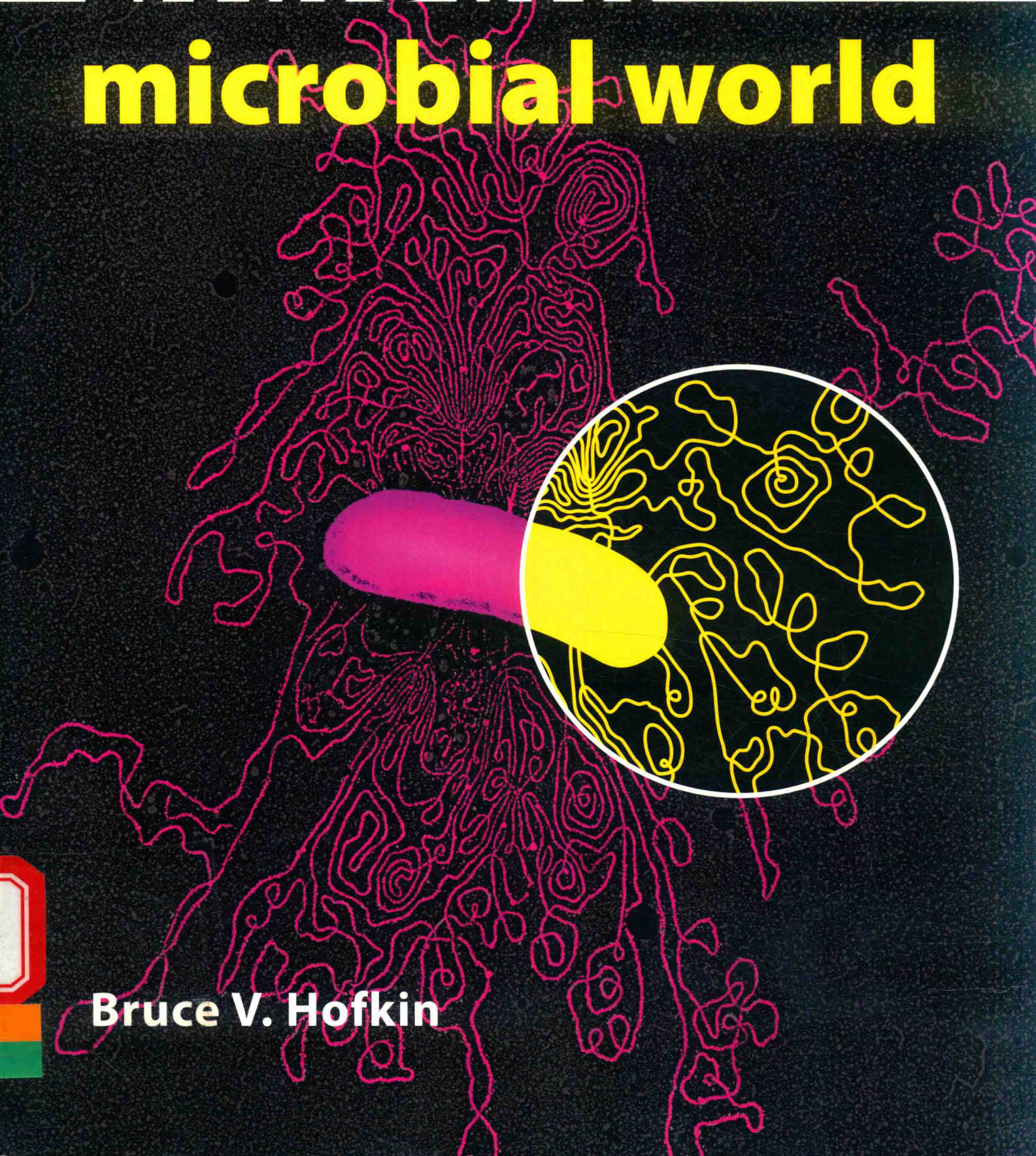


LIVING IN A microbial world



Bruce V. Hofkin

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Bruce V. Hofkin

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Preface

In the era of the 24-hour news cycle, we are bombarded routinely with important stories about microorganisms. AIDS, SARS, “bird flu,” *E. coli* outbreaks, meningitis, vaccines, antibiotic resistance, and most recently “swine flu,” make alarming copy that scare the public, and in turn fuel greater media coverage from established news sources, columnists, and the blogosphere. With conflicting information swirling through the media, it has become increasingly important for people to understand the basic principles of microbiology, in order to separate rumor and conjecture from good science, and make rational decisions about potential microbial threats and their health.

Living in a Microbial World is a textbook written for students taking a general microbiology or microbiology-themed course for non-science majors. It teaches the essential concepts of microbiology through practical examples and a conversational writing style intended to make the material accessible to a wide audience. The book will enable non-scientists to understand important issues about microorganisms and disease that they will encounter throughout their lives, and I hope it will help them make informed decisions about health issues for themselves, their families, and communities. Learning the principles of microbiology pays other dividends as well. The core topics—such as cell structure and function, microbial genetics, metabolism, and microbial evolution—have broader application to the life sciences in general, and can help students understand the living world, as well as the basic science, in a more profound and rewarding manner. The reader will learn the role that microorganisms play not only in our health but also in ecosystem processes, our diet, industrial production, and human history. Topics that we hear about every day, from global warming to energy independence to bioterrorism, all have a microbial angle. This text is designed to provide the reader with the background needed to understand and discuss such topics with a genuine understanding rooted in science.

