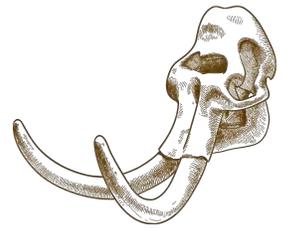




Deciphering Diets

Mammoth and Mastodon Edition



As we look into our planet's past, we piece together whatever evidence we can find to create a picture of lands and living things lost to time. In this activity, you will use clues from Columbian mammoth and American mastodon fossils and preserved dung to recreate their diet, as it was tens of thousands of years in the past.

Suggested Age - High School

Guiding Questions -

- How do we determine the diet of living animals? Can we use these same methods with extinct animals?
- What kind of evidence do we have of extinct animals? How do we use this evidence to infer things about how those animals lived?
- What information is the most difficult to determine about animals that lived thousands or millions of years ago? Do you think we will find ways to get new evidence in the future?
- How might different diets and habitats help animals (like these) coexist?

Materials -

Deciphering Diets clues and clue boards, glue or tape, cardboard (optional)

Activity Instructions -

- Print your clues and clue boards.
- Glue or tape your clue boards to a large piece of cardboard. (optional)
- Cut out your clues and read them carefully. Sort them into evidence of mammoths and evidence of mastodons, and glue or tape them to the appropriate spots on the clue boards.
- Connect each piece of evidence. Do they all tell the same story?
- Compare mastodons and mammoths. Which traits may have helped these huge animals to coexist for hundreds of thousands of years?

Extensions -

- What else do you wonder about mastodons and mammoths? Add more evidence to your clue boards about other aspects of their lives.
- Make your own clue boards with evidence about other extinct megafauna (large animals) that lived in North America, like saber-toothed cats or giant sloths. Have the same kinds of evidence been found for these animals?
- Who are the scientists who uncover and interpret this evidence? How do you become one? Look up paleontologists working near you!