

What's in a Name?

Activity: Grades 6-8

Students learn how scientists name a living thing in one of three ways: by reference to the location where an organism was found; in honor of a person with some connection to the discovery; or by reference to a unique body part or behavior.



Directions:

- 1. Explain.** Scientists use Greek and Latin words and scientific conventions to name plants and animals, including dinosaurs. There are three approaches: to reference the location where an organism was found; in honor of a person with some connection to the discovery; or to reference a unique body part or behavior.

One way scientists name living things is by the location where the animal lived or was first discovered.

Bahariasaurus ingens is named for the Bahariya Oasis in Egypt, where the first and only known specimen was discovered. Ask students if they can guess where *Argentinosaurus* was first discovered.

Answer: Argentina.

Group Activity. Brainstorm some names of imaginary prehistoric creatures if they were discovered in your local area. Write the names on the board.

- 2. Explain.** Other dinosaurs are named after famous people or for the lucky person who found them. *Paralititan stromeri* is named after Ernst Stromer. Ask students who *Nedcolbertia* is named after.

Answer: Ned Colbert (Dr. Edwin "Ned" Colbert).

Or *Ricardoestesia*?

Answer: Richard Estes.

Group Activity. Brainstorm some names of imaginary dinosaurs named after famous people and then after the students themselves.



- 3. Explain.** The last approach is to name animals by their body part, behavioral adaptations, or by whole body descriptions. **Example:** Englishman Richard Owen coined the word Dinosauria from "dino," (terrible) and "saur" (lizard). *Ichthyosaurus* is an "itchy" (fish) and "saur" (lizard).

Group Activity. Write the following Greek and Latin word parts on the board. Ask students to invent names for imaginary prehistoric animals using three word parts (prefix, root word, and suffix). List these names and descriptions of the animals on the board. **Example:** "Megabiceratosaurus" ("big two-horned lizard"). Additional Greek and Latin word parts are available online.

➤ <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/17/g68/greeklatin.pdf>

Note: This activity has been simplified for young students. Scientists would not mix Greek and Latin word parts.

Greek and Latin Word Parts:

bi—two
cephal(o)—head
cerat(o)—horn
ichthy—fish
mega—large
micro—small
odon or **oden**—tooth
ops—eye or face
ped or **pes**—foot
rex—king
rhino—nose
saur(us)—lizard
tri—three
tyrann—tyrant
uni—one
vor(e)—eating