In order to make the science relevant to everyday life and the practical interests of a non-science audience, each chapter of the book contains a series of cases intended to motivate learning the microbiology concepts. The cases present microbiology in the news, in history, in literature, and in scenarios of everyday life. Each case ends with several questions intended to pique student interest, and the questions are then answered as the student reads the next section of the chapter. For example, to introduce the topic of pathogen transmission, the introductory case recalls the true story of how the Norwalk Virus was spread among players of opposing teams during a college football game. Similarly, microbial freshwater ecology is introduced

with a description of a recent outbreak of avian botulism in Lake Erie. And drug resistance is discussed in the context of a mother who does not follow the doctor's directions, and stops giving her son antibiotics immediately after he feels better.

In addition to the cases, there are other features that should make the text inviting to the non-scientist. To emphasize the human context, there is a separate chapter on "Microbiology in History and the History of Microbiology," and epidemiology has its own chapter as well. Due to its foundational role in biology as a whole, and microbiology in particular, there is a chapter devoted entirely to microbial evolution, and evolutionary concepts are emphasized throughout the book. To streamline the text and make it more accessible, several traditional microbiology topics, which often receive their own chapters, have been integrated throughout other parts of the book. For example, in lieu of having a chapter on microbiology techniques, topics such as the Gram stain and the acid-fast stain are introduced in the discussion of cell wall structure. And throughout the book, examples of specific diseases are integrated into discussions of appropriate topics.

In these ways I have attempted to provide the reader with a meaningful, relevant, and contemporary text, through which they can explore the many wonders of the microbial world. It is my hope that after reading the book, students will share my fascination with this remarkable and diverse assembly of living things.

Like all textbooks, *Living in a Microbial World* has been a collaborative effort. Many people helped bring it to fruition, and these individuals are recognized in the acknowledgments. Any remaining errors, however, are solely the responsibility of the author. Please help us with these errors by contacting science@garland.com so that corrections can be made in the next printing.

Student And Instructor Resources

The following supplements are available for students and instructors. They can be accessed at <http://www.garlandscience.com/LMW>

The Art of *Living in a Microbial World*

The images and tables from the book are available in two convenient formats: PowerPoint® and JPEG. The PowerPoint slides can be customized for lectures.

