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The Fungus Among Us

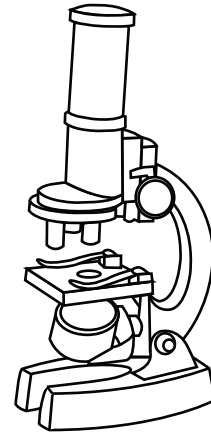
Have you ever eaten a fungus? You might have and not even known it! Fungi are living organisms that are all around us. While some can be dangerous, many types of fungi have extraordinary abilities that we can use to produce our favorite foods and even life-saving medicines.

If you love pizza, then you have fungi to thank. Bread and cheese are both made with fungi. Yeast, the fungus used to make bread, helps dough rise to make it fluffy. *Penicillium roqueforti* is one of the many types of fungi that is used to make cheese. Portobello mushrooms are another popular type of edible fungi.

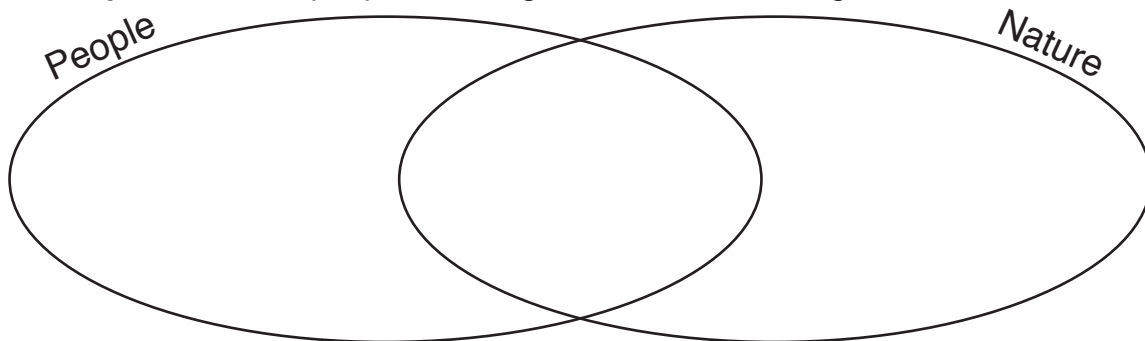
Fungi has also been used in medicine. In fact, the most commonly used **antibiotic** is made from a fungus called *Penicillium*. It was discovered by mistake when a scientist named Alexander Fleming left an experiment out in his lab while he was away on vacation. When he returned, he found a blue fungus growing on his petri dishes. The fungus, *Penicillium*, had stopped the bacteria in the petri dishes from growing. Now it is used all over the world to save lives.

But fungus is not just useful to people. For billions of years, fungi has had an important job in nature. It breaks down dead plant material and turns it into soil. Without fungi, most dead matter wouldn't be able to **biodegrade**, or break down, and we would be walking around in a big mess of leaves and other discarded plant material.

Fungi is all around us and has many important jobs. In nature, it helps break down dead plants. We also use it to make food and medicine. Next time you take a bite of pizza, remember that fungi helped make it!



Compare! How do people use fungi? What makes a fungus useful in nature?



Use a dictionary to find the meaning of these key terms from the article:

antibiotic _____

biodegrade _____

Both of the key terms above have the same root word, *bio*. What does *bio* mean?
