mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “What was the Ice Age like?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hey, it's Danni! A few years ago, I went on a trip to the US State of Alaska. While I was there, I got to visit these glaciers. It was incredible to see so much ice and snow in one place. Someone named Emily has a question that has to do with ice. Let's call Emily now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Danni.
- Hi, Emily.
- I have a question for you. What was the Ice Age like?
- Oh, that's a great question.

You might have heard of the ice age before. Maybe you've seen movies or books about the ice age that include animals we don't have today, like woolly mammoths and saber tooth cats, or maybe this is new to you. I'm curious. When you hear the words ice age, what do you think of?

VIDEO 2

I don't know how you answered, but I bet the image in your mind included, well, ice. Lots of it. Maybe you pictured something like those glaciers in Alaska, or animals surviving in the snowy icy poles of the Earth. If you live somewhere that gets cold in the winter, maybe you pictured something you've seen closer to home, like icicles hanging trees or piles of snow. And you're

right. Simply put an ice age is when earth gets colder and icier. This has happened more than once. Over the billions of years that the earth has existed, sign to think there have been at least five major ice ages. The time people usually call the ice age is the most recent one. It began only two point five million years ago. During this ice age, the temperature of the earth hasn't always been the same. It's gotten colder and less cold over years and years. But during the coldest period of the ice age, there was way more ice and snow than there is on Earth today. And that ice and snow lasted for thousands and thousands of years. Imagine what it would be like. If instead of having winter snow for a few months this year, it was cold and icy all year. And the next year, and the year after, and for the rest of your life. And on and on for thousands of years. You'd have to get pretty good at surviving in the cold, right? Well, it turns out lots of living things did figure out how to survive through the ice age, all over the world scientists have found remains of animals who lived through the ice ages' coldest years. These ancient remains are fossils. Like check this out, this is a fossil skeleton of a woolly mammoth. When it was alive, this huge animal looks similar to an elephant but with a big woolly coat of fur. This woolly mammoth skeleton was discovered in the US state of Michigan. These days much of Michigan usually gets cold and snowy in winter, but by summer, it heats up again. And the snow melts. But back when this woolly mammoth was alive, Michigan was covered in ice and snow year round. That thick fur coat helped this mammoth keep warm. But even at the ice age's coldest, not everywhere with snow and ice all the time, Actually, a lot of the earth was not snowy during the coldest years of the ice age, including much of the United States. Still, even those not snowy places didn't look like they do today because so much of the earth's water was frozen. In huge sheets of ice and snow. Many areas not covered in ice had less water than they do today. Less water meant fewer thick forests and more places that look like this, grasslands. Grasslands hosted some animals that couldn't survive in constant ice and snow. Like, check out this one.

This is a sloth. These days, sloths tend to live high in the trees of tropical rain forests. But take a look at the bones of a sloth from the colder years of the ice age next to a human. The sloth looks huge. If that sloth tried to hang from a thin jungle branch, it would fall. This ancient animal is a giant ground sloth. These big creatures lived on the ground feeding off of grasses and other plants. Some animals that prowled grasslands back then almost identical to the animals we have on Earth today. Like these guys, lions. Today, lions can only be found on the continents of Africa and Asia. But during the colder years of the ice age, they roamed across much of North America. And here's one ice age creature you might recognize. People. Humans survive through the coldest years of the ice age too. So in summary, an ice age is a period of millions of years when the whole earth cools. But it's way more complicated than just ice all over the place. During the coldest years of the ice age, much of Earth was covered in ice and snow year-round. But many places were not ice and snow in those years, but instead, grasslands. From fossils, we've learned about many animals who live during that time. Some we don't have on Earth anymore, like mammoths, and giant slots. And some, we do, like lions and even humans. And there's more left to discover Every year, we find more and more clues about these chilly years on our planet. Keep an eye out for discoveries near where you live. That's all for this week's question. Thanks for asking, Emily.