Comparing Tortoises and Turtles

Have you ever wondered what the difference is between a tortoise and a turtle? They both have scales. They have a hard shell covering. Both types of animals also lay eggs. So why do we have different names for these reptiles? Scientists give each reptile its special name because of a few important differences.

The most important difference between a tortoise and a turtle is where they live. Tortoises spend the majority of their time on land. They visit bodies of water only to drink or bathe. Tortoises that live in hot and dry areas will dig underground burrows to keep cool. In contrast, turtles live in water most of the time. Sea turtles spend their time swimming in the ocean. The females only come to shore to lay their eggs. Other turtles live in freshwater areas such as lakes and ponds. These turtles swim, but they may also climb onto a rock nearby to bask in the sun.

A tortoise and a turtle have different features that help them adapt to where they live. Tortoises have strong and round feet. These help them walk on land and dig burrows. However, turtles usually have webbed feet for swimming. In fact, sea turtles have long feet that look like flippers! They also have a streamlined body made just for swimming.

Because a tortoise and turtle live in different places, they have learned to eat some different foods. Tortoises are herbivores. This means they only eat plants. Foods like cactus, shrubs, and other plants with water are what tortoises like to eat. Turtles, on the other hand, are omnivores. This means they eat both meat and plants. Turtles eat insects, plants, and fish.

Though these reptiles are very similar, you can see that looking closer will help you notice some clear differences. Now, the next time you see one of these reptiles, try to decide if you’re seeing a land–dwelling tortoise or a water–dwelling turtle.

Read this sentence.

The most important difference between a tortoise and a turtle is where they live.

Which of the following sentences is NOT a supporting detail for the sentence above?

A. Tortoises spend the majority of their time on land.
B. Tortoises have strong and round feet.
C. Sea turtles spend their time swimming in the ocean.
D. Other turtles live in freshwater areas such as lakes and ponds.
2 Which of the following sentences gives the MAIN idea of the passage?
A. The most important difference between a tortoise and a turtle is where they live.
B. Tortoises have strong and round feet.
C. Scientists give each reptile its special name because of a few important differences.
D. Because a tortoise and turtle live in different places, they have learned to eat some different foods.

3 The author most likely wrote this passage to __________.
A. help the reader understand the difference between herbivores and omnivores
B. entertain the reader
C. inform the reader about the differences between tortoises and turtles
D. tell the reader about her favorite reptile

4 Which of the following sentences is the BEST supporting detail for this sentence?
Because a tortoise and turtle live in different places, they have learned to eat some different foods.
A. Tortoises spend the majority of their time on land.
B. The most important difference between a tortoise and a turtle is where they live.
C. Sea turtles spend their time swimming in the ocean.
D. Turtles eat insects, plants, and fish.
Source 1: Encyclopedia article about spider bites

Many people fear spiders. Spiders do bite humans, but only if they are scared or disturbed. A bite is easily treated. Be sure to clean the bite and to not scratch it.

Source 2: Science website that discusses the benefits of spiders on the ecosystem

Many people fear spiders. Spiders help the world by keeping the number of insects down. Spiders build sticky webs, and the insects fly into the webs and get caught. Then, the spider wraps each insect up and sucks its blood to give itself nutrients to live.

A. Spiders do bite humans, but only if they are scared or disturbed.
B. Spiders build sticky webs, and the insects fly into the webs and get caught.
C. Spiders help the world by keeping the number of insects down.
D. Many people fear spiders.
E. The spider wraps each insect up and sucks its blood to give itself nutrients to live.

Which sentence BEST belongs in a story about what a plant needs to grow?

A. It is important for a plant to have water and sunlight in order to grow.
B. Plants can be planted inside or outside.
C. Spring and fall are the best times to plant many plants.
D. Plants are useful for growing flowers and farming for food.
A student is writing a report for his class about ocean life. Read the draft of the report and complete the task that follows.

Some animals breathe underwater. Many of these animals are fish, like sharks. They use gills to help them breathe. Other animals live in the water, but come to the top of the ocean to breathe. They use their lungs like people. Whales and dolphins can breathe like this.

The beginning of the student’s report does not say what it is about. Write a beginning paragraph that explains the main idea of the paper.

Write your answer on the lines below.

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The following is the beginning of a student’s report about desert animals that use burrows. The paragraph needs to be finished by adding more details to describe how other desert animals use burrows.

Many desert animals burrow, or dig holes. The desert tortoise burrows when it is too hot in the summer. It also hibernates in a burrow from October to February since very little food is available during those months.

Now read the notes about other desert animals that the teacher wrote on chart paper and posted in the classroom.

Kangaroo Rat
- burrows in the heat of the day
- seals burrow to keep moist
- stores seeds in burrow
- stays in burrow for days

Sidewinder Rattlesnake
- burrows in sand during the day
- eyes and nostrils stick out of sand

Spade–Foot Toad
- burrows for several summer months to sleep
- rainy weather wakes it up
- returns to burrow to sleep during next hot spell

Finish the paragraph above by adding details and facts about why and how other animals use a burrow. Use the notes above to help you add to the paragraph.

Write your answer on the lines below.