



## AMAZING ANIMAL ARCHITECTURE: TERMITE MOUNDS

Determine what structures are found inside of a termite mound.

### Materials

Play-doh or salt dough  
Baking tray or sturdy piece of cardboard  
A pencil or tool to make holes with

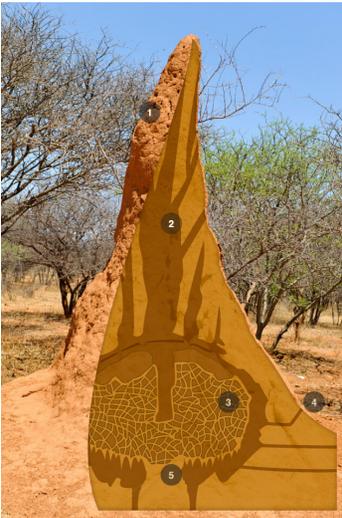
Salt dough ingredients:  
2 cups of *all-purpose flour or gluten-free alternative*  
1 cup of salt  
1 cup of water

### Procedure

- For this activity, you may use playdoh or make salt dough. The salt dough is bakeable and may be prepared on a cookie sheet for later baking. The playdoh is air dry and should not be put in the oven. To make salt dough, mix salt and flour in a bowl. Add water a little bit at a time while stirring until the dough starts to form. Then knead the dough for about 5 minutes. Add flour if the dough is too sticky or a bit of water if it is too dry.
- Place your dough on a baking tray or piece of cardboard. Keeping the base of your mound wide, pinch and pull the top until it is tall and cone-shaped. You can use the image of the termite mound on this worksheet as a reference for the shape you're trying to make.
- On one side of the mound, use the eraser end of your pencil to make small holes near the base for the termite nursery. Above those holes, use a finger to press some larger holes as space for where the termites grow fungus. Above the larger holes, use your finger or pencil eraser to make tubes running all the way to the top of your mound as your ventilation tunnels.
- If desired, you can bake-dry your mound at 200° F. Keep an eye on your mound while it is in the oven as baking times will vary. You can also set aside your mound for 24 hours to air dry.

### Results

Termite mounds have many specialized compartments.



### Why?

Mound-building termites live in Africa, Australia, and South America. Even though they rarely measure over half an inch in length, thousands of them come together to build enormous, skyscraper-like mounds. Most of the mound is built above ground but these termites actually live underneath it. The towering structure that we see above the ground is actually an elaborate ventilation system used to circulate fresh air through the termite nest and maintain temperature and humidity. One of the reasons termites do this is to create the perfect environment for growing fungus. Termites grow fungus to break down raw materials, like grass and wood, into easily digestible, nutrient-rich food.