

Dinosaur Names

Activity for Grades K–4

Introduction

Dinosaur names are often made up of combinations of Greek and Latin root words that describe characteristics or how the animal might have behaved. Other dinosaur names describe where the fossil remains were discovered or the name of the paleontologist who made the discovery. In 1841, Richard Owen, the first director of London's Natural History Museum, gave the name dinosaurs to these giant prehistoric reptiles. The word *dinosaur* is from the Greek *deinos* (terrible) and *sauros* (lizard). Some dinosaur names are short; others are tongue twisters.

Objective

In this activity, students will be introduced to dinosaur names and their meanings.

Materials

- List of Greek and Latin root words and their meanings written on the chalkboard or on chart paper
- Pictures of various dinosaurs (You can download images at www.amnh.org/resources/exhibitions/dinosaurs/)

DINOSAUR NAMES

Word	Meaning
<i>allo</i>	strange
<i>apato</i>	deceptive
<i>bronto</i>	thunder
<i>cerat</i>	horned
<i>compsa</i>	pretty
<i>deinos, dino</i>	terrible
<i>echino</i>	spiked
<i>elasma</i>	plated
<i>mega</i>	huge
<i>micro</i>	small
<i>nodo</i>	lumpy
<i>ops</i>	face
<i>ornitho</i>	bird
<i>raptor</i>	robber
<i>rex</i>	king
<i>saur, saurus</i>	lizard
<i>stego</i>	roof
<i>tri</i>	three
<i>tyranno</i>	tyrant

Procedure

1. Display pictures of *Triceratops*, *Stegosaurus*, *Tyrannosaurus rex*, and *Apatosaurus* to students. Call on students to name the dinosaurs and tell what they know about each one.
2. Tell students that dinosaurs were named using the Latin and Greek language. Explain that these languages are used by scientists to name both animals and plants. Dinosaur names can describe what the dinosaur looked like, how it might have acted, or where it was found. Have students look for the meaning of the Greek and Latin words used in the word "dinosaur" to discover the word's meaning. Write the following on the chalkboard:

dinosaur = *dino* + *saur*

Call on a volunteer to look on the chart to find the words *dino* and *saur*. Write *terrible lizard* on the chalkboard and explain that this was the name first given to dinosaurs.

3. Write the following dinosaur names on the chalkboard. Have students use the chart to decipher the names.

Tyrannosaurus rex = tyranno + saurus + rex

Stegosaurus = stego + saurus

Triceratops = tri + cerat + ops

Apatosaurus = apato + saurus

4. Have students suggest other dinosaur names that they would like to learn the meanings of. Write the names on the chalkboard. Use the chart provided as a reference.