Microbiology Movies

Short movies have been developed to complement material in a select number of chapters, with a special emphasis on molecular genetics, virology, and immunology. Each movie has a voice-over narration, and the text of the narration is available for download.

Student Quizzes

Short online quizzes are available for each chapter to test basic reading comprehension.

Flashcards

Online flashcards are available to test mastery of the key terms listed at the end of each chapter.

Glossary

The glossary at the end of the book is available online for quick searching and browsing.

Acknowledgments

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Contents

Chapter 1	Living in a Microbial World	1
Chapter 2	The Chemistry of Life	17
Chapter 3	The Cell: Where Life Begins	45
Chapter 4	A Field Guide to the Microorganisms	71
Chapter 5	The Microbiology of History and the History of Microbiology	107
Chapter 6	Microbial Genetics	133
Chapter 7	Metabolism and Growth	169
Chapter 8	Microbial Evolution: The Origin and Diversity of Life	203
Chapter 9	An Ecologist's Guide to Microbiology	229
Chapter 10	The Nature of Disease: A Pathogen's Perspective	259
Chapter 11	Host Defense	285
Chapter 12	Control of Microbial Growth	315
Chapter 13	Epidemiology: Who, What, When, Where, and Why?	343
Chapter 14	The Future Is Here: Microorganisms and Biotechnology	367
Chapter 15	Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: Microorganisms and Food	395
Chapter 16	Better Living With Microorganisms: Industrial and Applied Microbiology	417
	Glossary	G:1
	Figure Acknowledgments	F:1
	Index	I:1

Detailed Contents

Chapter 1 Living in a Microbial World

The Science of Microbiology

All living things are composed of one or more cells

All living things display other observable characteristics

Microbiology involves the study of several distinct groups of living things

Viruses strain our notion of what it means to be “alive”

Microbiology is closely intertwined with the study of nonmicroorganisms

Microbiology is composed of many specialized subdisciplines

CASE: ART COMES ALIVE?

The Scientific Method

A proper scientific experiment involves a series of well-defined steps

CASE: FLEMING REVISITED

If a hypothesis cannot be disproved, it may eventually become a theory

Coming Up Next...

Key Terms

Concept Questions

Chapter 2 The Chemistry of Life

Atoms: the Basic Building Blocks of Matter

Atoms are made up of smaller components called subatomic particles

As an atom's stability increases, its energy decreases

An ionic bond is formed when electrons are transferred from one atom to another

1	CASE: BACTERIA, SALT, AND CYSTIC FIBROSIS	20
3	Covalent bonds form when atoms share electrons in their outermost shells	22
3	Covalent bonds can be classified as either polar or nonpolar	22
4		
	The Importance of Water	25
4	Acids and bases are compounds that increase or decrease the concentration of protons in water	25
7	CASE: FISHLESS IN PENNSYLVANIA	25
7		
	Organic Molecules: the Building Blocks of Life	29
7	Carbohydrates function as energy storage and structural molecules	30
7	CASE: BACTERIAL HORSE HELPERS	30
10	Lipids are relatively hydrophobic molecules, also used for energy storage and structure	33
10	Proteins participate in a variety of crucial biological processes	35
10	CASE: BAD BAMBOO	35
13	Biological reactions require enzymes functioning as catalysts	38
13		
14	CASE: CALL IN THE CLOT BUSTERS	38
14	Nucleic acids direct the assembly of proteins	40
	Coming Up Next...	41
	Key Terms	42
	Concept Questions	42
17		
17		
18	Chapter 3 The Cell: Where Life Begins	45
19	Basic Concepts in Cell Biology	46
20	As cells get larger, their efficiency decreases	48
	CASE: SIZE DOES MATTER!	48

