

## The Amazing Axolotl

Have you ever met an axolotl? These special salamanders seem to stay young forever. That is why they are called “the Peter Pan of salamanders.” Most salamanders grow up and leave the water to live on land. Instead, the axolotl spends its entire life in the water. It continues to look much like it did at birth, though it does grow legs and get bigger. Some axolotls are close to a foot long.

Axolotls live in lakes and canals in Mexico City. They eat worms, insects, and fish. They are endangered in the wild because their habitats are being destroyed by pollution. They are also being eaten by non-native predators and taken by humans as pets.

Axolotls make popular pets because of their cute appearance. They are mostly black or spotted brown, but some varieties are white with pink or red markings. Their head is framed by feathery gills and they almost seem to smile. They survive well in tanks and are often used for research.

One reason that axolotls are interesting to study is that they can regrow body parts. They can regenerate their hearts, spines, and brains, in addition to their limbs. Axolotls can also accept organs and body parts transplanted from other axolotls. They do not reject these organs the way that humans and



other animals do. These characteristics make axolotls important for medical research.

The Aztec god of fire and lightning, Xolotl, is the namesake of the axolotl. Legend says that Xolotl could transform into a salamander. The god was also linked with dogs. Atl is the ancient Aztec word for water, so axolotl is sometimes translated as water dog.

Whatever you call them, these unique creatures are interesting to see and study. If you're ever traveling near Lake Xochimilco, you might spot one. If not, perhaps you'll have the pleasure of meeting one in a tank.



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NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Where do wild axolotls live their lives?
  - a. On land
  - b. In lakes and canals
  - c. In tanks
  - d. In research labs
  
2. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a reason that axolotls are endangered?
  - a. Pollution
  - b. Pet trade
  - c. Research
  - d. Eaten by dogs
  
3. What makes axolotls interesting to researchers?
  - a. They can regrow organs and limbs
  - b. They can accept organs and limbs from other axolotls
  - c. A and B
  - d. They do not do well in captivity
  
4. Why do you think they are called the Peter Pan of salamanders?
  - a. Because the character of Peter Pan never grew up
  - b. Because their feathery gills look like the feathers Peter Pan sometimes wore
  - c. Because there was a dog in the Peter Pan story
  - d. Because Peter Pan lived near water

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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