Sea Otters and the Kelp Forest

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

Name _____ Date _____

Along much of the west coast of North America, kelp grows in forests under the water. Kelp is a large brown alga, a kind of seaweed. Like plants, it uses sunlight to make its own food, so it is a producer.

Spiny sea urchins eat the kelp. Sea otters eat the sea urchins. That makes the sea otter the top predator in this food chain.

In the 1800s, people hunted too many sea otters for their fur. With fewer otters to eat them, the sea urchins grew in number and ate all of the kelp. Then, with no food left, the urchins died too.

Most of the time, sea otters keep the sea urchins from growing too quickly in number, and that protects the kelp forest. Since 1911, laws that protect sea otters have helped their numbers grow again.

1. **What do sea urchins eat?**

2. **Which animal is the top predator in this food chain?**

3. **What happened to the kelp when too many sea otters were hunted?**

4. **Why do you think a kelp forest needs sea otters?**

Answer key

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1. What do sea urchins eat?
   Kelp.

2. Which animal is the top predator in this food chain?
   The sea otter.

3. What happened to the kelp when too many sea otters were hunted?
   The sea urchins grew in number and ate all of the kelp.

4. Why do you think a kelp forest needs sea otters?
   Sample answer: sea otters eat sea urchins, so there are never so many urchins that they eat all the kelp.