Nova’s Guide to Human Teeth

Learning objective: To identify and describe the functions of different types of human teeth in the digestive system.

Read each question carefully and use your knowledge of human biology to answer. Ensure you use scientific terminology where appropriate.

Nova the owl is fascinated by how humans break down food to get energy. She has been studying how our teeth are adapted for different roles during the first stage of digestion.

Word bank: incisors · canines · premolars · molars · digestion · enamel · mastication

1. Nova notices that humans have different shaped teeth. Identify the two types of teeth primarily used for crushing and grinding food, and explain why their shape is suited for this task. (2 marks)

2. Explain the specific role of incisors when you take a bite of a crisp apple. How does their shape help with this action? (2 marks)

3. Why do you think humans have canine teeth, which are pointed and sharp, compared to an herbivore like a cow that mostly eats grass? (2 marks)

4. If a child buys a sugary snack for £1.20, why might the sugar content be harmful to the enamel of their teeth if they do not brush them regularly? (2 marks)

5. Order the following teeth from the front of the mouth to the back: Premolars, Incisors, Molars, Canines. (1 mark)

Draw: Draw a diagram of the human mouth and label the four main types of teeth: incisors, canines, premolars, and molars. Use different colours to represent each type.

Extension challenge: Research the function of wisdom teeth. Why do many adult humans have them removed, and what does this suggest about the evolution of the human jaw?