



Dinosaurs

The world's biggest creatures came in all shapes and sizes, but we can use their skeletons to suggest how they lived.

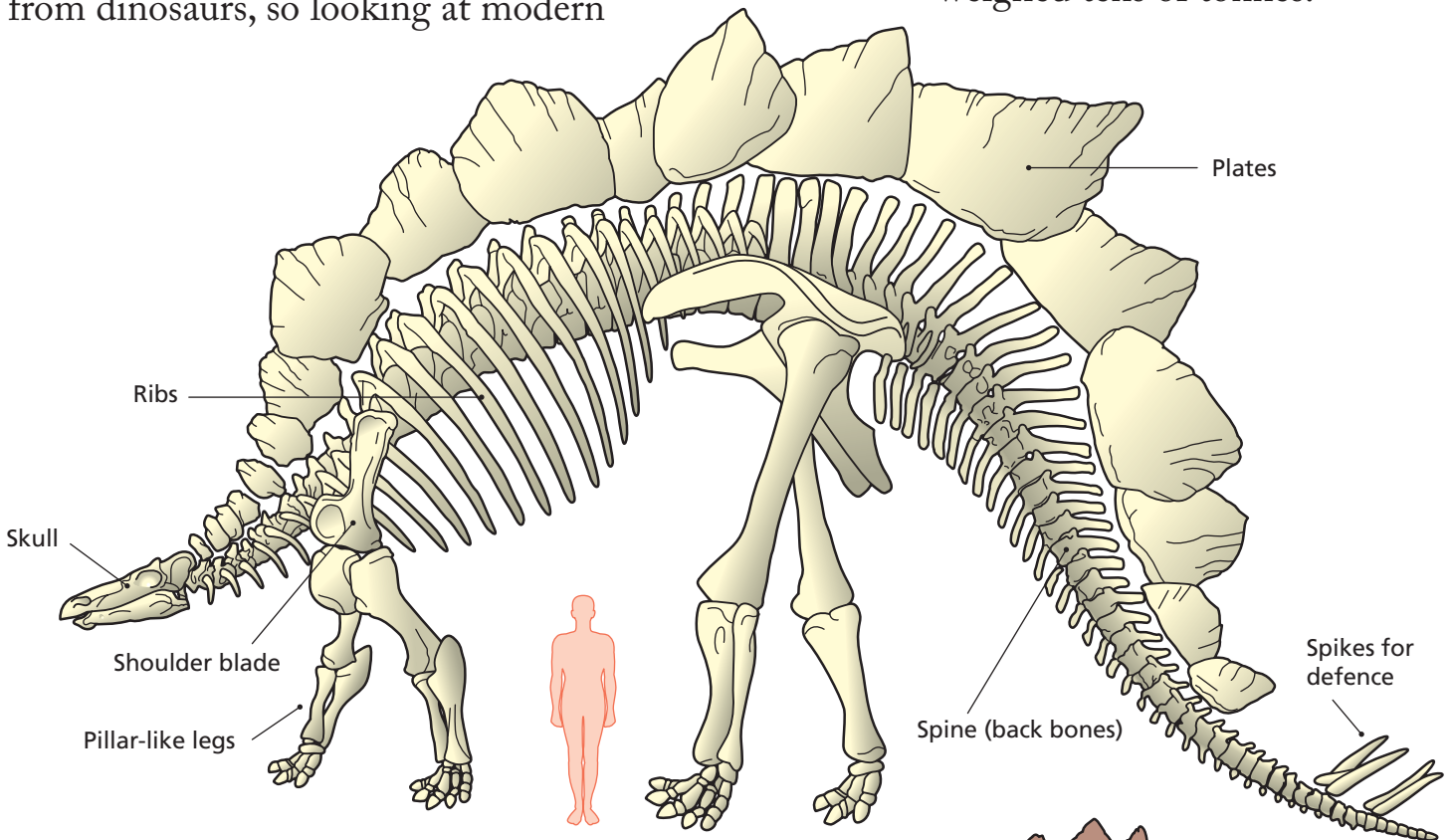
The **DINOSAURS**, which were ancient reptiles that lived on land, were the largest creatures ever to live on the planet. But as they died out 65 million years ago, no one has ever seen a dinosaur. However, from studying their bones, we know much about how they lived, what they looked like and how they moved.

Modern reptiles are not descended from dinosaurs, so looking at modern

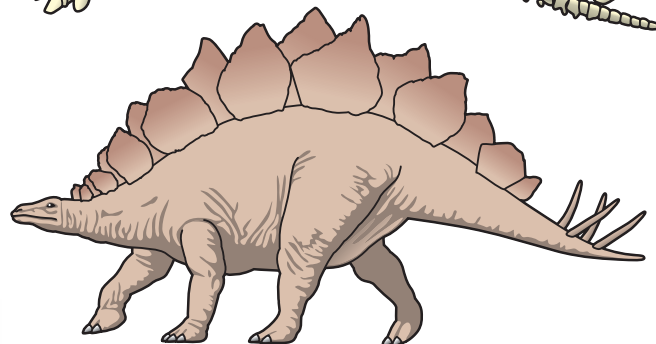
reptiles is of limited help. Scientists are not even sure whether dinosaurs were warm- or cold-blooded. Evidence now suggests they were warm-blooded, whereas modern reptiles are cold-blooded.

