

## Excerpts from “Earth’s Building Blocks”

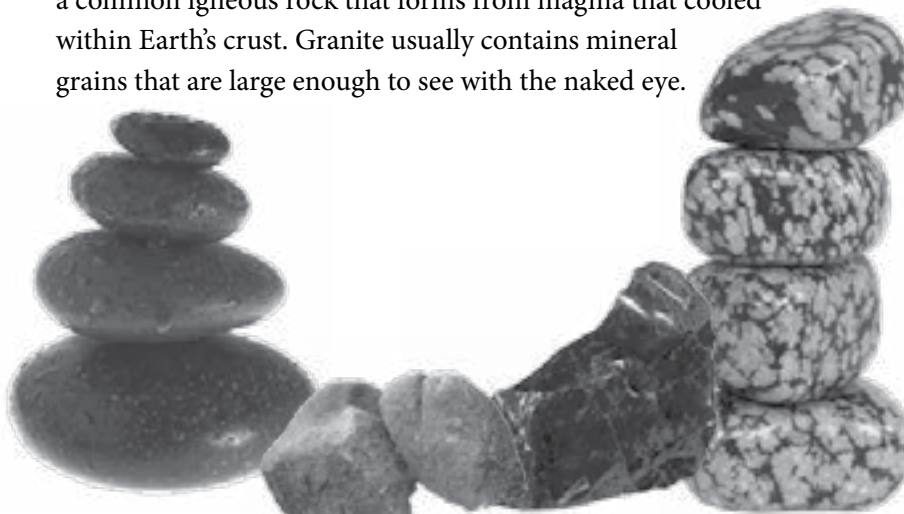
*Read the following excerpt and use it to complete the activity that follows.*

### Born from Magma: Igneous Rock

Let’s start with **igneous rocks**, the most abundant class of rocks on the earth. Igneous rocks form when magma cools and **solidifies**. When you think of igneous rocks, think of volcanoes.

There are two basic types of igneous rock. One type forms from magma that erupts onto Earth’s surface as lava. The lava cools and hardens into rock. The faster it cools, the smaller the mineral grains will be in the resulting rock. **Obsidian** is an igneous rock formed from lava that cooled very quickly, so quickly, there wasn’t time for the minerals to form grains. As a result, obsidian is as smooth and shiny as glass. In fact, it is often called volcanic glass. Basalt is an igneous rock formed from lava that took longer to cool. Basalt is typically a dark-colored rock. It has fairly small mineral grains that give it a fine-grained texture.

The second type of igneous rock forms from magma that solidifies below Earth’s surface. Magma cools very slowly when it’s deep beneath the surface. Slow cooling leads to igneous rocks with relatively large mineral grains. The slower the cooling, the larger the grains. **Granite** is a common igneous rock that forms from magma that cooled within Earth’s crust. Granite usually contains mineral grains that are large enough to see with the naked eye.

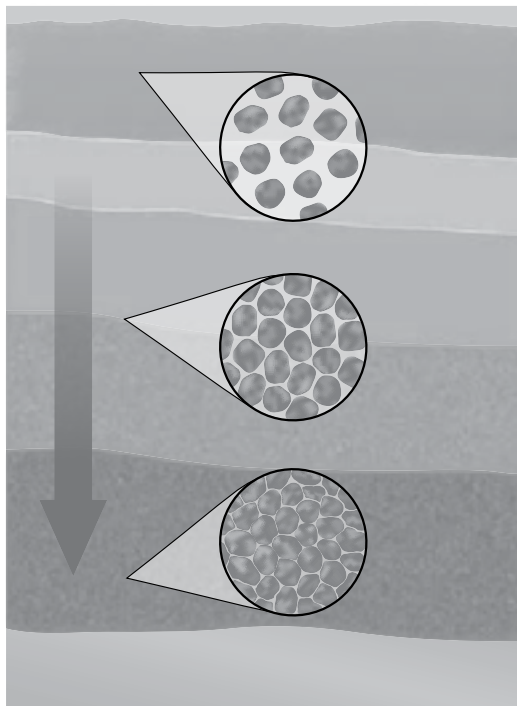


Igneous rocks

## Layer after Layer: Sedimentary Rock

**Sedimentary rock** is the second major class of rocks. Sedimentary rocks are made of sediments. Sediments are tiny bits of rock and sand combined with fragments of once-living things. Sediments collect in low-lying areas both on land and in bodies of water. They form layers, one on top of another. Over long periods of time, the weight of overlying layers **compacts** the sediments in deeper layers, squeezing them closer together. Sediments also become cemented, or glued, together as **dissolved** minerals fill the spaces between the sediments. As the sediments dry, the dissolved minerals turn into solids, binding the sediments together. Over time, compacting and cementing processes transform sediments into sedimentary rock.

Most sedimentary rocks are more easily broken than most igneous rocks. Hit a sedimentary rock with a hammer, and it will crumble or break apart. Some sedimentary rocks contain fossils. **Limestone** is a sedimentary rock often packed with the fossilized skeletons and shells of tiny ocean creatures. Some sedimentary rocks get their name from their sediments. Sandstone started as grains of sand, whereas mudstone formed from ancient mud.