The Prokaryotic Cell	49	Domain Archaea	79
Many prokaryotes have extracellular structures, extending beyond the cell wall	50	Eukaryotic Microorganisms	80
CASE: PLAQUE ATTACK	50	Protozoa are single-celled organisms within the domain eukarya	81
Most prokaryotes are protected from the exterior environment by a rigid cell wall	52	CASE: THE CAT'S OUT OF THE BAG ON A PROTOZOAN PARASITE	81
CASE: AN OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD	53	Many fungi are involved in disease or ecological processes or are useful for industrial purposes	84
Bacteria with different cell wall types can be distinguished by specific staining techniques	56	CASE: FIRST YOU SHAKE, THEN YOU ACHE	84
Some prokaryotes lack a cell wall	57	Fungi have one of two body plans and can be unicellular or multicellular	86
Each cell is surrounded by a plasma membrane	58	Kingdom Fungi is composed of four phyla	87
The liquid interior of the cell forms the cell's cytoplasm	59	The Viruses	89
CASE: THE ANTHRAX SCARE	60	CASE: "DEATH" IN THE RUE MORGUE	89
The Eukaryotic Cell	62	Most viruses have one of a few basic structures	90
The number of cells in a eukaryotic organism is variable	62	Specific viruses usually infect only certain hosts and certain cells within those hosts	91
While plant and fungal cells have cell walls, animal cells do not	63	Replication of animal viruses proceeds through a series of defined steps	92
Like prokaryotes, all eukaryotic cells are surrounded by a membrane	63	Replication is different for DNA and RNA viruses	95
The cytoplasm of eukaryotic cells contains a variety of membrane-bound organelles	64	Not all viral infections cause symptoms or kill host cells	97
CASE: PARROT FEVER	66	Viruses can damage host cells in several ways	98
Coming Up Next...	68	Like animals, plants are susceptible to many viral infections	99
Key Terms	68	Bacteriophages are viruses that infect bacteria	99
Concept Questions	69	Phages can influence the numbers of bacteria and even the diseases that they cause	101
Chapter 4 A Field Guide to the Microorganisms	71	Prions	102
Taxonomy: How Life Is Classified	71	CASE: LAST LAUGH FOR THE "LAUGHING DEATH"	102
Taxonomy is based on a system of hierarchical groupings	72	Coming Up Next...	104
Modern classification reflects evolutionary relatedness	72	Key Terms	104
DNA analysis provides evidence for relatedness	73	Concept Questions	105
CASE: STREAMS, SNAILS, AND SCHISTOSOMES	74	Chapter 5 The Microbiology of History and the History of Microbiology	107
Kingdoms are organized among three domains	75	If Microbiologists Wrote History	107
Organizing Microorganisms	76	CASE: THE SPANISH CONQUEST OF MEXICO	107
Domain Bacteria	76	Disease influenced important events in ancient Greece and Rome	108
The earliest bacteria were adapted to life on the primitive Earth	77	The Black Death altered European society forever	111
CASE: THE HEAT WAS ON!	77	European explorers imported many diseases into the new world	112
The tree spreads out	78	Several important events of the 19th century owe their outcomes to microorganisms	115
The most recently evolved lineages are found at the farthest branches of the tree	79		

