

# Evolution of Multicellular Life

## Big Picture

This is a very brief description of how the organisms that we have today evolved from the early, single-celled organisms that lived in water two billion years ago. We must remember that it took an extremely long period of time for the modern-day organisms to appear and that there were many more organisms that today's organisms evolved from. These species were forced to adapt to Earth's constantly changing environment.

## Key Terms

**Geologic Time Scale:** Divides the history of the Earth into different time periods based on the climate and the types of organisms living on Earth at the time.

**Mass Extinction:** When some sort of geologic or climate change causes a large number of species to go extinct.

**Extinction:** When all organisms of a particular species die; this can be a result of some natural phenomenon, such as a meteor falling.

## Important Eras

The geologic time scale organizes Earth's history by major changes in geology and climate and by important events in the evolution of life. These are some of the key eras organized in chronological order:

### Late Precambrian Era

Occurred two billion years ago to about half a billion years ago.

There were a lot of geologic and climate changes to the Earth.

- The continents drifted away and toward one another, eventually forming the continents we have now.
- There were also fluctuating carbon dioxide levels due to volcanic activity. This caused the climate to change constantly, as the Earth was continually going in and out of ice ages. One ice age was so cold, the Earth was

about a billion years ago, the first multicellular organisms existed.

- Single-celled organisms often found in freshwater in the ocean to the surface to volcanic and hydrothermal vents. Different environments had different kinds of organisms. Some organisms were able to survive in extreme environments like deep-sea hydrothermal vents. Other organisms were able to survive in extreme environments like hot springs.

The late Precambrian Era ended with a mass extinction. One of the reasons for a mass extinction was climate change. One theory is that the Earth had a lot of ice during the late Precambrian Era. This mass extinction paved the way for a lot of new species to form in the next era, the Paleozoic Era.

### Paleozoic Era

The Paleozoic Era of life that occurred right before the Mesozoic Era. This happened as a result of the mass extinction that occurred at the end of the Precambrian Era. When the conditions were right, new species began to appear. In fact, there were a lot of new species that formed in the late Precambrian Era.

### Paleozoic Era

Occurred around 544-252 million years ago; so much happened in this era that it had to be divided into 6 periods

- Cambrian Period: Because the preceding era ended with a mass extinction, this period began with a huge explosion of new organisms. Ancient organisms such as sponges and trilobites formed.
- Ordovician Period: Although no animals lived on land (all animals were invertebrates that still lived in water), plants such as mosses started appearing on land, and the earliest fish started appearing.
- Silurian Period: Fish and coral continued to live in the oceans, and vascular plants, such as ferns, evolved on land.
- Devonian Period: A type of fish evolved to breathe oxygen when its head was above water. Moreover, seed plants were invented on land.
- Carboniferous Period: The first plants on land were a huge success in carbon that was used to build up the atmosphere. The atmosphere was able to build up the oxygen levels in the atmosphere. This paved the way for the first vertebrate animals able to reproduce on land (amphibians).

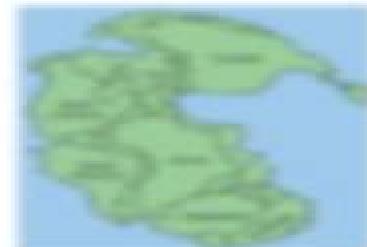


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- Permian Period: Another huge land mass formed when all the continents on Earth were stuck together. In this period, the conditions were very dry. During this time, plants began to evolve adaptations that helped them survive in dry conditions. This led to the formation of the first dinosaurs.

### Mesozoic Era

This was a mass extinction at the end of the Permian Period, marking the end of the Paleozoic Era.

# Multicellular Life Study Guide Answers

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