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PASSAGE IV

NATURAL SCIENCE: *The Armored Armadillo*

Meandering along the shoulder of the highway, the armadillo is surprisingly unaffected by its surroundings. This nomad of the desert appears to have no cares in the world, and really, why should he, when he carries on his back a natural suit of armor? He looks far more awkward than do most animals, yet this alien creature handles himself remarkably well. For such a small animal, the armadillo can withstand a surprising amount of aggression from most predators. Although his shell is far from impenetrable, the armadillo can rest assured that he is safer than many animals who wander the Texas roads.

The *Dasyus novemcinctus*, or nine-banded armadillo, is characterized by the bands that arch across its back. The bands are made of bony plates and are covered with leathery skin—these plates, in fact cover the animal's back, sides, tail, and the top of its head, creating a somewhat turtle-like shell. The interesting thing about the nine-banded armadillo is that the number of bands on its back may be anywhere between seven and eleven; nine is just the most common number. Contrary to popular belief, only one species of armadillo can roll itself into a ball; the three-banded armadillo does this as its primary defense against predators. Other armadillos often scurry under thorn bushes, rather like tanks strengthening their position.

Armadillos are, on average, two and a half feet long and they typically weigh between eight and sixteen pounds, although across different species those numbers can vary dramatically. Nine-banded females give birth once a year, generally to four identical young, which come from a single fertilized egg. The nine-banded armadillo is the only species of animal in which this remarkable trait occurs. The four-month-long gestation period is more than enough time for the offspring to develop, as they are born fully formed with their eyes open. After a few hours they begin to walk and are able to distance themselves from their mothers after only a few months. Few animals are able to outrun a startled armadillo, and if chased into its burrow, the animal is able to arch its armor against the burrow walls, making the armadillo nearly impossible to become dislodged; this is quite frustrating to dogs and other animals who would like to eat the armadillo. In addition to threats of being eaten by an opportunistic predator, the armadillo must also endure a more severe danger: automobiles. A significant number of armadillos die each year after being struck by cars.

Armadillos can be found in the northern parts of South America and as far north as the State of Texas. Nine-banded armadillos prefer warm climates and like to build burrows in the wet soil near streambeds, which they often share with other species, such as rabbits and opossums. Armadillos are nocturnal, and they spend their evenings digging for grubs and other invertebrates which make up the majority of their diet.

Most Texans see the armadillo as a pest, since the creatures have a tendency to ruin corn by eating the parts of the plants that are low to the ground; they

occasionally will eat other farm vegetables as well. Armadillos provide some benefits however, as they eat many annoying and harmful insects and are often used in medical research. Interestingly enough, they are the only mammal besides humans that can contract leprosy.

While armadillos are seen as strange and often troublesome animals, they are unique and valuable for research. This armored native of the south will most likely continue to fascinate and charm people for many years to come.

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31. The author likens armadillos scurrying under thorn bushes to "tanks strengthening their positions" in Paragraph 2 because:
- armadillos are well armored and thorn bushes give them even more protection.
 - an armadillo's shell is as hard as steel.
 - the scurrying of an armadillo sounds like a tank rolling over land.
 - the armadillo resembles a tank in appearance.
32. The author calls the armadillo an "alien creature" in the first paragraph because:
- not much is known about armadillos.
 - armadillos come from another planet.
 - armadillos are very aggressive.
 - an armadillo's unique appearance makes it stand out.
33. The passage indicates that, unlike some other desert animals, the armadillo:
- lacks a means of defending itself.
 - can go without drinking water for long periods of time.
 - reproduces many times each year.
 - can withstand most predators' attacks.
34. As it is used in the passage (line 42), the phrase "arch its armor" most nearly means:
- to construct.
 - to curve.
 - to dig.
 - to fight.
35. Based on information in the passage, the author feels that the nine-banded armadillo is especially unique because:
- it can curl into a ball.
 - it is the rarest type of armadillo.
 - it gives birth to four identical young.
 - its diet consists entirely of grubs.

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36. The passage indicates that most Texans consider the armadillo to be both:
- F. rare and sacred.
 - G. strange and interesting.
 - H. annoying and helpful.
 - J. valued and dangerous.
37. What does the passage state is one of armadillo's greatest threats?
- A. farmers.
 - B. cars.
 - C. opossums.
 - D. dogs.
38. The passage states that, in the Southern United States, armadillos do damage to:
- F. crops.
 - G. deserts.
 - H. rivers.
 - J. houses.
39. The passage indicates that, at birth, armadillos:
- A. are utterly helpless.
 - B. are identical to adults.
 - C. are able to see.
 - D. are totally independent.
40. According to the passage, the scientific name *Dasypus novemcinctus* is unique to:
- F. the three-banded armadillo.
 - G. the six-banded armadillo.
 - H. all armadillos.
 - J. the nine-banded armadillo.

END OF THE READING TEST.

STOP! IF YOU HAVE TIME LEFT OVER, CHECK YOUR WORK ON THIS SECTION ONLY.

TLC Stamp