Certain episodes in both World Wars I and II were influenced by microorganisms	117	The environment influences the nature of genetically determined characteristics	153
Some infectious disease is caused by nonmicroorganisms	120	Sources of Genetic Variation	154
The Science of Microbiology: A Brief History	120	Both asexual and sexual organisms are able to generate new genetic combinations	154
CASE: THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT GARFIELD	120	CASE: GRIFFITH'S TRANSFORMING FACTOR	155
Microorganisms were first discovered in the 17th century	121	Genetic recombination in prokaryotes has great significance for humans	159
The science of microbiology was born in the second half of the 19th century	121	Mutations are the original source of genetic variation	160
The "germ theory of disease" was advanced by the understanding of the need for hospital sanitation	124	CASE: END OF THE LINE FOR A LAST-LINE DEFENSE?	160
The development of pure culture technique allowed rapid advances in microbiology	126	Mutations are caused by many factors	162
Koch was the first to link a specific microorganism to a particular disease	126	Many mutations are repaired before they can affect phenotype	163
The germ theory led to major advances in disease control	127	Mutations are the raw material of evolution	165
With the development of the first vaccines, the field of immunology was born	128	Coming Up Next...	165
Antimicrobial drugs are a 20th century innovation	129	Key Terms	165
Into the modern era	130	Concept Questions	166
Coming Up Next...	130	Chapter 7 Metabolism and Growth	169
Key Terms	130	Metabolism is similar in all living things	170
Concept Questions	131	Basic Concepts	170
Chapter 6 Microbial Genetics	133	Energy released from food molecules is used for other processes that require energy	170
DNA: Structure and Organization	134	Cells convert the energy in biological molecules into ATP	171
DNA is an information molecule	134	Energy is transferred from one molecule to another via oxidation and reduction	172
The structure of DNA is the key to how it functions	135	Cell Respiration	175
DNA is found on chromosomes	137	Carbohydrates are the primary source of energy used in cell respiration	175
DNA Function: Replication	138	Cell respiration occurs in three stages	176
Each DNA molecule can be accurately copied into two new DNA molecules	138	In glycolysis, glucose is partially oxidized, forming two smaller molecules called pyruvate	177
CASE: DNA: FORM SUGGESTS FUNCTION	138	In the Krebs cycle, pyruvate from glycolysis is completely oxidized and the energy released is transferred as electrons to NAD ⁺ and FAD	178
DNA replication begins at a site called the origin	140	NADH and FADH ₂ are oxidized in electron transport, providing the energy for ATP synthesis	179
DNA Function: Genes to Proteins	141	CASE: SOMETHING'S FISHY IN THE FRIDGE	180
A cell's characteristics are largely determined by the proteins that the cell produces	141	Protons that are pumped across a membrane in electron transport provide an energy source for ATP synthesis	182
In transcription, a gene's DNA is used to produce complementary RNA	143	Incomplete glucose oxidation results in fermentation	183
CASE: CHRISTMAS TREES AND TRANSCRIPTION	143	Molecules other than glucose can be used to generate ATP	185
Amino acids are assembled into protein during translation	147		
CASE: PROTEIN SYNTHESIS: DEAD IN ITS TRACKS	147		
Gene activity is often carefully regulated	151		

