

A rose by any other name...

Understanding the Meanings of Dinosaur Names

Have you ever wondered how dinosaurs got their names? Scientists name organisms, living and extinct, according to a set of rules that were established long ago. Scientific names are based largely on classical Greek and Latin languages. That's why they look so strange to you. These names are meant to be descriptive, suggesting an organism's body type, appearance or other species it might be related too.

The Latin and Greek words used to name dinosaurs and other ancient reptiles usually describe the creature, or indicate where it was discovered or who discovered it. Often, two words are combined into one name. Many names combine a descriptive word with *saur* or *saurus*, which means "lizard". For example, *Ichthyosaur* means "fish lizard", from the Greek words *ichthys* ("fish") and *saur*; an ichthyosaur was a huge reptile that lived in the sea and looked like a fish. Once you know and understand that the names have a descriptive meaning and know a few of the Greek and Latin terms, you too can decipher the meaning of many dinosaur names.

LEVEL: Grade 2 and up.

OBJECTIVE: Students will learn that much information can be determined about a dinosaur simply by understanding the meaning of its name.

APPLICATIONS OF SCIENCE:

It is expected that students will:

- Draw conclusions from information.
- Construct simple definitions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

It is expected that students will:

- Demonstrate a simple understanding of the meaning and use of scientific terms and words.
- Construct simple definitions of terms and words used in science.

EXERCISES:

Use these lists below to decipher the meaning of some of the following dinosaur names:

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|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) Pterosaur | 2) Iguanodon |
| 3) Brachiosaurus | 4) Suchomimus |
| 5) Stegosaurus | 6) Brontosaurus |
| 7) Triceratops | 8) Protoceratops |
| 9) Allosaurus | 10) Tyrannosaurus rex |

Prefixes

allo	other (different)
anato, apato	goose
ankyl	curved
archo	ancient
brachio	arms
bronto	thunder
carn	meat
cera	horns
coelur	hollow
compsog	elegant
deino, dino	terrible
diplo	double
herb	plant
ichthy	fish
iguano	iguana
nodo	knobbed
ornis, ornith	bird
ovum	egg
pelyco	basin
proto	first
pter	wing
stego	plated, covered
struthio	ostrich
suchus	crocodile
theco	sockets
thero	beast
trach	duck
tri	three
tyranno	tyrant
velox	speed

Suffixes

cheirus	hand
chus	claw
dactyl	reptile
docus	beamed
dont, don	tooth
ischian	hipped
lestes	stealer
mimus	mimic
nathus	jaw
pod, poda	foot
raptor	plunderer (robber)
rex	king
saur, saurus	lizard
tops	face
vore	eat