

□ **READING CHALLENGE**

The Woman Who Found Dinosaur Bones

Mary Anning was a poor girl from England. She found amazing things in the rocks on the beach. She changed what we know about dinosaurs.

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| Level | A1 — Beginner |
| Age Group | Teens (11-16) |
| Topic | Science & Discovery |
| Duration | ~10-12 minutes |
| Skill | Reading |
| Vocabulary | 15 words |
| Quiz | 5 questions |

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About 200 years ago, a young girl walked on a **beach** in the south of England. She was looking at the **rocks** on the ground. She was looking for something special. She had a small **hammer** in her hand. Then she saw it: a strange shape in the rock. It was a bone. A very, very old bone. The girl's name was Mary Anning. She was only 12 years old. And the bone she found changed the world.

A Girl on the Beach

Mary Anning was born on 21 May 1799 in a small town called Lyme Regis. It is on the south coast of England. Her family was very **poor**. Her father, Richard, was a carpenter. He made furniture. But he did not make much money. So he also did something else: he **collected fossils**.

The beaches near Lyme Regis were full of fossils. Millions of years ago, this part of England was under the sea. When the sea animals died, their bones stayed in the mud. Over millions of years, the mud became rock. And the bones became fossils. When the rain and the sea hit the **cliffs**, fossils fell out of the rock and onto the beach.

Mary's father took her and her brother Joseph to the beach. He showed them how to find fossils in the rocks. They sold the fossils to tourists who visited Lyme Regis. The money helped the family buy food. Mary loved finding fossils. She was very good at it. She had sharp eyes and she was not afraid of hard work.

The Big Discovery

In 1811, when Mary was 12 years old, her brother Joseph found a large skull in the cliff. It was about one metre long. It had a long **jaw** and many sharp teeth. It looked like a monster. Joseph told Mary about it. Over the next few months, Mary went back to the same spot again and again. Slowly, she found more bones. She dug them out of the rock very carefully.

Finally, she had a full **skeleton**. It was about five metres long. It looked like a dolphin, but it was not a dolphin. It was something nobody had ever seen before. It was an ichthyosaur — a **creature** that lived in the sea about 200 million years ago. Mary was 12 years old, and she had **discovered** one of the most important fossils in history.

More Amazing Finds

Mary did not stop after the ichthyosaur. She kept looking for fossils every day. The beach was her office. Rain or sun, summer or winter, she walked along the cliffs and looked at the rocks.

In 1823, Mary found another amazing skeleton. It was a plesiosaur — a sea creature with a very long neck, a small head, and four big flippers. It looked like nothing anyone had ever seen. Some **scientists** did not believe it was real at first! They thought Mary had put different bones together to make a fake animal. But she proved them wrong. The plesiosaur was real.

In 1828, Mary found something else: a pterosaur. This was a flying reptile — not a dinosaur, but a creature that lived at the same time as dinosaurs. It had big wings made of skin. It was the first pterosaur ever found in England. Mary was becoming very famous in the world of science.

A Dangerous Job

Finding fossils was not easy. It was **dangerous**. The cliffs near Lyme Regis often fell. Big pieces of rock crashed down onto the beach without warning. In 1833, a big piece of cliff fell and almost killed Mary. It killed her dog, a little terrier called Tray. Mary was very sad. But she went back to the beach the next day. She needed the fossils. Her family needed the money.

The best time to find fossils was in winter, after storms. The rain and wind broke the cliffs open and new fossils appeared. But winter was also the most dangerous time. The sea was rough. The rocks were wet and slippery. The cliffs could fall at any moment. Mary worked in these conditions almost every day of her life.

A Woman in a Man's World

Mary Anning was one of the best fossil hunters in the world. Scientists from London, Paris, and other big cities came to Lyme Regis to meet her. They bought her fossils. They asked her questions. They learned from her. But there was a big problem: Mary was a woman, and she was poor.

In the 1800s, women could not be members of scientific groups. Women could not go to university. Women could not publish scientific papers. When scientists wrote about Mary's fossils, they often did not use her name. They said "a fossil was found in Lyme Regis." They did not say "Mary Anning found a fossil in Lyme Regis." The rich men got the credit. Mary got very little.