CASE: NAME THAT BACTERIUM	185	Microorganisms are subject to the laws of natural selection	218
Autotrophs: the Self-feeders	186	CASE: VANCOMYCIN RESISTANCE: THE SEQUEL	218
In photosynthesis, energy in sunlight is used to produce biological molecules	186	Natural selection can influence the virulence of disease-causing organisms	220
Chemoautotrophs use chemical energy the way that photoautotrophs use solar energy	188	CASE: A TALE OF TWO COUNTRIES—AUSTRALIA, ENGLAND, RABBITS, AND THE MYXOMA VIRUS	220
Microbial Metabolism and Growth	188	Microorganisms often influence the evolution of their hosts	222
Microbial growth refers to population growth	189	CASE: ALICE IN WONDERLAND	224
Oxygen, temperature, nutrient levels, and other environmental factors all influence microbial growth rate	191	Coming Up Next...	225
CASE: CANINE FIRST AID	192	Key Terms	226
Microbial populations pass through a sequence of phases called the growth curve	196	Concept Questions	226
As the environment changes, microbial metabolism and therefore the growth curve changes in response	197	Chapter 9 An Ecologist's Guide to Microbiology	229
CASE: MAKING YOGURT	197	Basic Ecological Principles	230
Coming Up Next...	199	Ecology is the study of how living things interact with each other and the environment	230
Key Terms	200	Energy and nutrients are passed between organisms in an ecosystem	230
Concept Questions	200	Nutrients are recycled in an ecosystem, whereas energy is not	232
Chapter 8 Microbial Evolution: The Origin and Diversity of Life	203	Microbial Ecology	232
How Life Began	203	Microorganisms live in microenvironments	233
Conditions on the early Earth were very different than they are today	203	Environmental conditions affect the growth rate of microorganisms	233
The first biological molecules were formed from nonbiological precursors	204	Many microorganisms live in biofilms	234
Genetic information may have originally been encoded in RNA instead of DNA	206	Microbial Habitats: Here, There, Everywhere	235
The first cells required a membrane and genetic material	207	Soil often harbors rich microbial communities	235
The first prokaryotes are thought to have arisen approximately 3.5 billion years ago	208	Many microorganisms are adapted to life in freshwater	238
Certain important metabolic pathways evolved in a defined sequence	208	CASE: WATER BIRDS AND BOTULISM	238
Eukaryotes evolved from prokaryotic ancestors	210	Water pollution can lead to severe oxygen depletion	241
CASE: CELLS WITHIN CELLS	210	CASE: LAKE ERIE: A NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE	241
Multicellular life arose from colonies of unicellular eukaryotes	212	Although similar in many ways, the marine environment is distinct from freshwater	242
The origin of viruses is obscure	213	Cloud-dwelling bacteria may be important in promoting rainfall	245
Prions may have arisen from abnormal host proteins	214	Microorganisms and Biogeochemical Cycles	245
Exobiology is the search for extraterrestrial life	214	Carbon moves between living things and the environment	246
Evolution: Explaining Life's Diversity	215	CASE: IRONING OUT GLOBAL WARMING?	246
Natural selection is the driving force of evolution	216	Bacteria convert nitrogen into forms that plants can absorb	248

CASE: THE KEY TO A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST	248	CASE: TROUBLE IN PARADISE	273
Sulfur in organic material is returned to the environment by microorganisms	251	CASE: A RUPTURED APPENDIX	275
Like other cycles, the phosphorus cycle relies on microbial activity	251	Viruses cause disease by interfering with the normal activities of the of the cells they infect	277
Ecological Interactions Involving Microorganisms	253	Different eukaryotic parasites affect their hosts in diverse ways	278
Both organisms in a mutualism benefit from the relationship	253	Pathogens leave the host through a portal of exit	279
In a commensal relationship one organism is benefited while the other is unaffected	254	Symptoms of disease often assist the pathogen in its transmission to a new host	280
Microorganisms in the same environment may compete for certain resources	254	CASE: WHO'S HURTING WHOM?	280
CASE: A MICROSCOPIC DOG-EAT-DOG WORLD	254	Coming Up Next...	281
Some microorganisms are predators	255	Key Terms	282
Coming Up Next...	256	Concept Questions	282
Key Terms	257	Chapter 11 Host Defense	285
Concept Questions	257	When infection cannot be blocked, first innate immunity and then adaptive immunity is activated	286
Chapter 10 The Nature of Disease: A Pathogen's Perspective	259	CASE: INFLUENZA: EXPOSED!	286
Basic Principles of Infectious Disease	260	Barriers to Entry	288
Contact with microorganisms only rarely results in disease	260	CASE: FRED	288
Hosts are colonized with normal microbial flora that is usually harmless	260	CASE: LAURA	290
CASE: SAYONARA SALMONELLA	260	The Innate Immune Response	290
The Process of Infectious Disease	263	If barriers to entry fail, the pathogen is confronted by elements of innate immunity	290
A pathogen must achieve several objectives if it is to cause disease	263	When innate mechanisms fail to eliminate an infection, the adaptive immune response is activated	293
Reservoirs provide a place for pathogens to persist before and after an infection	264	Antigen-presenting cells activate those cells responsible for adaptive immunity	294
CASE: WHAT'S BUGGING KITTY?	264	Antigen-presenting cells migrate to lymphatic organs to activate adaptive immunity	295
The type of reservoir used by a pathogen has implications for disease control	266	The Adaptive Immune Response	296
Pathogens must reach a new host via one or more modes of transmission	268	Antigen-presenting cells activate helper T cells to initiate an adaptive response	296
CASE: REVENGE OF THE BLUE DEVILS	268	Some activated helper T cells activate cytotoxic T cells to initiate a cell-mediated response	298
Pathogens gain access to the host through a portal of entry	270	Helper T cells also activate B cells to initiate a humoral immune response	298
Once they have entered, pathogens must adhere to the host	270	In a humoral response, several different classes of antibodies may be produced	302
Most pathogens must increase in number before they cause disease	271	A successful adaptive response culminates in the elimination of the pathogen	303
Successful pathogens must at least initially evade host defenses	272	An adaptive response is not always successful	304
Bacterial pathogens cause disease in several different ways	272	CASE: BONNIE	304
		Subsequent exposure to the same pathogen results in a stronger and faster adaptive response	304

