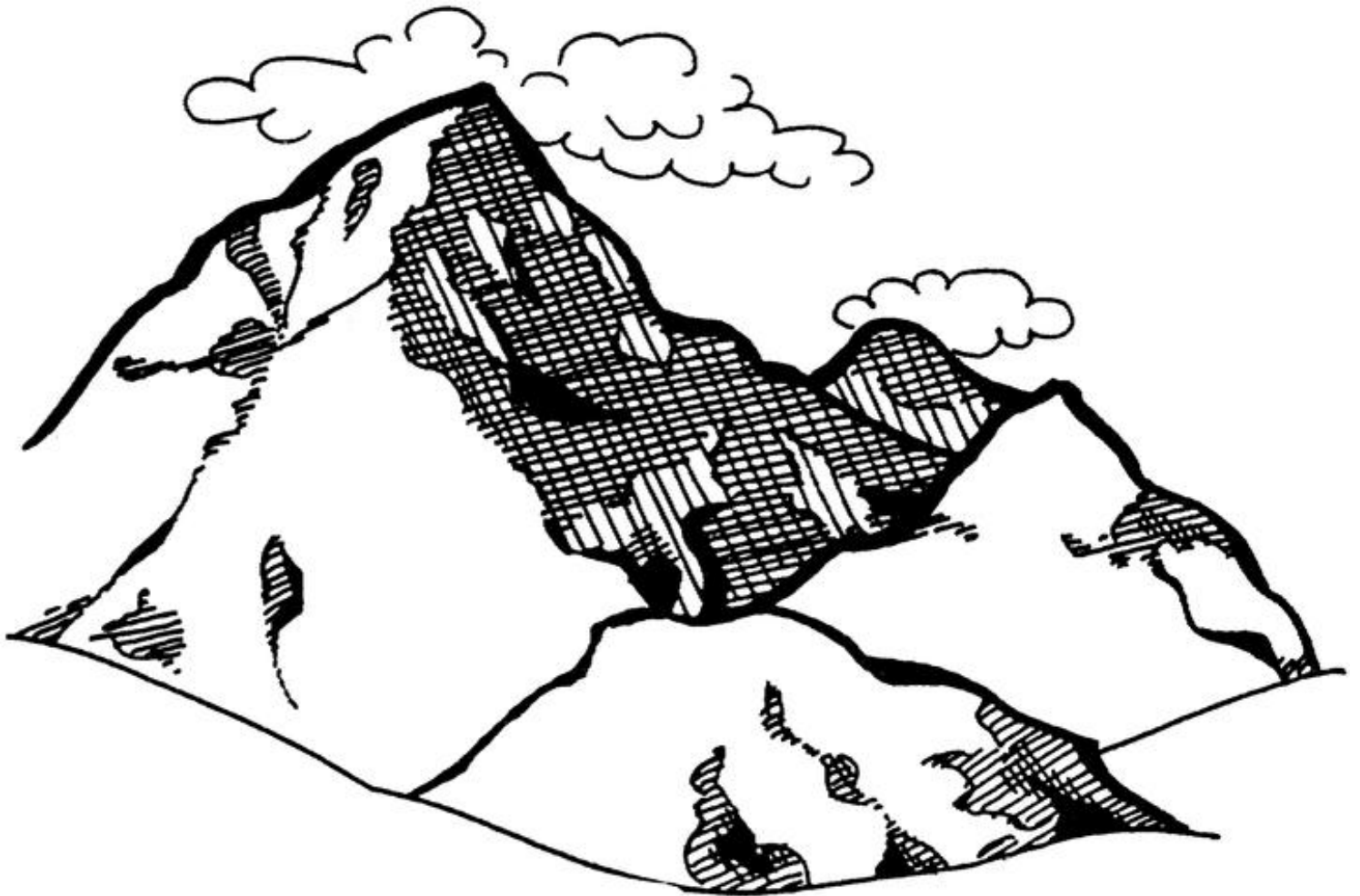


Rocks are found everywhere on Earth. In fact, the whole of the Earth is made of rock. Mountains are made of rock, canyons are made of rock, and there is even rock at the very bottom of rivers, and the oceans.

