Antarctica, a Continent of Ice



Read the passage. Then answer the questions in full sentences.

Name _____ Date _____

Antarctica is Earth's fifth-largest continent; it covers the South Pole and is covered almost completely in ice. It is also the coldest place on Earth. The average temperature there in winter is minus 34.4 degrees Celsius (minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit), and the lowest temperature ever recorded was minus 89.4 degrees Celsius (minus 129 degrees Fahrenheit). Antarctica has just two seasons: six months of daylight in summer, when it is tilted toward the Sun, and six months of darkness in winter, when it is tilted away.

Although Antarctica is so icy, it is considered a desert, because it receives very little rain or snowfall. The small amount of snow that does fall does not melt but builds up over hundreds and thousands of years to form large, thick ice sheets. Antarctica's terrain, the surface of the land, is made up of glaciers, ice shelves and icebergs.

The ice helps scientists in a surprising way. As many meteorites, or rocks that fall from space to Earth, have been found in Antarctica as in the rest of the world combined. Meteorites are easier to see on the white ice, and the ice preserves them for a long time. NASA uses satellites to study how Antarctica's ice is changing. The Ice, Cloud, and Land Elevation Satellite, or ICESat, measures changes in the size of the ice sheets. This matters because melting ice sheets may affect sea levels all over the world, and rising sea level can create dangerous conditions for people living close to the ocean.

1. **Why is Antarctica considered a desert, even though it is covered in ice?**

2. **What does "terrain" mean in the second paragraph? What in the sentence shows it?**

3. **How does Antarctica's small amount of snow end up forming thick ice sheets?**

4. **Does Antarctica's ice matter to people who live far away from it? Support your answer with details from the passage.**

Answer key

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1. Why is Antarctica considered a desert, even though it is covered in ice?
   It receives very little rain or snowfall.

2. What does “terrain” mean in the second paragraph? What in the sentence shows it?
   It means the surface of the land. The words right after it, “the surface of the land,” explain it.

3. How does Antarctica’s small amount of snow end up forming thick ice sheets?
   The snow that falls does not melt, so it builds up over hundreds and thousands of years.

4. Does Antarctica’s ice matter to people who live far away from it? Support your answer with details from the passage.
   Sample answer: Yes. Melting ice sheets may affect sea levels all over the world, and rising sea level can create dangerous conditions for people living close to the ocean. That is why NASA measures the ice with satellites like ICESat, to see how it is changing.