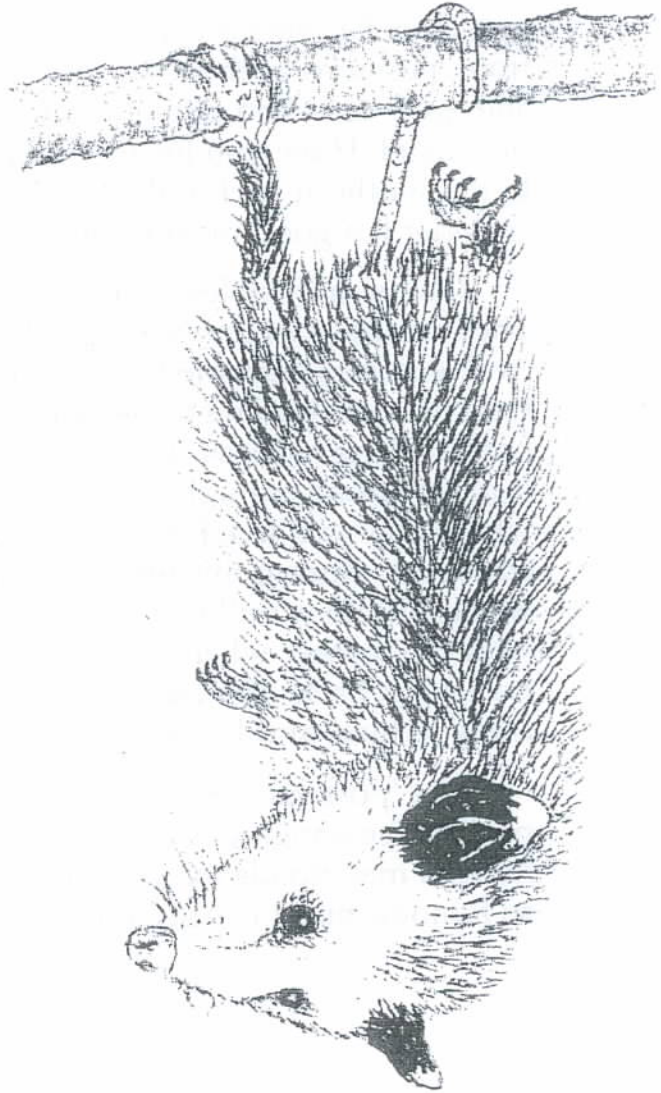


11. American Marsupials

You may have seen an unusual animal about the size of a house cat beside the road while you were riding in a car at night. You may have thought it was a large rat, but what you saw was probably the only marsupial (or pouched mammal) that lives in the fields and woods of North America. It is the common opossum, often named Virginia opossum, and usually just called 'possum. It is very nocturnal, which means active at night, so you are not likely to see one in the daytime. The 'possum spends daylight hours sleeping in its den, which may be in a hollow tree, a pile of rocks, another animal's abandoned burrow, or under a building. The den or nest is lined with leaves and grass to help insulate the 'possum in the winter. Opossums don't really hibernate, but when it gets very cold they lower their body temperature and sleep a lot while living off their stored-up fat.



The opossum has grayish-colored fur covering most of its body. The head is usually white, and the ears and feet are black with white tips. The pointed nose, ears, and tail have very little hair on them. Their feet have five toes that look more like fingers. One toe on each hind foot works more like a thumb to help the 'possum hold onto limbs. Even though it spends most of its time on the ground, the 'possum is a good climber, and is famous for being able to hold on and even hang by its tail. A full-grown 'possum will be holding on with a hind foot also since it falls too often if it just uses its tail.

Opossums will eat just about anything. The reason you may see them along a road is because they even eat dead animals they find killed there. They also eat a lot of insects, worms, fruit, grain, and small mammals they can catch. They catch roosting birds at night and raid their nests to eat the

American Marsupials

Vocabulary Checkup Write the words from the box on the correct blanks.



abdomen	hisses	limp	marsupial
nocturnal	odor	pouch	temperature

1. A scent or smell is an _____.
2. A mammal that carries its young in a pouch is a _____.
3. Between the chest and hips on the body is the _____.
4. Animals active only at night are _____.
5. Anything that lacks stiffness and is floppy is called _____.
6. A small bag-like pocket for marsupial babies is a _____.
7. The degree of heat in a living body is the _____.
8. Whistles through the teeth using the "s" sound are _____.

Comprehension You may need to look back at the story to answer the questions correctly.

1. What are some of the names used to identify the opossum in North America?

2. Describe what an opossum looks like in detail.

3. What are some of the reasons you are likely to see 'possums at night along a road?

Name _____ Date _____

15. Reptiles with Shells

Reptiles are animals like snakes, lizards, crocodiles, alligators, and tortoises and turtles. They all are cold-blooded, which means that their body temperature will be about the same temperature as the air, water, or dirt around them. Tortoises and turtles are the only reptiles with shells covering their bodies. They have some bones inside, but that tough shell instead of skin is great protection. Many turtles can pull their head and legs inside their shell for safety. Sea turtles can't pull inside their shells, however, and they have flippers instead of legs like the land turtles.



The green turtle lives in all of the warm waters of the world including the waters along the coast of the United States. These sea turtles grow as long as 5 feet and weigh up to 400 pounds. Green turtles are brown or green with yellow spots. They get their name from their greenish-colored flesh. They have lungs to breathe air like mammals, but the green

sea turtle can stay underwater for five hours before coming to the surface for air. Green turtles can't draw back into their shell for safety, but they can swim as fast as 20 miles per hour. You probably can't run that fast on land, and of course nobody can swim that fast.

The green turtle stays in shallow waters most of the time. Young turtles will eat small crabs and shrimp. Adults like to eat sea grasses and algae. They reach up and nibble leaves off tropical trees that hang over the water. But their favorite food is eel grass, which grows in the muddy waters along North and South America. Turtles don't have teeth, so they depend on the sharp jaws of their beak to cut the grass and mash it. They have very strong jaws, so don't stick your finger in there.

Female green turtles will sometimes be seen far out at sea as they migrate to a nesting beach called a rookery. Some of them will migrate thousands of miles to a warm spot on their favorite rookery to lay their eggs. Ascension Island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean has thousands of green turtles nesting there each year. The female will pull herself up the beach and use her flippers to dig a hole in the warm sand. She will lay as

Reptiles with Shells

Vocabulary Checkup Write the words from the box on the correct blanks.



algae	cold-blooded	flesh	flippers
lungs	reptiles	rookery	surface

1. Air-breathing, cold-blooded animals with scales are _____.
2. Broad, flat feet or legs to help in swimming are _____.
3. A group of tiny plants that grow in wet places are called _____.
4. The top or outermost layer of something is the _____.
5. The soft, meaty part of an animal's body is called _____.
6. Animals with backbones breathe by using sacs called _____.
7. Animals whose blood temperature fits the surrounding materials are said to be _____.
8. A nesting area for large numbers of a species is called a _____.

Comprehension You may need to look back at the story to answer the questions correctly.

1. Turtles are like snakes and other reptiles because their _____

_____.
2. Even though they are brown, green, and yellow, some sea turtles are named "green turtles" because _____

_____.
3. Green sea turtles show they are great swimmers by _____

_____.

Name _____ Date _____