

Polar Opposites

BRRRRR! If you live in a northern climate, this is a chilly time of year. To stay warm, you wear lots of sweaters, mittens, scarves, and a warm winter coat. But there are two places where it is cold all the time—the North and South Poles. The extreme climate at the North and South Poles makes them difficult places for most people to travel to or explore.

Why Are the North and South Poles So Cold?

The North and South Poles are so cold because they do not get as much direct sunlight as other places on earth. The North Pole is at the very northern tip of the earth. It is a huge hunk of ice that floats on top of the Arctic Sea. The South Pole is on the opposite end of the earth, on the continent of Antarctica. Underneath all the ice and snow of the South Pole is lots of land—even mountains!

Which Is Warmer?

Although each pole receives the same amount of sunlight, the North Pole is warmer than the South Pole because the Arctic Ocean is warmed by the sun. Because the water is warmer than the floating ice, the arctic air is warmer than the chilly winds of the South Pole.

Did You Know?

- » The North Pole is sometimes called the Arctic Pole.
- » There is no land at the North Pole—only ice that is 6 to 10 feet thick.
- » In winter, the North Pole is around -29 degrees F (-34 degrees C).
- » In winter, the South Pole is around -76 degrees F (-60 degrees C).
- » The largest land animal living near the South Pole is a wingless insect known as the Antarctic

midge. This tiny bug is less than half an inch (13 mm) long!

Polar Bears and Emperor Penguins

Although most animals cannot live at the North Pole because the ice is always changing, polar bears live on the arctic land masses close to the North Pole. Polar bears are excellent swimmers. They are able to live in freezing temperatures because they have thick fur and a layer of fat called blubber. Underneath their coats, polar bears have black skin. The dark color helps them soak in the sun's rays to keep warm. Did you know polar bear fur isn't really white? It's actually transparent and it reflects light, helping the bear blend in with its surroundings.

Emperor penguins spend their whole lives along the coastline near the South Pole in Antarctica. Like polar bears, they are excellent swimmers. How do they live on the coldest place on earth? They have lots of body fat and several layers of thick feathers to keep warm. They huddle close together in large groups to keep out freezing winds. The ones in the middle, where it is warmer, switch places with the ones on the edges to help each other survive.

Word Pictures

Here is a word picture from Psalm 147:16-17 that suggests the cold of wintertime:

He spreads the snow like wool
and scatters the frost like ashes.
He hurls down his hail like pebbles.
Who can withstand his icy blast?

Can you come up with your own word picture? **B**



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