Lesson 1 - Drifting Continents

In 1910, a German scientist named Alfred Wegener became curious about why some continents look as though they could fit together.

Wegener's hypothesis was that all the continents were once joined together in a single landmass and have since drifted apart.

This idea that continents slowly move over the Earth's surface became known as Continental drift.

The continents were joined together in a supercontinent, or single landmass, called Pangaea about 300 million years ago.

Over tens of millions of years, Pangaea began to break apart. The pieces slowly moved to their present-day locations.

Evidence from Land Features: Wegener pieced together maps of Africa and South America and noticed that the mountain ranges on the continents lined up.

Evidence from Fossils: Fossils from Glossopteris an ancient fernlike plant has been found in Africa, South America, Australia, India, and Antarctica.

Fossils of the freshwater reptiles Mesosaurus and Lystrosaurus have also been found in places now seperated by water.

Evidence from Climate: Fossils of tropical plants have been found on an island in the Artic Ocean. When the plants lived the climate must have been much warmer and milder. The climate changed because the island moved.

Wegener oculd not provide a satisfactory explanation for the force that pushes or pulls the continenents. Because he could not identify the cause of continental drift, most geologists of his time rejected his idea.