

41 Continental Drift



In 1915, a German scientist named Alfred Wegener (1880–1930) put together several kinds of evidence—including the location of fossils and rock layers on different continents—to come up with a new idea about the history of the continents. His idea was that the continents were once joined together to form a single large continent called Pangea. Over geological time, Pangea split apart and parts of it moved away to form today’s continents. Today, this idea is called **continental drift**. “Drift” refers to the idea that the continents slowly moved away from each other, or *drifted* apart. In this activity, you will examine more evidence for this movement of continents.

CHALLENGE



What is the evidence that the continents have moved?



Fossilized Glossopteris leaves

MATERIALS




For each student

- 1 Student Sheet 41.1, “Analyzing Evidence: Continental Drift”

PROCEDURE

1. Carefully read Student Sheet 41.1, “Analyzing Evidence: Continental Drift.”
2. Discuss with your group what is evidence and what is not evidence.
Remember to listen to and consider the ideas of the other members of your group. If you disagree with others, explain why you disagree.
3. On Student Sheet 41.1, look at each statement carefully and then mark whether you think it is or is not evidence. Check “yes” if you think it is evidence, and “no” if you think it is not evidence.
4. Cross out each statement that you have decided was not evidence. You will no longer consider these statements.
5. On Student Sheet 41.1, mark whether you think each piece of evidence does or does not support the idea that continents have moved. Check “yes” if you think it supports it, and “no” if you think it does not.
6. With your group, discuss:
 - a. whether you identified a statement as evidence or not.
 - b. how each statement you checked as evidence either supports or contradicts the idea of continental movement.

ANALYSIS

1. On Student Sheet 41.1, you identified statements that provide evidence in support of continental movement. Explain *how* each of these statements supports the idea that continents have moved.
2. Look again at Student Sheet 41.1. Have people other than Wegener contributed to the evidence in support of continental movement? Explain.
-  3. Imagine that you have been asked to write an encyclopedia entry about the movement of the earth’s continents. Write a paragraph about continental movement, describing the history of this idea and citing as many pieces of evidence as you can.