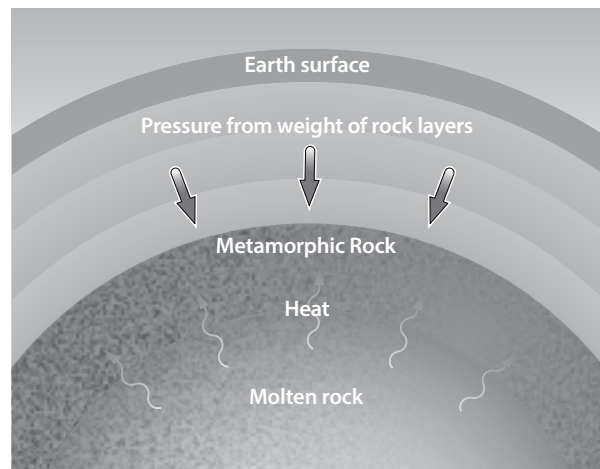
The weight of overlying layers compacts the sediments, squeezing them closer together.

### Changing Form: Metamorphic Rock

The third major class of rocks is **metamorphic rock**. Metamorphic rocks form when igneous or sedimentary rocks are exposed to extreme heat and pressure. They can even form from older metamorphic rocks. High temperatures and crushing pressure alter the minerals in the rocks. Mineral grains may be flattened or rearranged into layers, swirls, or stripes. They may also be changed into completely different minerals!

Remember granite, the igneous rock? When granite is subjected to intense heat and pressure, it becomes a metamorphic rock called gneiss. When the sedimentary rock limestone is squeezed and heated deep below ground, it becomes a metamorphic rock called marble.

Metamorphic rocks tend to form deep within Earth's crust. The pressure from countless tons of overlying rock is tremendous. Equally powerful is the heat rising from hot magma in the mantle beneath the crust. Metamorphic rocks often form where tectonic plates are slowly colliding. They can also form as magma travels up through cracks in Earth's crust and heats the rocks around the cracks. If the heat



of the magma completely melts the rock again, then it becomes igneous rock. If the rock is heated just enough to be changed, however, it instead becomes metamorphic rock.

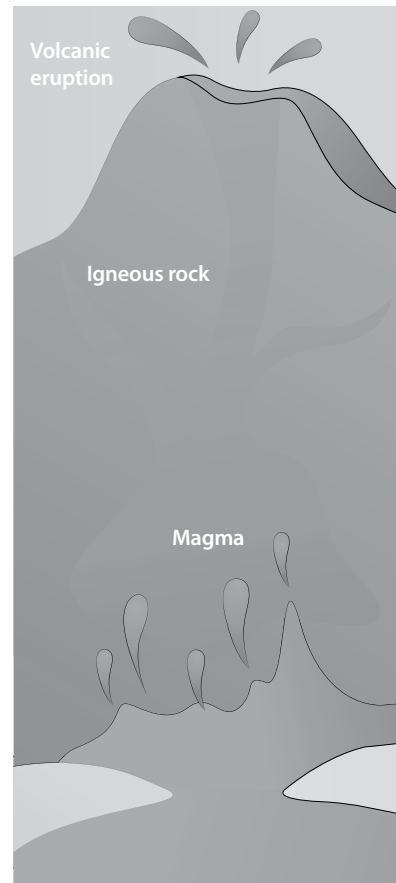
## The Rock Cycle

Rocks you see in the world around you might seem like permanent fixtures. Given enough time, however, all rocks change. They are created, destroyed, and recreated in a continuous cycle. Geologists call this ongoing process the **rock cycle**.

The rock cycle has no starting or ending point. You can jump in anywhere to see how it works. Let's begin with magma erupting from a towering volcano. The magma (now lava) cools and hardens into igneous rock. Over the course of thousands of years, sun, wind, rain, and freezing temperatures cause the rock to **weather**, or break down into smaller pieces. The pieces continue to weather, slowly breaking down into sediments. Howling winds, flowing water, and gravity gradually move the sediments down the sides of the volcano and beyond. Movement of sediments from place to place is called **erosion**.

Imagine that the sediments end up in a lake, where they settle to the bottom. Over long periods of time, more layers of sediments are deposited on top of them. Compacting and cementing processes eventually turn the deeply buried sediments into sedimentary rock.

Now imagine that the sedimentary rock is near the edge of a tectonic plate. The plate collides with another plate—very slowly, of course. Tremendous heat and pressure generated by the collision gradually turn the sedimentary rock into metamorphic rock. As the plates continue colliding, their rocky edges crumple. The metamorphic



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Type the correct word or phrase to complete each sentence. Each of the words/phrases will be used once.

compacted	erosion	magma	igneous	metamorphic
obsidian	rock cycle	sedimentary	solidified	texture

1. Lava flowed down the volcano's side and quickly hardened to form a glassy type of \_\_\_\_\_ rock.
2. Tiny flakes of \_\_\_\_\_ fell on the ground as an ancient tool maker worked to create a sharp blade for cutting.
3. The tiny flakes of rock were washed into a nearby stream, where they joined other sediments created by the \_\_\_\_\_ of rock from the nearby mountains.
4. The sediments formed layers on the stream bed, which \_\_\_\_\_ over time as the weight of the layers squeezed out the air and water.
5. The sediments cemented together and \_\_\_\_\_ into rock.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ rock was buried by even more layers of sediments over millions of years.
7. The heat and pressure from the weight of the overlying rock changed the \_\_\_\_\_ of the minerals in the rock.
8. New \_\_\_\_\_ rock formed and lay buried in the earth for millions of years.

9. Heat from \_\_\_\_\_ below the rock melted it, turning it into igneous rock.
  
10. As part of its journey through the \_\_\_\_\_, this piece of rock might someday be found on a beach in Maine or a mountaintop in Tennessee!