Vaccines induce immunological memory without causing disease	306	Chapter 13 Epidemiology: Who, What, When, Where, and Why?	343
HIV: A Problem of Immune System Destruction	307	The Birth of Epidemiology	344
CASE: OSCAR	307	The first modern epidemiological study identified cholera as a waterborne disease	344
Host Versus Pathogen: A Summary	311	Florence Nightingale found that improved hygiene reduced the likelihood of typhus	345
Coming Up Next...	312	Epidemics	345
Key Terms	312	A single contaminated site can give rise to a common source epidemic	345
Concept Questions	313	CASE: AN OUTBREAK OF HEPATITIS A	345
Chapter 12 Control of Microbial Growth	315	Host-to-host epidemics are spread from infected to noninfected individuals	347
Physical and Chemical Means of Control	316	Epidemics can occur for biological, environmental, and/or social reasons	347
Physical control of microorganisms involves manipulation of specific environmental factors such as temperature	316	CASE: CAUGHT RED-HANDED—AND WHITE-BEAKED!	347
CASE: COLD, HARD FACTS ABOUT COLD-FILTERED BEER	318	Epidemics become more likely when fewer people in a population are resistant	349
Chemical methods can control microorganisms on living and nonliving material	320	Epidemic outbreaks of influenza occur as the virus changes genetically	352
A variety of chemicals have antiseptic and disinfectant properties	320	CASE: FLU SEASON	352
CASE: WASH YOUR HANDS FIRST!	321	Investigating Disease Outbreaks	355
Antimicrobial Chemotherapy	322	CASE: A NEW BUG ON THE BLOCK	356
An ideal antimicrobial drug inhibits microorganisms without harming the host	323	A case definition helps health authorities determine if unusual cases are related	356
A drug's mode and speed of action, the type of infection being treated, the potential for side effects, and the likelihood of drug resistance all influence drug selection	325	Time, place, and personal characteristics of a new disease provide clues to the disease's identity	357
CASE: A MYSTERY ILLNESS	326	Case-control studies can pinpoint a common risk factor among affected individuals	358
Antibiotics work by interfering with specific bacterial structures or enzymes	328	Emergent Diseases	359
Selective toxicity, while possible, is harder to achieve against eukaryotic pathogens	331	Environmental, biological, behavioral, and social changes can result in emergent diseases	360
Antiviral drugs must interfere with a particular step in the viral replicative cycle	332	Emergent diseases can be categorized as one of four basic types	362
The misuse of antibiotics has led to the problem of drug resistance	335	Bioterrorism	364
CASE: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPLETING PRESCRIPTIONS	335	Coming Up Next...	364
New strategies provide options for circumventing antibiotic resistance	338	Key Terms	365
Coming Up Next...	339	Concept Questions	365
Key Terms	340	Chapter 14 The Future Is Here: Microorganisms and Biotechnology	367
Concept Questions	340	The Analysis of DNA	368
		Bacterial restriction enzymes have proven useful for cutting DNA at specific sites	368