Mary never complained much. She just kept working. She opened a small fossil shop in Lyme Regis. She sold fossils to **museums** and to private collectors. Some of her fossils are still in the Natural History Museum in London today. You can go and see them.

What Mary Taught the World

Mary Anning's discoveries were very important. Before Mary, most people in Europe believed that the Earth was only a few thousand years old. They did not believe that animals could become **extinct**. They thought God made all animals and they all still existed somewhere. Mary's fossils proved that strange, amazing creatures had lived millions of years ago and were now completely gone. This was a very big idea. It changed how people thought about the Earth and about life.

Mary helped scientists understand that the Earth is very, very old. The fossils she found showed that different animals lived at different times. Some animals died out and new ones

appeared. This idea is now called evolution. Mary did not use that word — Charles Darwin wrote about evolution later — but Mary's fossils were part of the evidence.

Remembering Mary

Mary Anning died on 9 March 1847. She was only 47 years old. She died of cancer. She did not have much money when she died. She was not famous outside the world of science. But today, almost 200 years later, Mary Anning is one of the most celebrated scientists in British history.

In 2010, the Royal Society named Mary Anning one of the ten most important British women in the history of science. There are books, films, and songs about her. In Lyme Regis, there is a museum about her life. Every year, thousands of people visit the beach where Mary found her fossils. Some of them still find small fossils in the rocks, just like Mary did when she was a girl.

Mary's story teaches us something important. You do not need money or a university degree to change the world. You need curiosity, hard work, and sharp eyes. A poor girl with a hammer on a beach changed what we know about life on Earth. And that is pretty amazing.

Vocabulary

| # | Word | Definition |
|----|------------------|--|
| 1 | fossil | the bones or shape of a very old animal or plant found in rock |
| 2 | cliff | a high, steep wall of rock, often next to the sea |
| 3 | discover | to find something for the first time |
| 4 | skeleton | all the bones inside a body |
| 5 | dangerous | something that can hurt you; not safe |
| 6 | museum | a building where you can see old, interesting, or important things |
| 7 | scientist | a person who studies nature and the world using experiments and facts |
| 8 | beach | the flat area of sand or stones next to the sea |
| 9 | creature | any living animal |
| 10 | collect | to find and keep things, often as a hobby |
| 11 | hammer | a tool with a heavy metal head, used for hitting things |
| 12 | rock | the hard, solid material that mountains and cliffs are made of |
| 13 | extinct | when a type of animal or plant is completely gone and no more are alive |
| 14 | poor | not having much money |
| 15 | jaw | the bones in your mouth that hold your teeth; the top and bottom parts of your mouth |

Comprehension Quiz

1. Where did Mary Anning find her fossils?
 - A) In a forest near London
 - B) On the beaches and cliffs of Lyme Regis
 - C) In a cave in Scotland
 - D) In a river in France

2. How old was Mary when she found the ichthyosaur skeleton?
 - A) She was 5 years old
 - B) She was 12 years old
 - C) She was 20 years old
 - D) She was 30 years old

3. Why did Mary sell fossils?
 - A) Because she wanted to be famous
 - B) Because her family was poor and they needed money
 - C) Because the museum asked her to
 - D) Because she did not like fossils

4. Why was fossil hunting dangerous for Mary?
 - A) There were wild animals on the beach
 - B) The cliffs could fall and the sea could come in very fast
 - C) Other people tried to steal her fossils
 - D) The rocks were very hot

5. Why did Mary not get much credit for her discoveries during her life?
 - A) Because her fossils were not real
 - B) Because she was a woman and she was poor, so the scientific world did not take her seriously
 - C) Because she never showed her fossils to anyone
 - D) Because she lived in a different country from the scientists

Answer Key

| # | Answer | Question |
|---|----------|---|
| 1 | B | Where did Mary Anning find her fossils? |
| 2 | B | How old was Mary when she found the ichthyosaur skeleton? |
| 3 | B | Why did Mary sell fossils? |
| 4 | B | Why was fossil hunting dangerous for Mary? |
| 5 | B | Why did Mary not get much credit for her discoveries during her life? |