



Mary Anning – a curious girl

Group:	Whole school
Key message:	Curiosity leads to learning
Props:	Assembly board Fossils or fossil images <i>She Sells Seashells</i> – poem available on The Hub

Engage

Show some examples of fossils or fossil images.

Ask: Do you know what these are? Do you know how they formed?

Explain that nowadays we know lots about fossils and what they tell us about life in prehistoric times. But about three hundred years ago, many people had never seen a fossil, and they didn't know how important they were in helping us learn about the past.

However, there was one curious girl, Mary Anning, who was fascinated by fossils and made many great discoveries.

Develop

Mary Anning was born in 1799. She lived in Dorset, in a village next to the sea. When she was 11, Mary's father died. Her family were very poor, so to raise some money, Mary, her dog Tray and her brother used to walk along the seashore collecting shells and fossils which they sold to holidaymakers in the village. Fossil hunting was a dangerous thing to do because there were landslides and high tides – a landslide nearly killed Mary once, but she kept on collecting!

Mary was very curious to find out more about the shells and fossils she had found, and about the creatures that had existed long ago, but there was a problem – she couldn't go to school and struggled to read and write. So, she decided to teach herself, and soon she knew more about fossils than anyone else. She wrote down all she knew, with drawings of the fossils she had found.

When she was 12, while walking along the beach, Mary's brother Joseph saw something that looked a little bit different sticking out from a rocky outcrop and showed it to Mary. Mary, being a curious girl, wanted to find out more about this strange object, so she dug into the sand and chipped away at the rock and managed to release the fossil from its resting place. She knew from her studies that it was a fossilised animal skull – but it was unlike any animal she had ever come across before.



Cornerstones

Mary discovered that the skull belonged to a prehistoric underwater creature, which was a bit like a crocodile. It was called an ichthyosaurus. After a few months, she found the fossilised remains of the whole creature.

She went on to find more fossils and became very famous, with many scientists asking for her advice and using her discoveries and knowledge to find out even more about fossils and the creatures who lived in prehistoric times. Eventually, she became a member of the Geographical Society of London, even though women were not normally allowed.

Much of what we know about fossils and prehistoric life is because of Mary and the people she helped and inspired. Mary is renowned as a very important scientist, whose discoveries were some of the most important finds of all time. Her work on geology gave us new ideas about how the world began and about the creatures who inhabited the Earth long before humans.

All this because Mary was a curious girl! Curiosity is a common characteristic among scientists. Scientists study or have expert knowledge about how things work. They want to know more about something that is puzzling them, so they ask questions and do everything they can to find out more.

Ask: Do you ask questions? Can you remember a good question you asked recently?

Innovate

Mary Anning became an expert on fossils because she came across them everyday and was curious to find out more.

Ask: What would you like to learn more about? Are you curious?

Explain that being curious is an important part of learning. Invite the children to try being curious in lessons and think of at least one good question every day. Teachers might like to establish a 'Curiosity wall' in their classrooms and reward good questions.

Express

Mary inspired the very famous tongue twister *She Sells Seashells*. Invite children to try the tongue twister in pairs or individually.