

Reading Comprehension/The Caspian Sea

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Caspian Sea

The Caspian Sea, situated between Europe and Asia, is the largest inland body of water in the world. It is about 1210 km (750 mi) in length and ranges between 210 and 436 km (130 – 271 mi) in width. The area of the Caspian Sea is 371,000 sq. km (143,000 sq. mi). In comparison, Lake Superior, the largest of the North American Great Lakes, is only 82,000 sq. km (31,000 sq. mi). The Caspian Sea is about 4½ times bigger than Lake Superior! However, unlike Lake Superior, the Caspian Sea is slightly *saline*. Saline means that there is salt in the water. The Caspian Sea has only about a third of the salt that the oceans' waters contain. About 55 million years ago, the Caspian Sea was part of a larger ocean called the Tethys Ocean. This ocean connected the Atlantic and Pacific oceans across what is now Asia. Continental shifts and change in the water level caused the Tethys Ocean to lose the connection with the other two oceans, and to begin to disappear. Now its source of water is from freshwater rivers, not other oceans, and over time the saltwater has gotten diluted; this is why the Caspian Sea is only slightly saline.

The Caspian Sea is divided into three parts roughly based on depth. When the three parts are looked at with respect to the percent of the total area they occupy, they are all almost equal. The northern part of the Sea is 25% of the total area, while both the middle and southern parts take up about 37% each. However when the three parts are looked at with respect to the percent of the total volume of the sea, they are very different. The northern part of the sea might take up 25% of the area, but it is only 0.5% of the total volume! The middle part of the sea accounts for 33.9% of the total volume, and the southern part of the sea has 65.6% of the total volume. The northern part is very shallow throughout, with an average depth of 5 m. The middle part of the Caspian Sea contains the Derbent Depression, with a maximum depth of 500 m and the southern part contains the South Caspian Depression, with a maximum depth of 1025 m.

The Caspian Sea is surrounded by Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran. To the south and southwest it is bordered by the Elburz and Caucasus Mountains, and at the northern end of the sea is the massive Volga river delta. The Caspian Sea has about 130 big and small *tributary* rivers. Tributary means that the stream or river flows into a larger stream, river or sea. The largest of these rivers is the Volga River flowing in from the north. The Volga River delta is 500 m in width.

The different types of animals and plants living in and around the Caspian Sea are very interesting. The Caspian Sea, like Australia and the Galapagos Islands, has been isolated for so long that there are some species of animals that live only in the Caspian Sea. These animals are *endemic* to the Caspian Sea. Among these animals are many species of sturgeon: giant, ancient fish (below). Sturgeons are the fish that make caviar. Sturgeons have been around for millions of years--so long that they can be called "living fossils". At one time, sturgeons lived in many of the ancient seas, but over time they began to die out. The Caspian Sea was one of the few places where sturgeons remained. Another interesting animal found in the Caspian Sea is the Caspian seal, Latin name *Phoca caspica*. The Caspian seal is the only mammal living in the Caspian Sea and is the only place that this seal calls home.



Reading Comprehension/The Caspian Sea

Name: _____ Date: _____

Answer the questions about the Caspian Sea.

1. Where is the Caspian Sea? What countries surround the Caspian Sea?

2. What is the length and width of the Caspian Sea?

3. How does the Caspian Sea compare in size to the Lake Superior?

4. Why is the Caspian Sea only slightly saline?

5. Describe the three parts of the Caspian Sea.

6. What are tributaries? About how many does the Caspian Sea have?

7. Where is the Volga River delta located?

8. What does *endemic* mean?

9. Other than the Caspian Sea, what are two places on Earth where isolation has caused unique species to develop?

10. What "living fossil" can be found in the Caspian Sea?

11. What is the only mammal living in the Caspian Sea?

Reading Comprehension/The Caspian Sea

Name: _____ Date: _____

Answers to the Caspian Sea

1. The Caspian Sea is situated between Europe and Asia. Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran surround the Caspian Sea.
2. The Caspian Sea is about 1210 km (750 mi) in length and between 210 and 436 km (130 – 271 mi) in width.
3. The Caspian Sea is about 4½ times bigger than Lake Superior.
4. The Caspian Sea is slightly saline because about 50 to 60 million years ago it was part of a larger ocean called the Tethys Ocean that connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Now it is fed by rivers that dilute it.
5. Northern Caspian Sea: 25% of total area, 0.5% of total volume and average depth of 5 m. Middle Caspian Sea: about 37% of total area, 33.9% of total volume, Derbent Depression with maximum depth of 500 m. Southern Caspian Sea: about 37% of total area, 65.6% of total volume, South Caspian Depression with a maximum depth of 1025 m.
6. Tributaries are streams or rivers that flow into other streams, rivers or larger bodies of water. The Caspian Sea has about 130 large and small tributaries.
7. The Volga River delta is located in the northern end of the Caspian Sea.
8. *Endemic* means that an animal or plant is only found in a certain area.
9. Australia and the Galapagos Islands are two places where isolation has caused unique species to evolve.
10. Sturgeons can be considered “living fossils”.
11. The only mammal is the Caspian Seal, *Phoca caspica*.