



Enrichment

Earthquake Myths

Although we understand that earthquakes are natural, geological events caused by rocks moving over, under, or past each other along fault surfaces, this wasn't always common knowledge. Throughout the centuries, people believed that earthquakes were caused by everything from people and animals living below Earth's surface, to wild winds trapped underground struggling to escape, to giants and gods who held Earth, then let it go.

Modern Misconceptions

While these ancient stories seem silly to us now, there are some earthquake myths that still exist today. Modern-day myths, however, are not about how earthquakes are caused, but about when they occur and what happens during one. For example, many people believe when an earthquake hits, the ground opens up beneath the fault and swallows up people, buildings, cars, and so forth. In reality, an earthquake moves across a fault.

Therefore the ground doesn't open as it might if the quake moved away from the fault. Small, shallow crevices can form, but there's no evidence to prove that anyone has ever been swallowed by Earth during a quake.

Some people also believe that the safest place to be during an earthquake is in a doorway. A doorway shouldn't be your first choice. You're safer under a desk or table. Doorways can collapse with the rest of a building.

Time and Place

Another modern-day myth is the belief that earthquakes happen only in California. Earthquakes can happen anywhere. They can also happen any time, contrary to the notion that major earthquakes happen only in the morning. Although some recent, major earthquakes have happened in the morning hours, there's no pattern to when earthquakes occur. Indeed, many major earthquakes also have occurred later in the day.

Directions: Use the encyclopedia and other library resources to answer the following questions.

- How do you think the myths of earthquakes swallowing up people came about? Is there a geological phenomenon that does "swallow up" people?

- What is the earthquake history of your state? Do scientists think earthquakes are likely to occur in your region in the future?

- How can understanding modern-day earthquake myths help you to help keep your family safe in the event of an earthquake? Be specific.