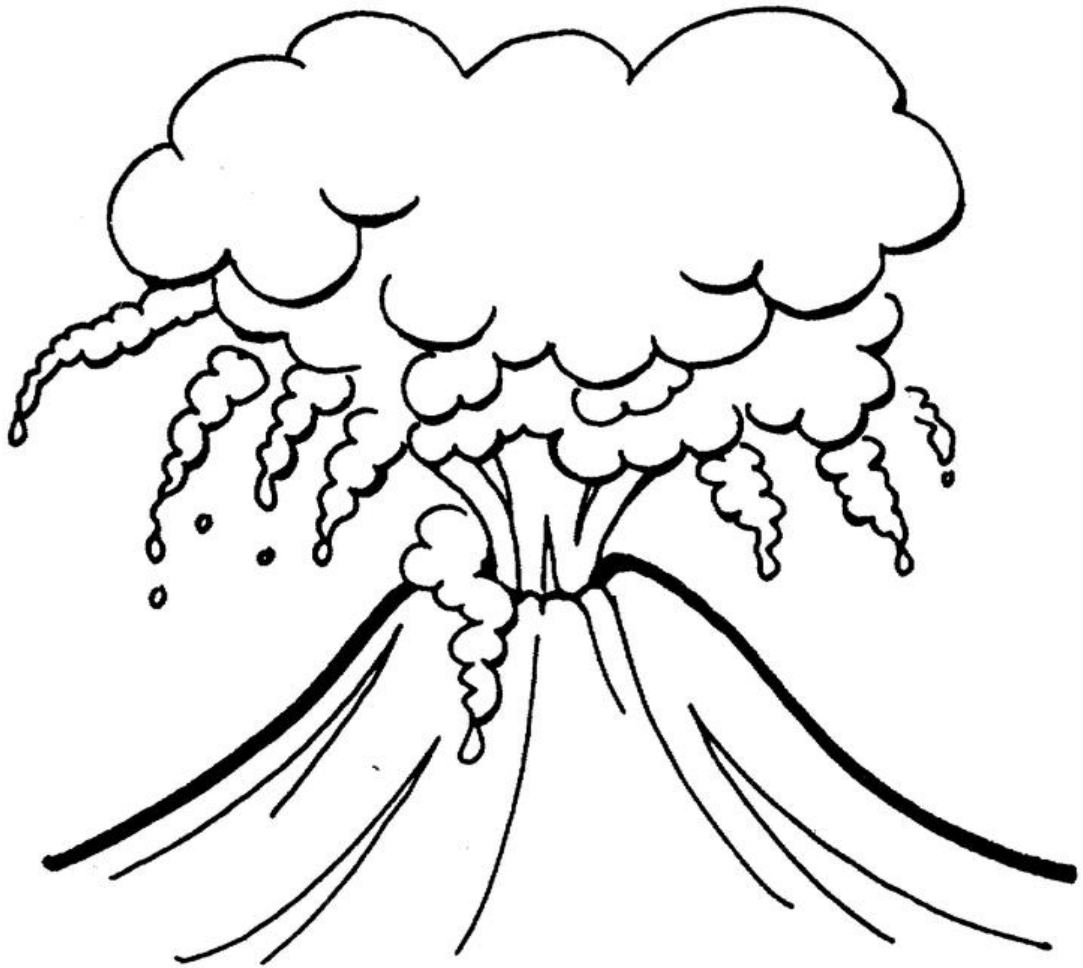


Rocks come in all sizes – very big like a mountain, small like a pebble, and very small, like a grain of sand. Sand is really tiny little pieces from a big rock, which were broken off by rain, or wind, or waves.



When sand mixes with dead plants, it makes dirt. Dirt is a great place for a seed to grow roots and sprout and grow into a new plant. People need to eat plants like vegetables and fruits to be healthy. So those tiny little pieces of rock, called sand, are very important.



