

STUDY QUESTIONS

TO “STRANGER THAN SCIENCE FICTION”

Study and learn facts and ideas based on this Young Naturalists nonfiction story in *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer*, September-October 2026, www.mndnr.gov/mcvmagazine.

Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine is your guide to wild things. Every other month, six times a year, the magazine arrives in your school library. Each one has a story for Young Naturalists like you. **Are you curious about wild things?** Young Naturalists tells true stories that can answer all kinds of questions such as these—

Have you ever heard of a purple wartyback? How about a pink heelsplitter, pimple-back, or monkeyface? All are Minnesota freshwater mussels. Read Young Naturalists stories to learn which species (kinds) of critters live in Minnesota—frogs, salamanders, snakes, wild cats, wild dogs, weasels, mice, and rabbits.

Want to **peek inside the den of a red fox** and see how the kits grow up? Are you a rock hound searching for agates? Have you ever wondered what’s alive under snow? How animals see? Why is a bluebird blue? How birds fly?

Would you like to hear the true story of **giants of the ice age**? Young Naturalists also tells you about the underground universe. You can read the story of a tiny owl that went to a hospital with an injured wing. Find out about a boy who worked in a logging camp. Read the story of Ojibwe children today hunting and gathering like their ancestors did.

Learn how to get started **camping, snowshoeing, ice fishing, or canoeing**.

Find these stories and more online at www.mndnr.gov/young_naturalists.

Your knowledge of wild things helps you explore and enjoy the outdoors. Have fun!

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1. WHAT TOOL COULD YOU USE TO HELP YOU SEE A SLIME MOLD?

- a. Binoculars
- b. Thermometer
- c. Telescope
- d. Hand lens

2. TRUE OR FALSE? SLIME MOLDS HAVE NOTHING IN COMMON WITH MUSHROOMS.

3. WHICH PART OF THE SLIME MOLD RELEASES SPORES?

- a. Fruiting body
- b. Plasmodia
- c. Protist
- d. None of the above

4. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SLIME MOLD HAS THE BIGGEST FRUITING BODY?

- a. Wasp nest
- b. *Heterotrichia ferruginea*
- c. Dog vomit
- d. Wolf's milk

5. WHY ARE SOME FUNGI, SUCH AS FAIRY CUPS, HELPFUL FOR FINDING SLIME MOLD?

- a. The slime mold lives inside the fruiting body of the fairy cup

- b. They like the same kind of living conditions and are found in similar places
- c. They are part of the same ecosystem
- d. Spores from the fungus can help make the slime molds more colorful and easier to see

6. TO WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES DOES THE SLIME MOLD BELONG?

- a. Plant
- b. Fungus
- c. Lichen
- d. Protist

7. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING LIFE STAGES CAN THE SLIME MOLD BE SEEN WITHOUT A MICROSCOPE?

- a. Spore
- b. Amoeba
- c. Plasmodium
- d. All of the above

8. TRUE OR FALSE? SLIME MOLDS EAT A RANGE OF THINGS, INCLUDING SLUGS, PILL BUGS, BEETLES, AND FLIES.

9. SLIME MOLDS HAVE A REMARKABLE MAZE SOLVING ABILITY. WHAT HELPS SLIME MOLD BE ABLE TO DO SO?

- a. Spore
- b. Amoeba
- c. Plasmodium
- d. All of the above

10. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS THE SHORTEST IN LENGTH?

- a. Their tiny, but efficient brain
- b. Their abilities to smell food
- c. The trail they leave behind as reminders
- d. Their fruiting bodies that release spores

11. SCIENTISTS ARE INTERESTED IN STUDYING SLIME MOLDS FOR WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING REASONS?

- a. To help figure out how to stop cancer cells from spreading
- b. To help treat diseases such as epilepsy
- c. To see if they can be a source for making antibiotics
- d. All of the above

CHALLENGE QUESTION:

LIST TWO SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SLIME MOLD AND FUNGUS.

