


The Living Fossil



It was Friday afternoon, and Jason and Tara were going back to school after eating lunch. Walking along the sidewalk, Jason noticed that some people were under a large tree, picking something from the grass and putting it in plastic bags.	1
“I wonder what they are doing,” said Tara.	2
“I don’t know,” said Jason. “Let’s find out!”	3
They walked over to where three women were picking up small yellow plum-like fruit and placing it in their bags.	4
“What are you doing?” inquired Tara.	5
“These are ginkgo seeds,” one lady replied. “They have an outer skin that we squish off to get at the inside kernel.”	6
“Oh, do they ever stink!” said Jason. “They smell like old cheese!”	7
The lady laughed. “They certainly do, and the skin is extremely sticky!”	8
“What do you do with the seeds?” asked Tara.	9
“They help keep us healthy. They’re a kind of medicine. We use the seeds when we have coughs and colds. They’re really quite tasty.”	10
Jason looked up and noticed that the tree was covered in yellow fan-shaped leaves. And on each branch, there were ginkgo seeds—lots of them! Tara picked some of the leaves from the ground and stuck them in her pocket. “Let’s show the class.”	11
When they arrived at school, Ms. Blackstock was in the room. “Look what we found on our way to school,” said Jason.	12
“Those leaves certainly do look interesting,” said Ms. Blackstock. “What are they?”	13
“Ginkgo leaves,” replied Jason rather excitedly. “A lady was picking the seeds from this tree.”	14
“Since we are studying plants in science, why don’t both of you do some research on the tree,” responded Ms. Blackstock.	15
Tara and Jason went to the library and used the computers and books to investigate the tree.	16

- They discovered that the ginkgo tree is actually a living fossil! 17
- “Wow,” said Jason, “look at this. The ginkgo has been around since the dinosaurs! It says here that the leaves have been found as fossils in rocks and that the tree has no close living relatives.” 18
- “Not only that,” interjected Tara, “this book says that the seeds are used as medicine, like the lady said, to help cure respiratory problems, and the leaves are boiled down to make a liquid that is supposed to improve memory.” 19
- When they returned to the classroom, Ms. Blackstock asked them what they had discovered. “This is a unique tree,” Tara said. “We discovered lots of fascinating information about how it is used as a medicine, and we found out that Chinese people used the leaf design in paintings and fabric, and that it’s been found in ancient pottery.” 20
- “Well, let’s share this information with the class,” said Ms. Blackstock. 21
- Tara and Jason spent the next few minutes telling the class about their discovery. “One really interesting fact,” stated Jason, “is that the ginkgo is an endangered species.” 22
- Manjeet asked, “What does that mean?” 23
- Jason explained that it is believed the only place the tree grows wild is in China and that the wild ginkgo is in danger of disappearing, so it is protected from clear-cutting. Tara described how this ancient tree is used in cities and towns like theirs to provide shade and to help clean the air of pollution. 24
- Olivia said that her grandmother had a bowl made of ginkgo wood in her house. “I could bring it in tomorrow for the class to see.” 25
- “That would be great,” replied Ms. Blackstock. 26
-  27
- The class continued to ask lots of questions, and Ms. Blackstock had to stop the discussion so they could get to their math lesson. “I want to thank Tara and Jason for telling us about this amazing living fossil,” said Ms. Blackstock.
- On the way home, Jason and Tara stopped by the tree once more, and Jason said, “I didn’t know that we had such a thing as a living fossil here in Southern Ontario right under our noses!” 28
- “Phew, although it doesn’t smell very good, it is still a beautiful tree,” said Tara. 29

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11 Explain how dialogue in the text helps the reader understand one of the characters. Use specific details from the text to support your answer.

12 Explain an important theme that is conveyed through the text. Use specific details to support your answer.
