

Read all about Mary Anning, show me what you have learned about her in what ever way you would like.

Create your own fact sheet, write a little story about her, draw some pictures and labelled diagrams.

24 Natural world

# Mary Anning

Palaeontologist • Born in 1799 • From the UK

Mary Anning came from a poor family. She figured out how to find amazing fossils, which are ancient animals or plants preserved in rock, and made money selling them. Some of her finds were 200 million years old, from the time of the dinosaurs! Now she is celebrated as a great fossil hunter who changed the way we see the world.

## Fossil hunting

Anning made many important finds, including two ancient sea reptiles—the ichthyosaur and the plesiosaur. She also dug up amazing fossilized shells. People didn't believe there had been creatures living a long time ago that no longer existed, but Anning's discoveries proved otherwise.

**Coprolite** Anning's discoveries showed that a mysterious type of rock, now called coprolite, was actually fossilized poop.

**No women allowed!** The Geological Society of London didn't allow Anning in because she was a woman. She also didn't always get credit for her findings. People today realize and appreciate just how important her discoveries really were.

**Ammonite shell** This shell was Anning's most common find. It's the shell of a mollusk whose closest living relatives include the octopus, squid, and cuttlefish.

**Lyme Regis** Most of Anning's fossil hunting took place where she lived—on the fossil-rich coast around Lyme Regis in the United Kingdom.

**Ichthyosaur** This sea reptile lived hundreds of millions of years ago. It had big eye sockets, probably so it could see well underwater.

**Plesiosaur** The plesiosaur was the largest sea-dwelling reptile when it lived on Earth more than 205 million years ago.

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# MARY ANNING

## PALAEONTOLOGIST



### Keys to the Ecosystem

A renowned fossil hunter, Mary Anning scoured the dangerous Jurassic cliffs at Lyme Regis searching for 'curios' to sell. She found ammonites, belemnites and strange 'bezoar stones' which, when cracked open, revealed fossilised bones and scales. Anning deduced that they were fossilised faeces, or coprolites. The analysis of these coprolites is now an important way to study past ecosystems.

*"She understands more of the science than anyone else in this kingdom."*



### An Age of Reptiles

When she was 12, Anning and her brother Joseph unearthed an ichthyosaur, the most complete specimen ever found, causing a scientific uproar. Anning excavated, cleaned and prepared several more ichthyosaurs between 1815 and 1821.

Anning also discovered the first plesiosaur, another marine reptile. This specimen had such a long neck, with 35 vertebrae, that one scientist briefly believed it was a fake. Anning found a second, more complete plesiosaur in 1830, as well as the first pterodactyl outside of Germany and several fish.

Her groundbreaking discoveries provided evidence for both extinction and an ancient "Age of Reptiles".



*It is "to her exertions we owe nearly all the fine specimens of Ichthyosauri of the great collections."*



