



Mesa Verde National Park Printable Reading Comprehension

Word Count: 287 | Lexile 890

Mesa Verde National Park in southwestern Colorado protects some of the best-preserved cliff dwellings in North America. Between the late 1100s and late 1200s, the Ancestral Pueblo people built homes and community spaces in the natural alcoves of sandstone cliffs. These dwellings—some with dozens of rooms—were connected by ladders, pathways, and small plazas. From a distance, they look like villages tucked safely into the rock.

Life at Mesa Verde required careful planning. Families stored corn, beans, and squash, and collected water from seeps and springs. Farmers grew crops on the mesa tops, where they could catch sunlight and summer rains. Pottery, sandals, and tools show skilled craftsmanship and everyday problem-solving. Kivas—circular, partly underground rooms—likely served as places for ceremony, teaching, and community meetings.

By the late 1200s, most people left the area. Drought, changing resources, or social pressures may have pushed communities to move south toward present-day New Mexico and Arizona. Although the exact reasons are still studied, descendants of the Ancestral Pueblo—such as the Hopi and many Rio Grande Pueblo peoples—keep cultural connections to Mesa Verde through stories and traditions.

Today, park rangers protect sites like Cliff Palace and Balcony House and guide visitors along narrow trails and sturdy ladders. Scientists use mapping, dating methods, and careful excavation to learn without damaging what remains. Mesa Verde reminds us that successful communities balance ingenuity with respect for place—and that people adapt when environments change.

1. What makes Mesa Verde especially famous?

- A. Large rivers used for transportation
- B. Gold mines and trading posts
- C. Plains covered in grass for farming
- D. Well-preserved cliff dwellings built by Ancestral Pueblo people

2. According to the passage, what did kivas most likely provide?

- A. Extra storage for crops
- B. Space for ceremony, teaching, and meetings
- C. Housing for visiting traders
- D. Places to protect animals

3. Which detail best shows planning and problem-solving at Mesa Verde?

- A. People moved south in the late 1200s.
- B. Rangers lead tours with ladders.
- C. Families stored food, managed water, and farmed on mesa tops.
- D. Dwellings looked like villages from far away.

4. Why did communities likely leave Mesa Verde?

- A. A mix of drought, changing resources, or social pressures
- B. Demands from European settlers
- C. Flooding along major rivers
- D. A law requiring people to move

5. What inference can a reader make about life in the cliff dwellings?

- A. People rarely cooperated with neighbors.
- B. People relied on shared spaces and careful use of resources.
- C. Most families traveled constantly.
- D. Animals provided most of their food.

6. Which sentence best states the central idea of the final paragraph?

- A. Tourists must climb many ladders at Mesa Verde.
- B. Scientists avoid using any technology at the park.
- C. Rangers discourage visitors from learning about the dwellings.
- D. Protecting sites and studying them carefully help us learn from the past.

7. Which statement is supported by the passage?

- A. Mesa Verde was abandoned because pottery skills were lost.
 - B. Only rangers understand the cliff dwellings today.
 - C. Descendant communities maintain cultural connections to Mesa Verde.
 - D. The cliff dwellings were built after 1600.
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Answer Sheet

1. D

2. B

3. C

4. A

5. B

6. D

7. C