

Student Name _____ Date _____

ON THIN ICE

DIRECTIONS. Read the story, then answer the questions below. When finished, write your own short story based upon a chosen point-of-view.

1. According to the author, what was life like as a microbe?
2. What were some clues that this was a microbe's life?
3. What were some clues that this took place on Mars?
4. What did the author want you to think was causing the earthquakes on Mars?
5. What do you think may have been causing the earthquakes on Earth?

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By Patrick Koske-McBride, age 14, Bishop, CA 93514

It was a wonderfully cool, dry afternoon, a day that was perfect for doing anything outdoors and Mike Robe was trapped in his motorized carriage, stuck in a traffic jam in the ice tunnel. He sighed and leaned back in his seat, listening to the radio. To help calm himself, he tensed and then relaxed his flagella repeatedly.

“Reports of major and minor icequakes are still coming in from around the ice sheet. The icequake epicenter seems to be near the edge of the carbon dioxide south polar cap. Scientists are unsure of what to make of the situation. We’ll now go to the weather report.”

Mike rubbed his cytoplasm. He had had a bad day at work. He didn’t need the apocalypse to happen today as well. Maybe there was something to those recent claims of the world ending, he thought. Probably just a coincidence, after all, it was well known that the ice plates shifted a lot. Reassured that nothing was happening, he drove home without a second thought.

Mike Robe pulled into the garage of his suburban dwelling, got out and went in. He could almost taste dinner. When he opened the door, he saw pictures that had been knocked out of place and a few were on the floor. Pieces of broken pottery and cooking utensils littered the kitchen. A pleasing aroma failed to meet his nostrils.

“Joyce? Joyce are you here?” he called to his wife.

“I’m in h–here,” came the shaky response from the master bedroom.

Mike Robe walked to the bedroom. Mrs. Robe was frantically packing several suitcases. She was behaving anxiously and had the air of a hunted microorganism about her.

“What are you doing?” Mr. Robe asked.

“Packing. Icequakes have been hitting our house all day. I’m going to take Robert and go to my mom’s.” Mrs. Robe told him.

“It’s probably nothing to worry about. It’s just the ice plates shifting, and it’ll be over in a few hours. There’s no reason to leave town,” Mr. Robe reasoned.

Just then a tremor shook the apartment, bringing every one to their hands and

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knees. Mike Robe could see the ice ground crack. Robert ran into his parents room crying. A faint tinkle of breaking ceramics could be heard and in the distance sirens started wailing.

"I'll get my clothes," Mr. Robe announced.

Half an hour later the Robes as well as several other families, were loading their motorized carriage before they set out. Mike Robe made one last trip to the house to lock up when a mammoth quake hit. Mr. Robe fell on his face and he could see and feel waves going through the ice. When he stood up, the quake was still in progress. He looked up at the sky. But this time, instead of a familiar brownish butterscotch, he saw only metallic gray, stretching across where the sky should have been. He began screaming as he saw that whatever was blocking the sky was coming closer, and quickly.

At this very moment, life on Earth was also exciting.

"Yes! The probes found ice under a few feet of soil!" shouted Dr. Johanson. Dr. Weston came across the floor of the NASA laboratory. He squinted at the computer screen.

"Hey, not a false alarm. This is great! This could lead to the colonization of Mars!" Dr. Weston gleefully cried. "Any life signs?" he asked.

"None as far as the probes can tell, although the probes are picking up chemical signs that there might have been a few microbes," answered Dr. Johanson.

"Too bad. But the ice alone is a great find! Think of what this could lead to! Think of the support that this program could get! We could..." Dr. Weston's excitement was cut short when the equipment shook and the windows rattled. "What was that?"

"Just a small earthquake. We've been having them all day. The radios said that they are not sure what is causing it. Probably, it's just the fault line shifting and it'll be over in a few hours," Dr. Johanson told him.