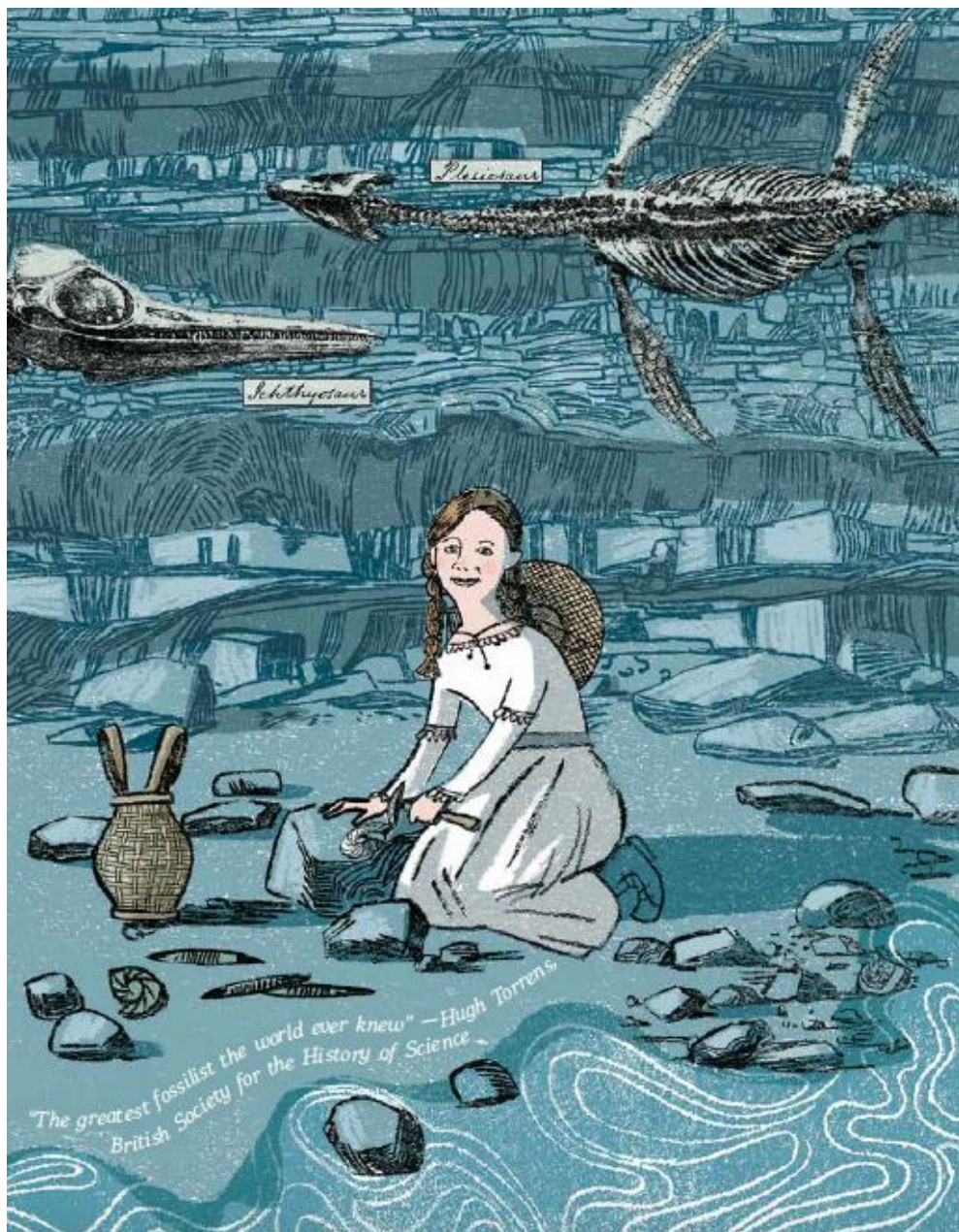
Mary Anning

Born: 21 May 1799

Died: 9 March 1847



Ada Lovelace Day  
FindingAda.com



"The greatest fossilist the world ever knew" —Hugh Torrens  
 British Society for the History of Science



## BURIED TREASURE

Mary Anning, Paleontologist

A  
 jaw,  
 mouth,  
 eyeholes,  
 a long skull.

What could it be?

Mary dug and drilled  
 uncovering "snakestones"

layers of limestone  
 and "crocodile teeth"—

fossils sold to save her family from starving.

Patiently, persistently,  
 she chipped and chiseled the skull,  
 detecting a backbone—  
 blown bare in a storm.

Day after day she carved,  
 millions of years melting away,  
 revealing ribs, a spine,  
 etching the Earth's past  
 in the cliffs.

She worked,  
 unearthing

fabulous flippers

and a  
 long  
 tail:

like a dolphin's,

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Penniless after her father's death, **MARY ANNING** (1799–1847) combed England's coast selling fossils to tourists. While her brother spotted a skull in 1811, it was thirteen-year-old Mary who unearthed the prehistoric sea reptile—an ichthyosaur—in 1812. Later, she discovered the first two complete plesiosaurs and a pterosaur, laying the foundation for Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.