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Should We Bring Back the Woolly Mammoth? Scholastic Scope. 10/22/2012, Vol. 61 Issue 3, p20-21. 2p. Reading Level (Lexile): 930.

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Section:Debate

Should We Bring Back the Woolly Mammoth?**Scientists plan to clone an extinct animal. What could POSSIBLY go wrong?**

Imagine that you have a time machine. You step in, crank the dial to 25,000 B.C., and poof! you disappear.

When you step out, you find yourself face-to-face with the most enormous creature you've ever seen. At 11 feet tall, it towers over you. It has shaggy hair, a sloped back, a long, powerful trunk, and sharp, curved tusks that extend out to an impressive 13 feet. The animal weighs six tons -- about as much as a school bus. This behemoth is a woolly mammoth.

Woolly mammoths died out around the end of the last Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago. Pretty soon, though, you might be able to see an actual living woolly mammoth, and you won't need a time machine to do it. A team of South Korean, Russian, and Japanese scientists say they can bring back one of these prehistoric creatures using a process called cloning.

Mammoth Concerns

Over the past 15 years, scientists have cloned a number of species, including goats, dogs, and cats. Cloning a woolly mammoth, however, will be a lot harder.

First, scientists will harvest cells from the remains of a woolly mammoth discovered in Siberia, a very cold region of Russia. They will use the cells to produce an embryo. That embryo will be placed in the womb of an elephant. About 22 months later, she will give birth to a baby mammoth.

One scientist says they could produce a mammoth as soon as five years from now, but there are many challenges ahead. Cloning efforts often fail, and cloned animals tend to have serious and sometimes gruesome health problems. Many suffer painful birth defects and die within days or even minutes of being born. If successful, however, the mammoth project would be an amazing scientific achievement.

Not everyone is convinced that it's a good idea, though. The planet has changed dramatically since the time of the mammoths; their habitat no longer exists. A cloned mammoth would have to live its entire life in captivity -- where it would surely be subjected to constant tests. Is it fair to bring an animal into the world to be a research subject -- a curiosity, basically -- that could never live freely with others of its kind?

There are also concerns about the elephant mother. For one thing, she would have to endure the stress of frequent testing during her pregnancy. Plus, elephants form very close bonds with their young. The death or removal of a baby mammoth would be tragic for its mother.

Into the Present

Cruelty isn't the only issue that critics are raising. Many people wonder why millions of dollars and countless research hours should be spent attempting to resurrect a species that went extinct thousands of years ago instead of trying to save the thousands of animal species that are endangered today.

Still, cloning a woolly mammoth would be an exciting learning opportunity -- a chance to bring the

ancient past into the present. Then again, maybe scientists should focus on inventing a time machine instead. Then we could see any extinct creature we wanted!

ESSAY KIT

What you need to write a perfect essay

What Do You Think?

Should scientists clone a woolly mammoth?

Use evidence from the article to support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.

YES

THAT. WOULD. BE. SO. COOL.

1 It would be an incredible scientific achievement.

2

3

NO

FRANKENSTEIN, MUCH?

1

2

3

EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES -- AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES. Decide what you think. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become the thesis statement for an argument essay on this topic.

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TAKE THIS ACTIVITY FURTHER! WRITE AN ESSAY USING OUR SCOPE TEMPLATE.

PHOTO (COLOR): Science Project Regret: "Hmmm. Maybe I should have cloned a goldfish."

PHOTO (COLOR)

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