

Reading Comprehension — The Great Barrier Reef

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The Great Barrier Reef

Off the north-eastern coast of Australia lies the largest living structure on the entire planet. It is so vast that it can be seen from space, yet it is built by some of the smallest creatures in the ocean. This is the Great Barrier Reef.

The reef stretches for more than two thousand kilometres — longer than the distance from Sydney to Perth. Astonishingly, it is not made of rock. It is built from coral: tiny animals, each smaller than your fingernail, called polyps. Over thousands of years, millions upon millions of these polyps have grown together, leaving behind hard skeletons that slowly build up into the enormous reef we see today.

The Great Barrier Reef bursts with life. It is home to more than fifteen hundred kinds of fish, hundreds of types of coral, sea turtles, dolphins, sharks and giant clams. For this reason, it is sometimes called the "rainforest of the sea."

But the reef is in danger. When the ocean becomes too warm, the coral becomes stressed and turns ghostly white — a problem called coral bleaching. If the warm water lasts too long, the coral can die. Scientists, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have cared for these waters for thousands of years, are working hard to protect it.

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the natural wonders of the world. Protecting it matters not only for Australia, but for everyone who shares the planet.

Questions

1. Where is the Great Barrier Reef? (1 mark)
2. What are the tiny animals that build the reef called? (1 mark)
3. Roughly how long is the reef? (1 mark)
4. Find and copy a word in paragraph 1 meaning "extremely large." (1 mark)
5. Why is the reef sometimes called the "rainforest of the sea"? (2 marks)
6. What is coral bleaching, and what causes it? (2 marks)
7. Why do you think the writer mentions it "can be seen from space"? (2 marks)
8. Summarise three facts about the reef and one threat it faces. (4 marks)

Answer Key / Mark Scheme

1. Off the north-eastern coast of Australia.
2. Polyps (coral).
3. More than two thousand kilometres.

4. "vast."

5. Because it is bursting with a huge variety of life, like a rainforest.

6. When the ocean gets too warm the coral becomes stressed and turns white; warm water causes it.

7. To show how enormous it is / to impress the reader with its size.

8. Facts (any 3): largest living structure; over 2,000 km; built by tiny polyps; 1,500+ fish; called rainforest of the sea. Threat: coral bleaching from warm water.