection might include: brontosaurus (apatosaurus), stegosaurus, tyrannosaurus rex, triceratops, pterodactyl, panoplosaurus, anklyosaurus. Alternatively, go to the Natural History website (see below) for the *Dino Snores: Sleep over at the Museum* page. Ask students to read the information and write 4–7 questions for you and / or others, based on the information, eg *How much is a ticket?*

Answer key

1

- 1 65 million
- 2 plant and meat eaters
- 3 150 million years ago
- 4 700 species
- 5 an asteroid
- 6 mammals and birds
- 7 palaeontologists

2

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 50–70% | the amount of plant and animal life killed off |
| 180 km wide | the size of the crater in Mexico |
| 20 km per second | the speed of the asteroid |
| 150 million years | the length of the dinosaur age |
| 10-15km wide | the size of the asteroid |
| once in a million years | the frequency of a strike from an asteroid like this one |
| 41 | the number of experts examining the evidence |

3

The students' questions may be phrased differently, but carry the same focus and meaning:

- 1 How many theories were there to explain the death of the dinosaurs, until this conference?
- 2 Before this conference, what were the two main explanations for the death of the dinosaurs?
- 3 At the conference, which theory was considered to be the most likely cause of their death?
- 4 Where was an important part of the evidence for the asteroid theory?
- 5 Can you see the crater?
- 6 What happened after the asteroid hit the earth?
- 7 What can you see around the coast of Mexico?
- 8 How long was it cold and dark for?
- 9 What came after the darkness and cold?
- 10 How many of the animals and plants were killed off at this time?

4

Students' own answers.

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Related websites

The following websites might be useful, for either yourself or your students:

<http://www.universetoday.com/tag/chicxulub-crater/> (the conference website)

<http://inlinethumb20.webshots.com/6675/2692643020102365357S600x600Q85.jpg> (visual of the Chicxulub crater, Mexico)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/8550504.stm> (this includes a video)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/2837407.stm>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/nov/08/humans-sixth-extinction>

The different theories:

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/a.buckley/dino.htm>

<http://www.unmuseum.org/deaddino.htm>

The homework tasks:

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/visit-us/whats-on/nights-museum-events/dino-snores/index.html> (The Natural History Museum, London)

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/dinosaurs/>