DNA fragments can be separated by gel electrophoresis	369	In the absence of oxygen, some microorganisms undergo fermentation, releasing specific waste products	401
Southern blotting can be used to identify a specific gene of interest	371	Many plant products can be fermented into various food items	401
CASE: PINPOINTING A CANCER-CAUSING GENE	371	CASE: HOMEMADE WINE	402
Sequencing techniques can be used to reveal the sequence of nucleotides in a DNA sample	373	Fermented milk is the basis of making cheese and yogurt	407
CASE: TB—BC (“BEFORE COLUMBUS,” THAT IS)	374	Certain meat products, including salamis and cured hams, require fermentation	408
Large amounts of specific DNA sequences can be obtained with the polymerase chain reaction	374	Production of Other Foods and Dietary Supplements	408
The Sanger method can be used to sequence a specific sample of DNA	375	Coffee beans are readied for roasting through the use of bacteria	408
The entire genomes of many organisms have been sequenced	376	Many common dietary supplements are produced by microorganisms	408
CASE: <i>E. COLI</i> 'S DARK SIDE	376	CASE: MICROBIAL METABOLITES FOR A FEATHERED FRIEND	408
Genetic Engineering: Whose Gene Is It Anyway?	379	Time to Eat: A Few Microbial Recipes	410
CASE: BIOLOGICAL BLACKMAIL	379	Sauerkraut	410
Genes of interest can be cloned by inserting them into bacteria	379	Pickles	410
DNA from any organism can be maintained in a DNA library	383	Bagels	411
Insights and Applications	384	Yogurt	412
DNA technology has provided better understanding of genes and how they function	384	Greek feta cheese	412
DNA technology has numerous medical, agricultural, and industrial applications	385	Vegemite sandwich	413
CASE: THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY: THE KING IS DEAD OR LONG LIVE THE KING?	389	Coming Up Next...	414
Ethics and Safety	392	Key Terms	414
Coming Up Next...	393	Concept Questions	414
Key Terms	393	Chapter 16 Better Living With Microorganisms: Industrial and Applied Microbiology	417
Concept Questions	393	Commercial Applications	418
Chapter 15 Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: Microorganisms and Food	395	CASE: UNEARTHING A NEW ANTIBIOTIC	418
The Beginnings of a Beautiful Friendship	396	Many microorganisms produce metabolites with commercial potential	419
CASE: FLIGHT FROM EGYPT	396	Microorganisms producing promising metabolites must often be subjected to strain improvement	419
Microbial activity can help to preserve the quality of some foods	396	Potentially valuable microbes must also grow well in an industrial setting and must not pose undue risks to humans or the environment	421
Fermented dairy products and grains have been used for thousands of years	397	A defined series of steps are followed to move production from the laboratory to the factory	422
Microorganisms and Food Production	398	Many industrially produced microbial metabolites have useful medical applications	423
Some fungi and bacteria are consumed directly as food	398	Industrial microbial metabolites have a wide variety of other, nonmedical uses	425
CASE: WHAT'S FOR TUCKER, MATE?	398		

Big Problems, Little Solutions	426
New strategies are required to combat environmental pollution	427
CASE: THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS	427
Microorganisms are used to digest harmful chemicals through the process of bioremediation	428
Both the environmental context and the microbe being used determine how bioremediation is conducted	429
Bioremediation can prove valuable in many different settings	430
Microorganisms can help reduce solid waste and improve soil quality through composting	431
CASE: WASTE REDUCTION BEGINS AT HOME	431
Plastics may be replaced by biodegradable, microbially produced alternatives	432
Microorganisms may be used to help meet the demand for limited resources	433
Microorganisms may be able to stabilize soil, reducing earthquake damage	436
Coming Up Next...	436
Key Terms	436
Concept Questions	437