
You can get help from teachers, but you are going to have to learn a lot by yourself, sitting alone in a room.

Dr. Seuss

Text 7: Antarctica

The coldest, highest, driest, weirdest place on earth

Antarctica is the fifth largest of the earth's seven continents. During the winter, it double in size because of the large amount of sea ice that forms at its edges. The names Arctic or Antarctica come from Arctos-Greek for 'Bear'. This refers to the constellation 'The Great Bear', which can always be seen in the north.

Antarctica is more than 50% covered in ice, and it contains about 90% of the world's fresh water. Because of this thick ice cover, it is the highest of all continents. The snow and ice of Antarctica are the purest in the world. The general isolation from the remainder of the world has allowed it to avoid the industrial pollution that is common to the other continents.

Antarctica is the coldest continent. The lowest temperature ever recorded anywhere on earth, -88.3°C, was in 1960, at the Soviet Union's Vostok Station.

Antarctica can be classified as a true desert, as the equivalent of just 7 cm of water falls annually. It hasn't rained at the South Pole since the end of the Pleistocene era, 1,000,000 years ago. The interior has almost continuous daylight during the summer and continuous darkness during the winter.

It has only two species of flowering plants, and virtually no flying insects. The surrounding ocean, however, abounds in living creatures. Large numbers of whales feed on the rich marine life. Seals and birds live and breed, but the most prominent inhabitant of the Arctic is the penguin, of which there are over twelve million.

Today, around a thousand people call Arctica home for several years at a time. Braving winds that freeze the flesh, the constant threat of snow blindness, and the intense unremitting cold, they are there for the extraordinary scientific treasures that await discovery. The ice retains ancient atmospheric samples and meteorites; the skies offer a direct line to space. This is the one place still untouched by man, that is a barometer for the potentially ruinous impact our species is having on the planet.

Exercise 1

1. What is the origin of its name?
2. Why is there so little pollution?
3. Is there much plant animal life?
4. What living creatures are there in the seas around?
5. Why is the area special from a scientific point of view?

Exercise 2: For each question, choose the best answer to go into the gap in the sentence.

1. Antarctica is the largest of the earth seven continents.	✓ first ✓ fifth ✓ eighth
2. It doubles in size during	✓ summer ✓ winter ✓ autumn ✓ spring
3. It contains about of the world's fresh water.	✓ 9% ✓ 90% ✓ 99%
4. There are species of flowering plants.	✓ twenty ✓ two hundred ✓ two
5. The most prominent inhabitant of the Arctic is	✓ the swine ✓ the snake ✓ the penguin
6. The Great Bear constellation can always be seen in	✓ the north ✓ the north-west ✓ the south-west
7. Antarctica is more than covered in ice.	✓ 59% ✓ 95% ✓ 9.5%
8. This is the only place still by man.	✓ undiscovered ✓ touched ✓ untouched

Exercise 3: Below are 21 animals (birds and insects). For each one, decide if it's True (it lives in Antarctica), or False (it doesn't).

	True	False		True	False		True	False
elephant			fox			turtle		
crocodile			bee			goat		
snake		F	dog			shark		
tiger			whale			spider		
mosquito			swine			cat		
seal			camel			penguin		
scorpion			giraffe			lion		