



Read the story carefully. Then answer each question below in a full sentence.

In nature, one change causes many more. Trace the entire chain and think about how each link depends on the one before it.

The Scorched Ridge's Ripple



A lightning strike on a dry summer afternoon ignited a wildfire on the steep slopes of Pine Ridge. The blaze spread quickly, consuming acres of dense forest. While firefighters worked tirelessly to contain it, much of the underbrush, shrubs, and even many mature trees were reduced to ash. The ground, once held firm by a complex network of roots, was now bare and exposed.

Weeks later, the first heavy autumn rains arrived. Without the protective canopy of leaves to break the force of the raindrops and the roots to anchor the soil, the water rushed down the scorched slopes. It carried with it tons of loose ash, dirt, and debris, transforming clear mountain streams into thick, muddy torrents. These muddy waters flowed directly into the Willow Creek, a vital river downstream.

The sudden influx of sediment choked the riverbed, burying the gravel where trout and salmon typically laid their eggs. The murky water also made it difficult for fish to breathe, as the sediment clogged their gills. Many fish perished, and those that survived struggled to find food or suitable spawning grounds, leading to a sharp decline in their numbers.

For the small town of Willow Creek, whose economy relied heavily on fishing tourism and local catches, the impact was devastating. Guides reported empty boats, and the town's annual fishing festival was canceled. The community understood that nature's chain, once broken by the fire, would take many years to heal, affecting their livelihoods for seasons to come.



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

(1) Which of these **BEST** explains why the heavy autumn rains caused so much damage to Willow Creek? Circle the correct answer.

- (A) The rain was unusually acidic after the fire.
- (B) The fire had removed the vegetation that normally held the soil in place.
- (C) The firefighters had accidentally diverted the water into the creek.
- (D) The fish in the creek were already weak from the summer heat.

(2) Complete the sentence: Because the sudden influx of sediment choked the riverbed,

_____.

(3) What immediate effect did the wildfire have on the mountain slopes?

(4) Describe how the wildfire on Pine Ridge led to the decline in fish numbers in Willow Creek and then affected the local community.

(5) What might have happened if the wildfire on Pine Ridge had NOT occurred? Explain.