MINNESOTA COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENTS PRACTICE ITEMS

1. WHICH OF THE PLACES BELOW WOULD YOU BE MOST LIKELY TO SPOT A SLIME MOLD?

- a. damp, shady places
- b. areas that get a lot of sunlight
- c. puddles
- d. places sheltered from the wind

2. REVIEW THE STORY TITLE AND THE HEADINGS THAT OCCUR THROUGHOUT THE ARTICLE (IN THE LARGER COLORED FONT). WHAT CAN YOU INFER ABOUT THE AUTHOR'S ATTITUDE TOWARD SLIME MOLDS?

- a. She finds them disgusting and useless.
- b. She finds them fascinating and important.
- c. She doesn't really care for them.
- d. She is neutral, not really liking them or disliking them.

3. WHICH STORY DETAIL SUPPORTS THE AUTHOR'S STATEMENT THAT SLIME MOLDS HAVE A LOT TO TEACH US?

- a. Even though they don't have a brain, slime molds can solve mazes.
- b. Slime molds eat algae, fungi, other slime molds, and certain kinds of bacteria.
- c. Scientists are still studying slime molds to learn more about what role they play in the ecosystem.
- d. During its life, a slime mold goes through astonishing changes.

4. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD BE CONSIDERED THE STORY'S MAIN IDEA?

- a. Slime molds look like beings from a science fiction story.
- b. Even though they belong to different groups, slime molds and mushrooms have a lot in common.
- c. During their life, slime molds go through many changes.
- d. While often overlooked, slime molds are a fascinating part of the ecosystem that can inspire and teach us.

5. THE LAST SECTION OF THE STORY GIVES US CLUES ABOUT THE AUTHOR'S PURPOSE FOR WRITING THIS STORY. WHAT CAN WE INFER FROM THAT LAST SECTION ABOUT WHAT THE AUTHOR WOULD LIKE US TO DO, NOW THAT WE'VE READ THE STORY?

- a. The author hopes we are inspired to look for, learn about, and appreciate slime molds.
- b. The author wants us to be careful when we are out in nature not to encounter any slime molds.
- c. The author encourages us to think about ways we can help protect nature.
- d. The author would like us to learn more about mushrooms and fungus so that we better understand how they are different from slime mold.

6. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TEXT FEATURES DOES THE AUTHOR USE TO SUPPORT HER STATEMENT THAT SLIME MOLDS ARE WEIRDLY WONDERFUL?

- a. diagram with labels
- b. charts
- c. key words
- d. close-up images

7. WHAT IS SO AMAZING ABOUT A SLIME MOLD PLASMIDIUM COVERING AN ENTIRE ROTTING STUMP?

- a. If you return to look at it in a few days, their tiny domes will pop open and release clouds of fluff and spores.
- b. They engulf bacteria and other one-celled creatures, covering them completely and eating them.
- c. Even when they are this big, they are still considered a one-celled organism
- d. It is growing along paths that will lead it to food, while leaving a trail behind on the paths that do not lead to food.

8. WHAT QUESTION DOES THE STORY ANSWER?

- a. Where can you find slime molds?
- b. Are slime molds useful to bacteria?
- c. How can slime molds be conserved and protected?
- d. What is the most common slime mold in Minnesota?

VOCABULARY

Hand lens – a small tool with a glass or plastic lens used to make tiny things look bigger

Decaying – to slowly rot and break down

Fungus – a group of living things that are neither plants nor animals, such as mushrooms, mold, and yeasts

Fruiting bodies – the part of a fungus that grows above ground that makes and releases spores

Spores – tiny special cells that help many living things, like fungi and slime mold, reproduce

Mulch – a layer of wood chips, chopped leaves, or straw that creates a protective layer over the soil

Habitat – a natural home that provides living things exactly what they need to survive, grow, and reproduce

Crevice – a narrow crack, split, or thin opening in a hard surface

Prey – an organism that is being hunted and eaten

Bacteria – microscopic, single-celled organisms that live in the soil, as well as in other places all around and inside of us

Protist – a tiny, living thing that is not an animal, plant, or fungus

Food web – a map that shows who eats whom in an ecosystem

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Ecosystem – all the living things in a given area, interacting with each other, and with their non-living environments

Food web – a map that shows who eats whom in an ecosystem