

Mary Anning



Ages	Subject	Topics	Resources
7-11 years	Science History	Fossils Time	Worksheet & role play cards from the activity pack

Mary Anning was born on the 21st May 1799 in Lyme Regis, Dorset. From an early age she was searching for fossils on the local beaches with her father and brother to sell to local people. The Jurassic aged Blue Lias cliffs near Charmouth were the richest for fossils, but also very dangerous. In 1833 there was a large coastal landslide from which Mary escaped but unfortunately her beloved dog was killed. Mary became known around the world for her important fossils finds. Her discoveries included the first ever ichthyosaur skeleton, the first two plesiosaur skeletons found; the first pterosaur skeleton located outside Germany and many important fish fossils. Her findings contributed to important changes in scientific thinking about prehistoric life and the history of the Earth. She died on the 9th March 1847. In this activity, children will explore the town of Lyme Regis where Mary Anning lived. Using historical and modern-day pictures, they will compare and contrast how the area has changed. Then using artefacts or pictures of objects as a stimulus, children will be asked to research what Mary's life was like and respond to her story.

Teachers' Materials

To create your box of artefacts that reflect Mary Anning's life, you may need to visit a museum to borrow a box. Or you could search sites such as eBay to buy Victorian bonnets, rock hammers and small fossil guides.

Practicalities

The activity can be delivered within the classroom but for authenticity would benefit from a box of real artefacts and perhaps Victorian costumes the children could try on. Your local museum might be able to lend some items.

Discussions

During Victorian times, young girls were expected to stay at home to learn skills such as cooking and sewing which would become useful later in life when they became wives and mothers. Mary Anning was very different, she was from a poor background and she decided that in order to support her family she would sell the fossils she could find. Even though she did not go to school, she taught herself all about the fossils she found and why they were special to science. Mary became so knowledgeable that scientists (all men!) from all over the country came to see her for her advice and skills. However, despite this she was never recognised in public for her work and was refused entry to the Geological Society of London to present a paper on her fossil work because she was a woman. Discuss with the children how this makes them feel? Are things very different today for women?

Extensions and Adaptations

A wonderful extension to this activity would be to explore some prominent female scientists who also changed the world in the past and today. The Royal Society has created a list of the most influential British women in the history of science. Children could spend time exploring the stories of these women and create a class display to accompany their work on Mary Anning.

Links to Other Resources

Mary Anning links well to the following resources:

- [Jurassic Coast Timeline](#)
- [Jurassic Food Webs](#)
- [Fossil Detectives](#)
- [What is the Jurassic Coast?](#)