

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Salt of the Earth**

Salt is such a common element that we don't often think about its source. Historically, salt has been used for preservation. It preserves food so it doesn't spoil. We season our food with salt.

The many uses for salt have made it a valuable commodity over the centuries. Entire economies have been built on the production and trade of salt. In ancient Rome, salt was used as currency. In some countries, roads were built specifically for the transportation of salt from mines to seaports. At various times in history, exclusive rights and taxes on salt have led to wars and revolutions. China, Africa, and India are countries that have all experienced conflicts over salt. Our own history in America is not immune to the value of salt. The Massachusetts Bay Colony held rights to produce salt for many years. The Erie Canal was built, in part, to transport salt.

Salt plays other cultural roles as well. It is used in religious rites for purification or offerings. Its value is reflected in language. When salt was used as currency during times of slave trade, people might say someone was "not worth his salt." We say a dependable person is "the salt of the earth."

Long ago, people obtained salt by boiling seawater. The water evaporated as steam, leaving behind nearly pure salt. Salt can also be mined from underground deposits as a mineral. Often these deposits were formed by past evaporation and shifts in rock layers over time. Most of the salt produced this way is in the form of rock salt. A third way of producing salt is a little more complex. A dome is erected over a salt deposit. The salt is drilled out of the earth and water is added to the salt to dissolve it. The resulting brine is then boiled causing the water to evaporate, leaving just the salt once again. Much of this salt is what we know as table salt.

**Text Questions**

- Which of the following is not a method for mining salt?
  - trading with other countries to obtain salt
  - boiling salt water to cause evaporation
  - mining salt out of underground deposits
  - drilling salt and adding water to make a brine, then boiling the brine to evaporate the water
- Which is a synonym for the word *commodity* as it is used in the second paragraph?
  - money
  - belonging
  - merchandise
  - stock
- Which statement explains one reason why salt is a valuable commodity?
  - We season our food with salt.
  - Salt is used for food preservation.
  - Roads were built specifically for the transportation of salt from mines to seaports.
  - Exclusive rights and taxes on salt have led to wars and revolutions at various times in history.
- What does it mean to say someone is "the salt of the earth"?
  - That person's language is seasoned with interesting words.
  - That person knows how to save and preserve important things.
  - That person is among the lower levels of society.
  - That person is reliable, trustworthy, and dependable.
- What are some other ways people use salt? Give examples to support your answer.

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