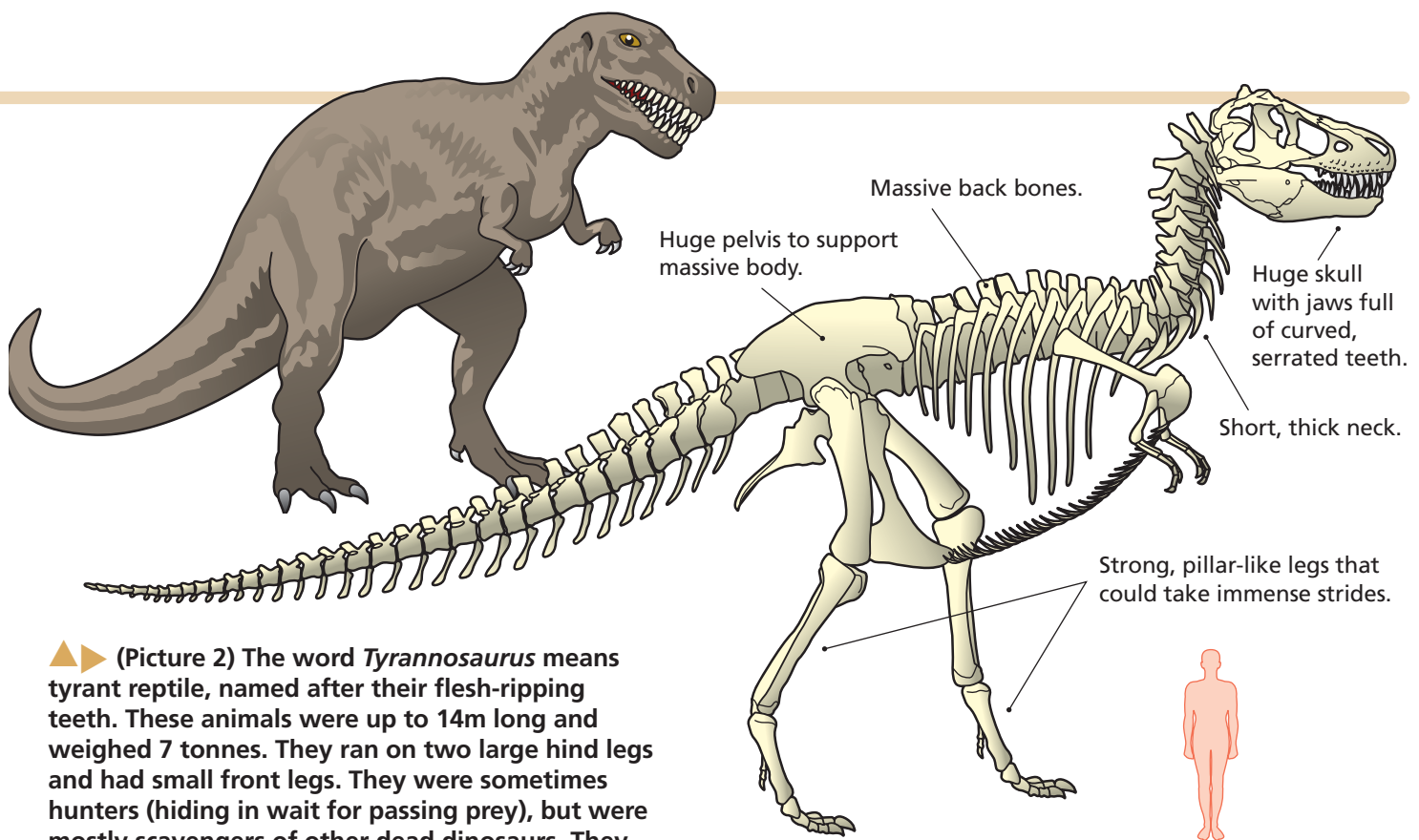
Dinosaur size and speed

Some of the biggest dinosaurs were tens of metres long, over ten metres tall and weighed tens of tonnes.



►► (Picture 1) The word *Stegosaurus* means roofed reptile, named after the Greek word for the 'roof' of plates on its back. These animals were up to 7.5m tall and weighed up to 2 tonnes. They were plant eaters, with mouths for chopping off the plants and huge stomachs for digesting the plants.





▲▲ (Picture 2) The word *Tyrannosaurus* means tyrant reptile, named after their flesh-ripping teeth. These animals were up to 14m long and weighed 7 tonnes. They ran on two large hind legs and had small front legs. They were sometimes hunters (hiding in wait for passing prey), but were mostly scavengers of other dead dinosaurs. They were too large to run large distances after prey.

Animals of this size could not move quickly, and so the biggest dinosaurs, such as *Stegosaurus* (Picture 1), could not have hunted for food. Instead, they had to be plant eaters. They had teeth suited to tearing at leaves, and huge stomachs to digest the tonnes of food they ate.

The smaller dinosaurs were lighter and so were able to move more quickly. These were the meat eaters, of which *Tyrannosaurus* (Picture 2) is one of the largest, with a huge head and flesh-ripping teeth, although *Deinonychus* (a wolf-sized animal) was probably the most ferocious, especially because it hunted in packs.

Special features

The legs of dinosaurs were tucked in under their bodies, rather than sticking out at

the sides like other reptiles. This is what allowed them to move quickly and, for some, to stand on two legs. Many of the hunting dinosaurs, like *Tyrannosaurus*, walked on two legs. As a result, their arm bones are much thinner than their leg bones. The large plant eaters walked on all fours, and so their legs are similar in size.

A few dinosaurs had special plates on their backs. *Stegosaurus* had a double row of giant plates down its back, possibly to support skin and to act like radiators, getting rid of excess heat.

Summary

- Many dinosaurs were large and so needed large bones to support them.
- The hunting dinosaurs were mainly two-legged.
- The plant-eating dinosaurs needed large bodies to digest the food they ate.