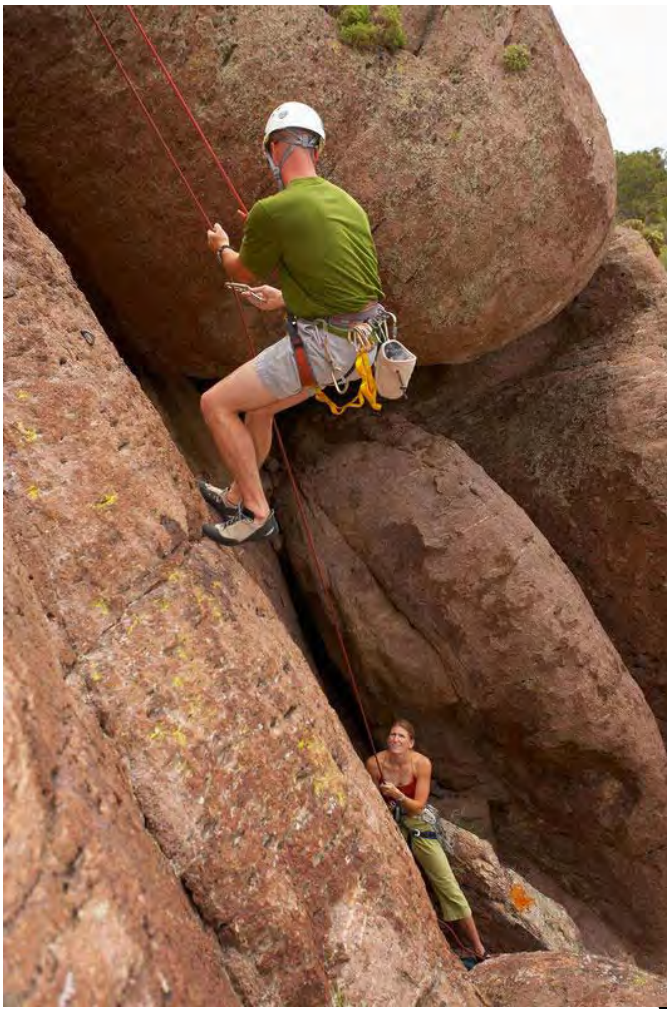


There are 3 kinds of rock.

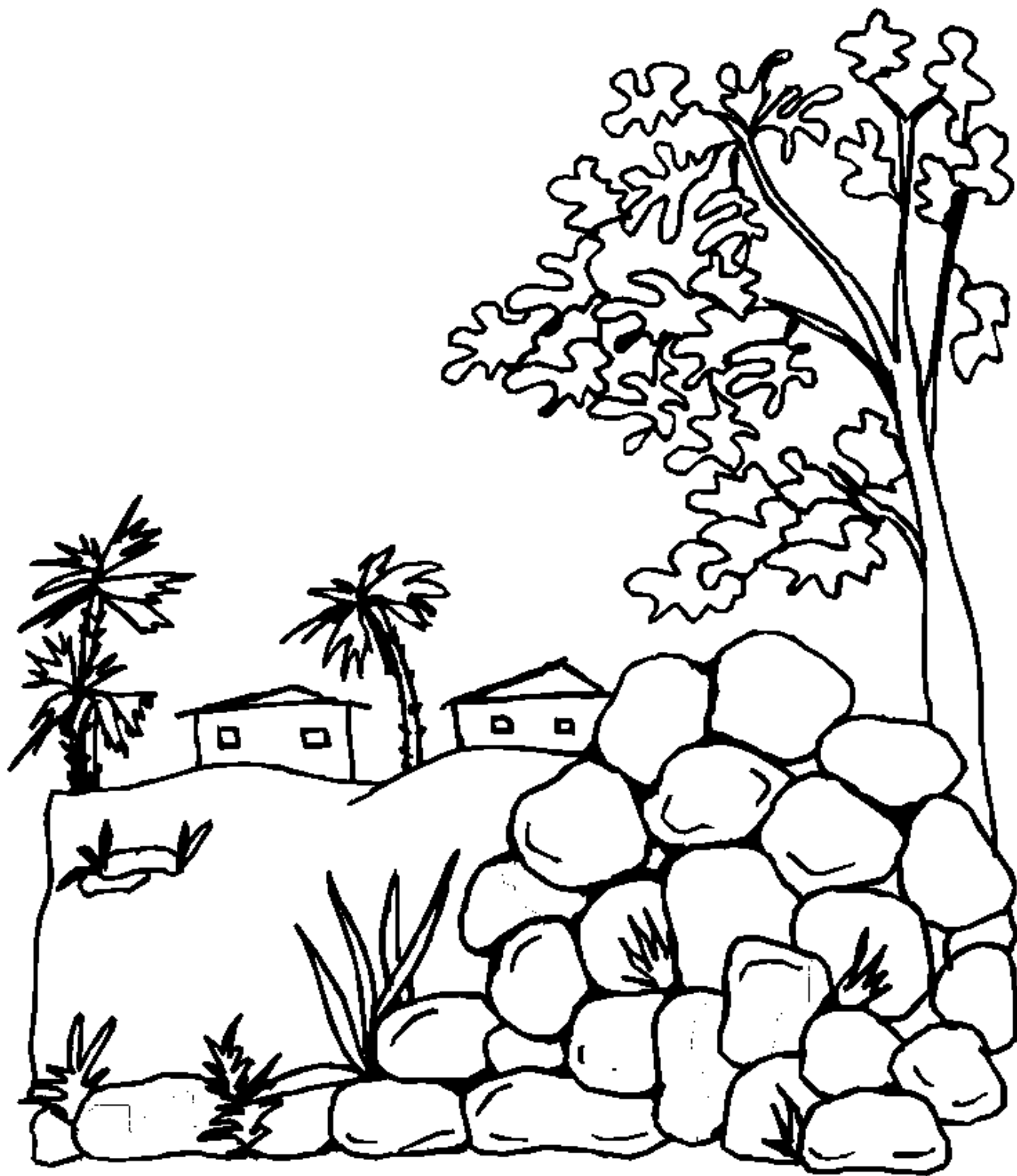
1) Igneous rock is made when the hot lava that erupts out of volcanoes cools down and gets hard.



