



Venus Fly Trap Printable Reading Comprehension

Grade Level: 5 | Word Count: 437 | Lexile 980

The Venus Fly Trap: A Plant with a Bite

What has a gaping red mouth, long fearsome teeth, and can snap food from the air in the blink of an eye? A dragon? Some frightening beast? Few people would guess that this frightening creature is the humble Venus fly trap, a plant smaller than the size of your hand.

The fleshy “mouth” of a fly trap is not like the mouths of people or dogs or any other creatures. This trap is made of a tough plant fiber and snaps shut when crawling or flying insects brush past. Unlike many other carnivorous creatures, which have complex systems for processing food, all of the work of digestion in a Venus fly trap happens in its leafy trap. First, the trap has to ensure that insects cannot easily escape to freedom. Long tooth-like pieces called cilia frame the opening of the trap. The cilia cage the insects and prevent them from escaping the trap’s leafy jaws. From here, the fly trap faces a challenge. In the wild, pieces of debris can fall from passing animals and other plants to trigger the trap. Instead of wasting precious energy on inedible objects, the plant waits to feel the object move before beginning digestion. If the object is still, the trap will soon open and release the debris. The plant can then await its next victim. If a live insect is sensed, however, the trap will flood with wet digestive juices that will break down the body of its victim into usable nutrients.

Scientists believe that the hunt for nutrients is the reason why the ancient ancestors of Venus fly traps evolved methods to attract and digest insects. Venus fly traps and other carnivorous plants most commonly grow in bogs. The soil in boggy habitats is acidic and lacks sufficient nutrients for many plants to grow. It is possible that some bog plants developed a taste for insects as a novel way of obtaining nutrients. The snapping leaves of the Venus fly trap, however, are unique even among carnivorous plants. Other carnivorous plants use slippery leaves or sticky hairs to trap insects. Scientists think that the Venus fly trap is most closely related to the sticky hair type of carnivorous plant. The development of a trap mechanism meant that the Venus fly trap could better hold on to wriggly insect prey than its relatives with simpler sticky mechanisms.

Word Count: 432

1. What is the author's purpose in the first paragraph?
 - a.) To excite the reader
 - b.) To inform the reader
 - c.) To persuade the reader
 - d.) To confuse the reader
2. Why might the Venus Fly Trap's trap be made of tough plant fiber instead of soft tissue?
 - a.) To make the plant taste bad to other animals
 - b.) To make the trap harder for insects to escape
 - c.) To help the plant blend in with its environment
 - d.) To allow the trap to use photosynthesis while closed
3. What might happen to a Venus Fly Trap that is missing its cilia?
 - a.) The Venus Fly Trap would catch more prey than usual
 - b.) The Venus Fly Trap would be stickier
 - c.) The Venus Fly Trap would not spring closed as quickly
 - d.) The Venus Fly Trap would have more prey escape its trap
4. Based on the following sentence, what could be the best definition for the word "debris"?
 - a.) Leaves
 - b.) Gravel
 - c.) Particles
 - d.) Trash
5. *In the wild, debris can fall from passing animals and other plants to trigger the trap.*
 - a.) Leaves
 - b.) Gravel
 - c.) Particles
 - d.) Trash
6. Why does the Venus Fly Trap wait for movement before beginning digestion?
 - a.) To make sure the insect is completely inside the trap
 - b.) To avoid wasting energy on objects that are not food
 - c.) To keep the trap from snapping closed too quickly
 - d.) To attract more insects with its bright color
7. What would be the best choice as a heading for the final paragraph?
 - a.) "Unique Plants of the Bogs"
 - b.) "The Family Tree of the Venus Fly Trap"
 - c.) "Mechanisms of Carnivorous Plants"
 - d.) "Nutrient Processing of the Venus Fly Trap"
8. Which feature does the Venus Fly Trap **not** share with the other carnivorous plants?
 - a.) Lives in bog habitats
 - b.) Eats insects to obtain nutrients
 - c.) Lives in acidic soil
 - d.) Uses a snapping trap mechanism to catch prey

Answer Key

1. **a)** To excite the reader
2. **b)** To make the trap harder for insects to escape
3. **d)** The Venus Fly Trap would have more prey escape its trap
4. **c)** Particles
5. **b)** To avoid wasting energy on objects that are not food
6. **b)** “The Family Tree of the Venus Fly Trap”
7. **d)** Uses a snapping trap mechanism to catch prey