Reading Comprehension: Non-Fiction Article

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Remarkable Tuatara

The tuatara is one of New Zealand's most extraordinary creatures. Although it looks like a lizard, it is actually the last surviving member of an ancient order of reptiles called Rhynchocephalia, which thrived over 200 million years ago during the age of the dinosaurs. This makes the tuatara a true "living fossil."

Tuatara have several unique features that set them apart from other reptiles. They possess a third eye on the top of their heads, called a parietal eye, which is visible in young tuatara but becomes covered with scales as they mature. Scientists believe this eye helps detect light and dark cycles, which may assist in regulating their body temperature and daily rhythms.

These reptiles are also remarkably slow-growing and long-lived. Tuatara don't reach maturity until they are between 10 and 20 years old, and they can live for over 100 years. They have an extremely slow metabolism, which means they can survive on very little food. In fact, tuatara can hold their breath for up to an hour and are most active in cool temperatures, unlike most reptiles that prefer warmth.

Today, tuatara are found only in New Zealand, primarily on offshore islands that are free from introduced predators like rats and cats. Conservation efforts have been crucial to their survival, as these predators pose a significant threat to tuatara eggs and juveniles. Several breeding programmes have been established to protect this taonga (treasure) for future generations.

Answer the following questions by circling the correct letter:

1. The tuatara is best described as:

A. A type of lizard native to New Zealand

B. The last surviving member of an ancient reptile order

C. A dinosaur that survived extinction

D. A recently discovered species

2. What is unusual about the tuatara's third eye?

A. It allows them to see in the dark

B. It disappears completely as they age

C. It is visible in young tuatara but becomes covered with scales later

D. It is larger than their other two eyes

3. Based on the article, tuatara are different from most reptiles because they:

A. Prefer warm temperatures

B. Grow very quickly

C. Are most active in cool temperatures

D. Cannot hold their breath underwater

4. Why are tuatara now found mainly on offshore islands?

A. They prefer island climates

B. These islands are free from introduced predators

C. They cannot swim to the mainland

D. There is more food available on islands

5. The word "taonga" in the last paragraph most likely means:

A. Problem

B. Treasure

C. Danger

D. Mystery

6. Which statement can be inferred from the article?

A. Tuatara are easy to breed in captivity

B. The slow metabolism of tuatara helps them survive in challenging conditions

C. Tuatara are the fastest-growing reptiles in New Zealand

D. All tuatara will be extinct within 10 years