

Grade 6 Narrative

Butterflies

“Did Mrs. McInteer just say we had three minutes to prepare our impromptu speech?” Terrified couldn’t begin to describe what Cara was feeling at this moment. Once again she felt totally unprepared. Not only had she failed to get to class on time for the third day in a row, but she’d also forgotten that today was the beginning of a new unit. Apparently her speech teacher was under the delusion that all junior high students could mentally compose a speech in their heads in just 180 seconds. Given an ambiguous topic like “bad luck” or “favorite childhood toy,” what was a person to do?

Despite her panic, Cara had to admit that she was pretty good at making up excuses on the spur of the moment. Many of those could be quite eloquent when delivered to Mrs. McInteer with an apologetic smile. But this was an actual speech. Her entire class would be watching and listening. What if she went blank? What if they laughed? What if a tornado sucked off the roof just as she opened her mouth? Okay, the last one was probably a bit of a stretch, but, at this point, Cara was rather hoping for a natural disaster; anything to avoid this potential train wreck.

Time was waning. Mrs. McInteer’s electronic timers showed just 45 seconds left. Cara’s topic “the color that describes me” glared up at her from the small piece of paper she’d been handed moments ago. Somehow that small white slip had developed its own personality. In fact, she was pretty sure it was enjoying watching her squirm. Wasn’t she always the one with a quick retort? Wasn’t she the one who always had something to say even when it wasn’t her turn?

Suddenly, Mrs. McInteer’s voice broke the silence. “Cara, you’re first.” Using every ounce of courage she possessed, Cara rose from her chair and began a slow winding journey to the front of the classroom. This stall tactic would buy her a few more seconds. Color? Lime

green, mustard yellow, midnight blue, neon orange, the choices danced through her head, followed by a parade of reasons she could use to support her answer.

Somehow the physical act of moving had a calming effect on her nerves. The butterflies in her stomach seemed to be falling into formation. As she reached the last desk and prepared to pivot to face her classmates, the choice became clear. In the last few minutes, her emotional roller coaster had gone through a spectrum of colors, but now she knew which one best described her at this very moment in time. She turned to her classmates, opened her mouth, and set the butterflies free.

Grade 6 Informational

Modern Dinosaurs

Silent, swift, and strong, alligators and crocodiles haven't changed much over the years. Alligators and crocodiles are reptiles¹. These water-lovers make up a group of animals called crocodylians². Crocodylians were on Earth at the same time as the dinosaurs. Today's alligators and crocodiles could be thought of as modern dinosaurs.

The alligator and the crocodile are very much alike. You could call them cousins. They have many things in common. Both of these reptiles have scaly skin and are cold-blooded. The eggs they lay are covered with very hard shells. Their webbed feet help them swim, and their powerful tails act like paddles to help steer.

While they share many qualities, they also differ in several ways. One difference is the way their skin looks. Another is the shape of the animals' jaws. A third way to tell them apart is by their teeth. Another difference is the way they build their nests.

Plain or Speckled

Both animals have black speckles on their skin. It looks as if pepper has been sprinkled on them. These dots are sense organs. They help the animals notice small pressure changes in the water. Crocodiles have these black dots all over their bodies. Alligators, however, have them only around their jaws. The rest of the alligators' scales are plain.

The skin color of crocodylians is also different. Grown alligators look greyish black. Crocodiles, on the other hand, are brownish green. Crocodylians are usually the same color as the water in which they swim. Because they blend in so well, it makes them difficult to spot in the water.

Alligators usually live in swamps, rivers, or wetlands. Crocodiles make their homes in freshwater rivers, lakes, and ponds. Unlike alligators, some types of crocodiles also can live in saltwater.

Jaws and Teeth

An easy way to know if a reptile is an alligator or a crocodile is to look at the head. The shape of the nose will tell you the type of animal. Alligators have jaws that are wide and rounded. Their noses are shaped like a "U." Crocodiles have longer, more pointed noses that look like a "V."

The teeth can be the biggest giveaway as to which reptile is which. An alligator's upper jaw is wider than its lower jaw. When they close their mouths, their teeth are almost completely hidden. Crocodiles have upper jaws that are about the same width as their lower jaws. When the mouth is closed, many teeth on both the top and bottom stick out.

Crocodylian Nests

Crocodiles and alligators both build nests to keep their eggs warm until they hatch. The two animals construct their nests differently.

Crocodiles dig a hole in loose soil. The female will lay up to fifty eggs in the hole. She lays them in two or three layers. She fills the hole with sand, completely covering the eggs to keep them warm. Sometimes, though, the ground gets too hot. When this happens, the mother crocodile will splash water on the nest to cool it down. She also may place grass on top of it to lower the temperature.

Alligators construct their nests out of leaves, branches, and mud. They build the nests above ground. The mother alligator will shape a mound six feet wide and three feet high. She then scoops out a hole in the middle of the mound and lays between twenty and seventy eggs in the hole. She covers up the eggs with more leaves, sticks, and dirt.

For both alligators and crocodiles, it takes between 55 and 110 days for the babies to hatch. If the nest is warm, it takes less time for the eggs to hatch than if the nest is cold. Both crocodiles and alligators can live up to age 100—or more!

Alligators and crocodiles are very much alike. Even though there are differences between them, both are animals worthy of respect. After all, crocodylians are a living bridge to the Age of Dinosaurs.

¹ **reptiles:** any of a group of cold-blooded animals that has a backbone and is covered in scales

² **crocodylians:** a group of reptiles that includes crocodiles and alligators