2) Sedimentary rock is made when lots of sand grains are broken off mountains by wind and rain. Over a long time, the layers of sand collect at the bottom of rivers, join together, and become hard. We find most fossils in this kind of sedimentary rock.

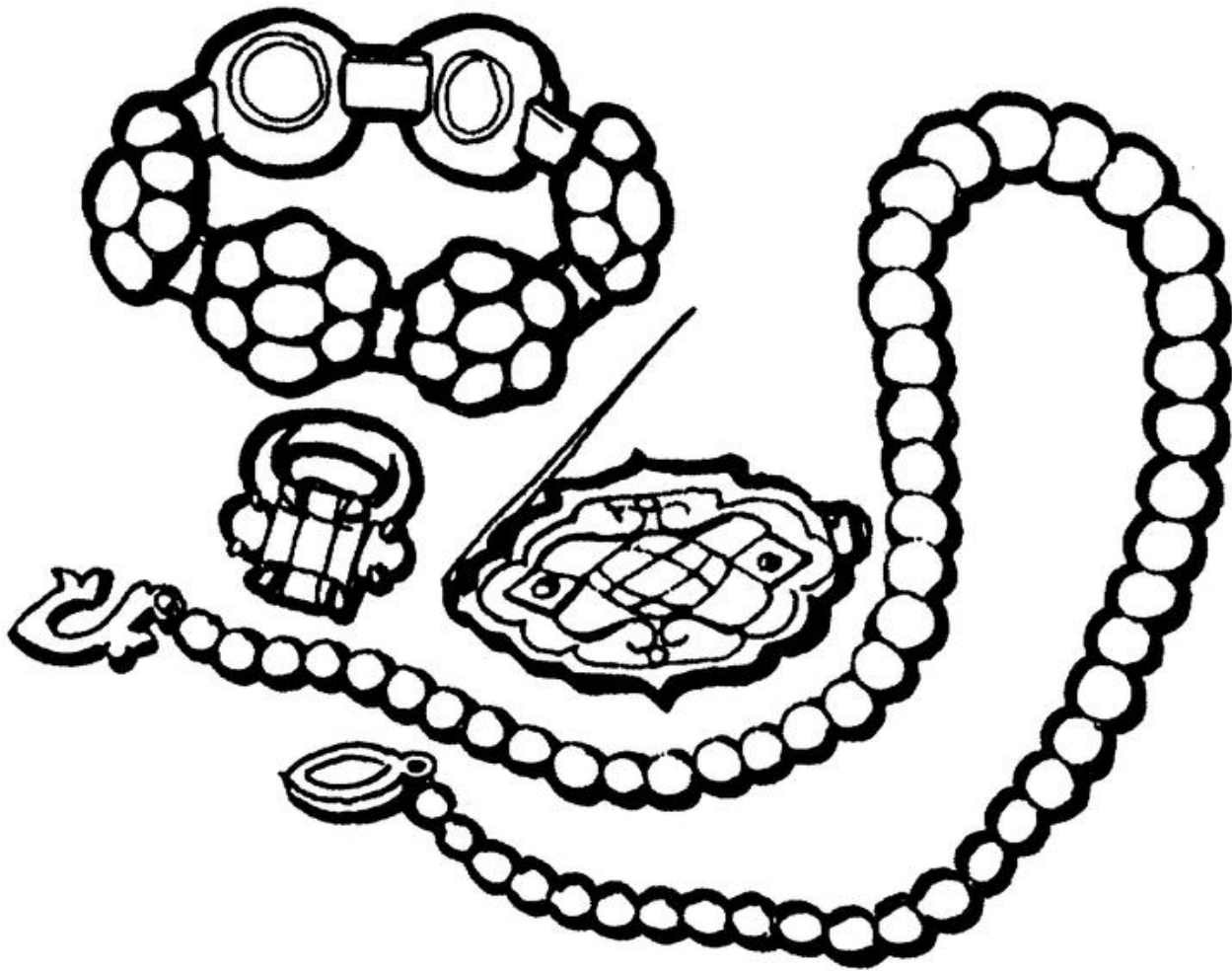


3) Metamorphic rock is made when igneous and sedimentary rocks are squeezed together tightly inside the earth for very long time. Metamorphic rocks like marble and slate are very hard, and have been on the Earth for millions of years.



You might find some or all of these kinds of rocks in your neighborhood, depending on where you live.





Crystals are special parts of rocks that were formed millions of years ago. The crystals were extremely hot and liquid at first, and trickled into the spaces between larger rocks, and then became hard over time. Crystals come in lots of different colors. Sometimes people like to polish rock crystals, and cut them into different shapes, and make jewelry with them. Another name for polished crystals is gems, or gemstones. Some gemstones are amethyst (purple), emeralds (green), rubies (red) and sapphires (usually blue). Diamonds are gems, too.