



Extraordinary Lives: **Mary Anning**

1. Mary Anning had a brush with death when she was a child. What happened?

2. Why did many families struggle in England at the beginning of the 19th century?

3. What was Mary's childhood like?

4. Why might Mary's job be described as hazardous?

5. Can you give three examples of fossils Mary Anning found?

6. Why did Anning become disillusioned with the scientific community?



7. Why were Anning's discoveries considered to be so groundbreaking?

8. As well as the identification of dinosaurs, what was Anning's other area of expertise?

9. Do you think the scientific community behaved well towards Mary Anning?

10. Why do you think Mary Anning is an important role model for today's women and girls?



Extraordinary Lives: **Mary Anning** - Answers

1. Mary Anning had a brush with death when she was a child. What happened?

When she was a baby, she was being held by a group of women under a tree which was struck by lightning. The women died, but Mary was taken home and revived in the bath. After this, her temperament changed and she became much more lively and intelligent.

2. Why did many families struggle in England at the beginning of the 19th century?

The French Napoleonic Wars (fought between European countries and England against France) meant that there were food shortages and many people struggled to find enough money to pay the rising costs of food.

3. What was Mary's childhood like?

Mary had to work hard as money was tight for her family. Her father taught her to find fossils and she became an astute collector, selling her finds to tourists. Unfortunately, her father died from injuries associated with a fall while fossil collecting, which put additional pressure on Mary and her brother to support the family. She continued to find common fossils, but in 1811 she and her brother found the skeleton of an ichthyosaur, which earned the family £23. We can tell from this that her childhood was probably difficult but ultimately rewarding.

4. Why might Mary's job be described as hazardous?

Because she had to look for fossils on cliffs which were not always safe. Her dog, Tray, was caught in a landslide while hunting for fossils with Mary. He was buried alive.

5. Can you give three examples of fossils Mary Anning found?

Answers could include: ammonites and belemnite shells; the skeleton of an ichthyosaur; the first complete skeleton of a plesiosaurus; a pterosaur skeleton; a squaloraja skeleton.

6. Why did Anning become disillusioned with the scientific community?

Because, despite her considerable expertise, her work was not formally acknowledged because she was a woman. She was refused admittance into the Geological Society of London (they wouldn't admit any women at all until 1904). Often, Anning would advise her male counterparts on fossils, but they would accept the credit for themselves. Charles Cuvier, a well-known palaeontologist, even disputed Mary Anning's find of a plesiosaur, and maintained it was a fake. The Geological Society met to consider the fossil and Cuvier was eventually forced to admit his mistake. But Anning felt she was largely ignored by the scientific community.

7. Why were Anning's discoveries considered to be so groundbreaking?

Because up until then people had had very little understanding of how the earth was created. People mostly believed the Biblical story of creation, and the idea of extinct species had only just been suggested as a possibility. These new and outlandish skeletons shook up people's understanding of how the earth had formed.



8. As well as the identification of dinosaurs, what was Anning's other area of expertise?

Coprolites – fossilised poo.

9. Do you think the scientific community behaved well towards Mary Anning?

Answers might explore the fact that Anning was largely ignored because she was a woman, that one of her finds was dismissed by Charles Cuvier, and that she only ever had one scientific piece published in her lifetime. However, students may also consider the £25 annuity by the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Geological Society as proof that they eventually wanted to acknowledge her work in some way.

10. Why do you think Mary Anning is an important role model for today's women and girls?

Answers might explore the difficulties Anning had in getting her work acknowledged, her determination to continue her work with fossils; opening her own shop, her passion for science; her determination to succeed in a world dominated by men; her expertise and knowledge in a scientific field.

