

**TESTS FOR HIGHER STANDARDS**

**English Language Arts**

**Reading**



*Based on the —*



**GRADE LEVEL TEST**

**Grade 8**

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Use the following passage to answer the next 10 questions.

### The La Brea Tar Pits

- 1 Los Angeles evokes images of surfing, Santa Monica Pier, Disneyland, Universal Studios, Hollywood, and so much more. One place, however, that isn't seen on the usual tours of Los Angeles is the La Brea tar pits. This is where the modern world meets up with the prehistoric one. Located 7 miles west of Los Angeles back in 1910, the tar pits now sit right in the middle of downtown Los Angeles!
- 2 Tar pits are created when crude oil comes to the surface through cracks in the Earth's crust; the light part of the oil evaporates, leaving behind the heavy tar, or asphalt, in sticky pools. For thousands of years, local Native Americans used the tar from the La Brea tar pits as glue and as waterproof caulking (sealing) for baskets and canoes. When the Westerners arrived, they mined the tar and used it for roofing of their homes in the nearby town of Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles.
- 3 At first, when locals found bones in the tar, they thought that some unlucky cattle had gotten trapped there. In 1901, however, Professor John C. Merriam and his students, from the University of California at Berkeley, carried out the first scientific excavation of the tar pits. What they found was a paleontologist's dream!
- 4 Rich in fossils dating back to the Pleistocene Epoch, the time period that spanned from 2.6 million to 11,400 years ago, the tar pits contain at least 59 mammal species and over 135 bird species. As well, over 660 species of plants, mollusks, and insects have been found in the tar pits. All of the fossils provide a snapshot of life in southern California from 40,000 to 8,000 years ago. Imagine seeing a woolly mammoth or a Smilodon, the most famous of the saber-toothed cats or "tigers", walking down the streets of downtown Los Angeles today! These weren't the only mammal fossils discovered; native horses, camels, long-horned bison, and mastodons, which are no longer found in North America, were among the buried treasures of the La Brea tar pits. Many other plants and animals found in the pits closely resemble or are identical to species that still live in the area — or that would be living in the area had Los Angeles not been built!



**Saber-Toothed Cat or "Tiger"**

- 5 Today, a huge number of the La Brea fossils are on display at the George C. Page Museum of La Brea Discoveries, which sits right next door to the tar pits. Gallons of asphalt continue to ooze and bubble to the surface each day, at times trapping insects, worms, lizards, birds, rodents, and rabbits, especially during warmer days when the asphalt is stickiest. Excavations go on to this day, and even though millions of fossils have been discovered, the scientists continue to work in the tar pits, hoping to find yet one more new discovery!
- 6 Should you ever go to Los Angeles, visit all of the usual tourist attractions, including the Jurassic Park ride at Universal Studios in Hollywood. However, if you want to experience the thrill of seeing real fossils of mammoths, mastodons, saber-toothed cats, and more, then head over to the Page Museum. Once there, don't be surprised if you hear the call of a dire wolf echoing from the depths of the La Brea tar pits!



L.8.4a, RI.8.4

**18. Read the following sentence from the passage.**

Los Angeles evokes images of surfing, Santa Monica Pier, Disneyland, Universal Studios, Hollywood, and so much more.

**What does evokes mean, as used in the sentence above?**

- A attracts
- B calls forth
- C stimulates
- D suppresses

L.8.4c, L.8.4a, RI.8.4

**19. Read these definitions for fossil(s).**

**fossil:** (*noun*) **1:** any remains, impression, or trace of a living thing of a former geologic age, as a skeleton, footprint, etc.; **2:** a markedly outdated or old-fashioned person or thing.

**As it is used in paragraph 4, what word could replace fossils?**

- A ancients
- B veterans
- C specimens
- D adventurers