How Caves Are Formed

DIRECTIONS: Circle the best meaning for each underlined word from the passage. Then write the clues from the passage that helped you choose the correct meaning.

1. Composed means: A. written  B. made of

CLUES:

2. Seeps means: A. flow very slowly  B. break

CLUES:

3. Corrodes means: A. wear away by chemical reaction  B. wear away by friction

CLUES:

4. Saturated means: A. completely wet  B. completely covered

CLUES:

5. Evaporates means: A. becomes deeper  B. loses moisture

CLUES:

6. Stalactites: A. hang down from roof of cave  B. grow up from floor of cave

CLUES:

7. Stalagmites: A. grow up from floor of cave  B. hang down from roof of cave

CLUES:

Most caves form in an area of land composed of limestone or dolomite rock. These areas of land also often contain sinkholes and underground streams. Rainwater seeps through cracks in the rock and combines with carbon dioxide to form a weak acid. The acid corrodes the rock and forms hallowed out areas on the floor of the water table. The water table is the area below which the ground is saturated with water. It takes a long time, several million years, for the hallowed out areas to join together to form a cave, and as long as the water table remains high, a cave will continue to grow.

All the time, rainwater continues to seep into the ground above the cave, picking up minerals from the rock. As this water drips into the cave, it sometimes evaporates and leaves behind mineral deposits on the cave’s ceiling. A bit at a time, these deposits grow into icicle-shaped formations called stalactites. Sometimes water droplets fall to the cave floor and leave mineral deposits there. If this happens in the same place often enough, the deposits on the floor can grow to become pillar-like formations called stalagmites. Given enough time, stalactites and stalagmites can join to form floor-to-ceiling columns inside the cave.