Name_____

Deadly Delicacy

Imagine a fish that swallows water to inflate itself like a balloon. The pufferfish does just that as a defense against predators. Its slow, clumsy swimming ability makes it hard for it to escape. However, once the pufferfish expands its size, it becomes an inedible ball. The fish can puff up to two or three times its normal size. Quick-acting predators that manage to eat the fish before it inflates will receive a lethal poison. The poison is also toxic to humans; one fish contains enough poison to kill thirty people.

However, in Japan, people consider the meat of the pufferfish a delicacy. Chefs undergo special training to learn how to prepare the fish in such a way that it is safe to eat. It takes two years to complete this training. Thin slices of the flesh are served with all traces of toxins from the organs removed. Still, as many as two hundred people a year are poisoned from the fish, and about half of them die.

Many species of pufferfish exist. Most make their homes in tropical or subtropical waters, but some are freshwater fish. Pufferfish have rough or spiny skin in place of scales. Some have bright coloring to warn predators of the poison. Others have coloring that blends in with their environment.

Pufferfish consume mostly invertebrates and algae. Some species eat clams, mussels, and other shellfish. Perhaps they derive toxins from the bacteria in the food they eat. The toxin acts on victims by affecting the nervous system. Paralysis begins from the outermost parts and works inward.

Why would anyone wish to eat such a food? Some people like to live on the edge. There's a thrill in doing something daring. Others want to experience the tingling sensation that can occur on the tongue and lips. The best approach, though, is to beware of the pufferfish.

Text Questions

1. What does the word *lethal* mean as it is used in the first paragraph?
   a. authorized by law
   b. slow
   c. deadly
   d. harmful
2. What do other fish have that pufferfish lack?
   a. gills
   b. scales
   c. skin
   d. poison
3. What is the purpose of the second paragraph?
   a. It describes how chefs prepare pufferfish to make it safer to eat.
   b. It gives details about a chef's training.
   c. It explains why pufferfish are poisonous.
   d. It tells why people like to eat pufferfish.
4. What does the idiom "live on the edge" mean in the fifth paragraph?
   a. to be different from other people
   b. to do unusual things
   c. to participate in dangerous activities
   d. to have a house built on a cliff
5. Why do you suppose people like to eat poisonous fish?

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LIVEWORKSHEETS