

Name: _____

The Grandest Canyon: A Journey Through Time and Rock

The Grand Canyon, located in the high desert of northern Arizona, is not just a hole in the ground; it is one of the most powerful and spectacular natural wonders on Earth. It is a massive gorge, or extremely deep valley, that stretches for an incredible 277 miles. In some places, it is over 18 miles wide, and from the top edge, called the rim, down to the bottom, it drops more than a mile deep! When you stand on the edge and look across, the vast, silent chasm feels like a different world. Like a giant history book made of stone, the layered canyon walls reveal bands of different colored rocks—red, orange, pink, and gray. These layers were formed stacked up over millions of years, and they tell the incredible story of what the Earth was like long before humans, or even dinosaurs, ever walked on it.

The primary force responsible for creating the Grand Canyon is the Colorado River. For at least six million years, this powerful, rushing river has been cutting a path through the solid rock of the Colorado Plateau. As the water flows, it acts like sandpaper, carrying away sand, pebbles, and even massive boulders. This relentless process, called erosion, is what carved the deep canyon floor. While the river makes the canyon deeper, weather like wind, rain, and snow makes the canyon wider by crumbling and loosening the edges of the towering cliffs, causing giant rockfalls that reshape the landscape.



Colorado River in the Grand Canyon

1. How does the author organize the information in the second paragraph?
 - a. By comparing the Grand Canyon to other famous canyons in the world.
 - b. By explaining the causes of both the canyon's depth and width (cause/effect).
 - c. By listing the events of how the Colorado River was formed in chronological order.
 - d. By describing a problem, such as rockfalls, and providing a solution.

Because the canyon is so incredibly deep, it contains many different types of weather and environments. This creates a vertical journey through nature. At the top, on the "rim," the air is much cooler, and huge forests of tall ponderosa pines and Douglas fir trees thrive, providing shade for animals like elk and Abert's squirrels.

However, as you travel down towards the river, the temperature rises dramatically. At the very bottom, near the Colorado River, it can be as scorching hot as a desert, and only tough plants like the prickly pear cactus, yucca, and agave can survive in this intense heat. You



Prickly pear cactus, Yucca, and Agave in the Grand Canyon.

might even be lucky enough to see a California Condor, one of the rarest and largest birds in the world, soaring high above the ancient rocks.

People have lived near and in the Grand Canyon for thousands of years, well before it became famous. Native American tribes, including the Havasupai, Hopi, and Navajo, have deep connections to this place and consider the canyon a sacred, or very holy, sanctuary. To make sure this incredible site was saved for everyone to see, President Woodrow Wilson signed a special law on February 26, 1919, officially designating it as Grand Canyon National Park. This action meant the land would be protected forever by the government. Today, millions of visitors from all over the world travel to Arizona each year just to stand on the edge and wonder at the immense, colorful landscape.

2. Based on the third paragraph, what conclusion can you draw about a hiker traveling from the South Rim down to the Colorado River?

- a. The hiker will need to wear warmer clothes as they get closer to the river.
- b. The hike will get easier the further down they go because it is downhill.
- c. The hiker will experience significantly warmer temperatures and a change in plant life.
- d. The hiker will be able to see ponderosa pine trees growing near the river.

3. Based on the passage, which sentence best describes the main idea of the entire text?
- a. The Colorado River is the longest and most powerful river in Arizona.
 - b. Erosion from wind, rain, and snow makes the Grand Canyon grow wider every year.
 - c. The Grand Canyon is a spectacular natural wonder with unique environments, formed over millions of years, and protected as a national park.
 - d. Millions of visitors travel to the Grand Canyon each year to see the colorful rock layers.
4. Why are agave and yucca plants able to grow at the bottom of the Grand Canyon?
- a. They prefer the cooler air and shade found near the river.
 - b. They are suited for the hot, dry, desert-like conditions found there.
 - c. They are protected from the wind by the tall ponderosa pine trees.
 - d. Native American tribes use them in holy ceremonies.
5. In the first paragraph, the word "chasm" most likely means:
- a. A small, pleasant hill.
 - b. A wide, flat plain.
 - c. A very deep, large gap or opening.
 - d. A high mountain peak.
6. What was the author's main purpose for writing this passage?
- a. To teach the reader how erosion works using the example of the Colorado River.
 - b. To persuade the reader that they must visit the Grand Canyon at least once in their life.
 - c. To inform the reader about the formation, history, and unique features of the Grand Canyon.
 - d. To explain to the reader why ponderosa pines can only grow on the rim of the canyon.

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