

Salt:

It Isn't Just for Food

By Hermann von Richter



- 1 Salt is a mineral. It can be found in many places around the world. More than two hundred million tons of salt are mined each year. Salt has been important to people for a long, long time. Salt is connected to history, language, health, industry, and money.
- 2 There are many stories and sayings about salt. Have you ever heard people described as “the salt of the earth”? It means they are honest and hard-working. People may “salt away” money or other things of value. This means they are saving it little by little. If someone tells you to “take it with a grain of salt,” it means you should not believe all of what you have been told. You will also find stories from many countries about salt. In a folktale told in several different countries, a king asks his daughters how much they love him, and one answers “more than salt,” which turns out to be the best answer.
- 3 When you sit down to eat, you may pick up the salt shaker and sprinkle some of the white grains onto your food. This makes it taste better. Before people were able to refrigerate their food, salt was used to keep the food from spoiling. Salt was very valuable then. Without salt, people would not have had enough food to eat. It was so valuable that it was used as money. Even Roman soldiers were paid with salt. The word for the salt money was *salarium*. This is where the word *salary* comes from. A salary is the money someone gets paid for doing a job.
- 4 You need salt to live. Your body contains about three ounces of salt. That is a little less than half a cup. Since your body can't make salt, you must ingest it. This means you must get it through your food and drink. People need to take in about one-fourth of a teaspoon of salt each day. Salt keeps your body healthy, helps your food digest, and helps the body heal. You get more than enough salt each day when you eat packaged foods. However, if you are doing a lot of crying or sweating, you lose salt. If that's the case, you may need to eat a little more salt to keep the proper level.
- 5 Salt isn't just for flavoring your food, though. There are thousands of uses for salt. Salt is used to melt ice and snow. This makes highways safer in the winter. It is used to soften water so soaps work better. It is used to make clay, paper, soap, and glass. Salt is used to clean off rust and to dye fabrics. It is put into clouds to try to get them to produce rain. It is also used in art to give a special look to watercolor paintings.
- 6 Did you ever wonder where the salt on your table comes from? It comes from salt water, such as the ocean, or from underground deposits made by dried up salt water from long ago. When the water evaporates, or turns to water vapor, the salt crystals are left. These are collected by machines, cleaned, crushed, and packaged. Then the salt is sent to stores and put on the shelves for you to buy. Today salt does not cost a lot, but it is still valuable.

COMPREHENSION

A Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 1 This story is mostly about
 - a the important part salt has played in history and still plays today.
 - b uses for salt.
 - c where salt comes from.
- 2 If someone said you were "the salt of the earth," they would be saying
 - a you are tasty.
 - b something mean about you.
 - c something nice about you.
- 3 Long ago, salt was very valuable because without it food would spoil and then
 - a people would have to go to the store more often.

- b people would die because they wouldn't have enough to eat.
 - c animals would eat it and get sick.

- 4 You must take in salt every day because
 - a your body cannot make salt.
 - b it wears off.
 - c it breaks down.
- 5 If the amount of salt in your body decreases, you
 - a won't enjoy your food.
 - b will not be healthy.
 - c will cry easily.

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

B Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- 1 joined; linked (1)
- 2 keep something cold (3)
- 3 money paid on a regular basis for work done (3)
- 4 take in by mouth (4)
- 5 turns to water vapor or gas (6)
- 6 kinds of rock structure (6)
- 7 having importance; worth something (6)

C A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning will depend on how it is used. *

The *fly* buzzed around the room.
The bird will *fly* to its nest.

Look at each word in **bold type** below. Note the paragraph number. Look back at the paragraph. Which meaning does the word have there? Write *a* or *b*.

- 8 **spoiling** (3)
 - a going bad; being ruined
 - b taking by force
- 9 **digest** (4)
 - a magazine with short stories
 - b break down food in the stomach
- 10 **table** (6)
 - a piece of furniture
 - b arrangement of information in columns and rows

THINK ABOUT IT

D John's bike is blue.

You add an 's to a noun to show that someone or something owns something. There are special pronouns that show the same thing.

His bike is blue.

Read each set of sentences. Which word or words does each underlined pronoun stand for? Write *a* or *b*.

- 1 Juan gave Harvey a bag of salt. Then Juan said, "This is your salt."
a Juan's
b Harvey's
- 2 A king asked his daughters, "How much do you love me?" Their answers pleased the king.
a The king's
b The daughters'
- 3 A king ordered a tax on salt. A baker said, "Now I can't bake my bread."
a The king's
b The baker's
- 4 Animals walked through the woods to find salt. Settlers followed their trails.
a The animals'
b The settlers'
- 5 Joe asked Sam if the potatoes needed salt. Sam said, "It's your decision."
a Joe's
b Sam's

E Words with similar or nearly similar meanings are called synonyms. *Mean* is a synonym of *wicked*.

Read each sentence. Which word in parentheses () is a synonym of the word in **bold type**? Write the word.

- 6 People need salt to stay **healthy**.
(well, ill)
- 7 The history of salt contains many **interesting** stories.
(boring, absorbing)
- 8 Some **folktales** are about salt.
(stories, recipes)
- 9 A salary is the money a person gets paid for doing a **job**.
(inactivity, employment)
- 10 You **eat** salt in your food and drink.
(lose, ingest)

F Read each sentence. If it is only about salt in the past, write *past*. If it is only about salt now, write *now*. If it is about salt both then and now, write *both*.

- 11 People can get salt easily.
- 12 A soldier is paid with salt.
- 13 People use salt to season food.
- 14 People need salt to live.
- 15 Salt comes from salt water.