

Living Fossil

Imagine how shocked you would be if you came face to face with a live dinosaur. Now you have some idea of how amazed scientists were when they learned that a live coelacanth had been caught. The coelacanth isn't a dinosaur; it's a fish. Scientists believed that this fish had died out around the same time as dinosaurs—over 60 million years ago. Then, in 1938, a fisherman in South Africa pulled a live one into his vessel!

The fisherman didn't understand how important his catch was. But a woman named Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, who worked at a nearby museum, had a feeling it was special. The fish was over 4 feet long and weighed 127 pounds. Its scales were a beautiful shade of blue, and its odd-looking fins almost appeared to be legs. Marjorie had never seen anything like it.



She searched through books to figure out what species the fish was, but she could not find it anywhere. So, she sent a drawing to her friend James Smith, who knew more about fish. Though Marjorie's drawing was rough, James suspected that it showed a species that scientists had seen only in fossils. Several weeks later, James traveled to Marjorie's museum and saw the fish specimen itself. He had been correct—it was a coelacanth!

The discovery of a "living fossil" caused a sensation. The coelacanth was very important in scientists' study of animals. It showed a link between animals with fins and animals with legs.

Quiz Questions

1. What is the main idea of this story?

- a. The fisherman who caught the coelacanth didn't understand how important his catch was.
- b. The coelacanth's odd-looking fins almost appeared to be legs.
- c. The discovery of the coelacanth was important because the fish was a "living fossil."

2. Why was the coelacanth important to scientists?

- a. It showed a link between animals with fins and animals with legs.
- b. It was over 4 feet long and weighed 127 pounds.
- c. It had scales that were a beautiful shade of blue.

3. What does the word **vessel** mean in this story?

- a. a large boat

___ b. something to drink out of

___ c. a museum

4. Why couldn't Marjorie find the coelacanth in any books?

___ a. because the fish was a species that scientists had seen only in fossils

___ b. because Marjorie worked at a museum that didn't have many books

___ c. because she didn't know as much about fish as her friend James did

5. Why were scientists amazed when they learned that a live coelacanth had been caught?

6. Select the best word for each definition.

catch

sensation

suspected

rough

link

had a feeling about

something that connects

a new, exciting thing

thing that has been trapped

not exact or not perfect

7. Move the events into the correct order.

A fisherman pulled a live coelacanth into his vessel.

James suspected that the fish was a coelacanth.

James traveled to Marjorie's museum to see the specimen.

Marjorie looked through books to find the fish's species.

Marjorie sent a drawing to her friend James.