

# Mary Anning - Biography

Mary Anning was a famous fossil hunter. She was born in 1799, in the seaside town of Lyme Regis in Dorset, on the south coast of England. Mary had nine siblings, but sadly only Mary and her brother Joseph lived to adulthood.

When Mary was a baby, she had a very lucky escape. She and her family were at a fair when a thunderstorm broke out. The woman holding Mary was struck by lightning! Sadly, the woman was killed, but Mary was left unharmed.

Mary's family were very poor, meaning she didn't get to attend school very much. Instead, she taught herself to read and write. She learned about geology and anatomy from the books she read.

Mary spent most of her time searching the beaches, looking for what she called 'curiosities'. As she got older, she developed a better understanding of these 'curiosities'. She realised they were actually fossils! When she was just 12 years old, Mary spotted something unusual poking out from a cliff. She had discovered the skull of a mysterious creature. At first, she thought it was a crocodile. However, what she had actually discovered was the first complete fossil of an ancient reptile. The reptile was called an ichthyosaur, which means 'fish lizard'.

Over the course of her life, Mary made many incredible discoveries. One of these discoveries included a marine reptile called a plesiosaur. She also discovered a flying reptile called a dimorphodon. These discoveries made her very popular among the scientists of her time. Scientists would visit her for advice and to talk about fossils and other scientific ideas. Mary's fossils helped scientists understand how life began. They came to realise that prehistoric animals were not the same as the



living animals that surround us today.

As Mary's fossil career flourished, she decided to open a shop in her home town. In her shop, she sold shells, rocks and fossils. Fossil collectors from far and wide came to visit the shop and purchase Mary's fossils.

Today, Mary is remembered as one of the greatest fossil hunters to have ever lived. Her discoveries and passion for fossils have inspired many others to find out more about our ancient world.



# Questions

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**1** What year was Mary Anning born in?

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**2** How many of Mary Anning's siblings survived into adulthood?

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**3** Which fact about the lightning strike is true?

- ☐ Mary was badly injured.
- ☐ Mary ran away to avoid the lightning.
- ☐ The woman who was carrying Mary died.
- ☐ Mary's mother was holding her when she got struck by lightning.

**4** How do we know that Mary was an independent child?

- ☐ She was very poor.
- ☐ She taught herself to read and write.
- ☐ She didn't get to attend school very much.
- ☐ She spotted something unusual poking out from a cliff.

**5** Which word in paragraph 4 is used to show that the creature that Mary found was unusual or strange?

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6 What was the name of the reptile that Mary found when she was just 12 years old?

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7 Why was Mary so popular with other scientists at the time?

- ☐ She was the only fossil hunter.
- ☐ She found the ichthyosaur.
- ☐ Only Mary understood how life began.
- ☐ She was very knowledgeable about fossils.

8 What are prehistoric animals?

- ☐ Fossils of dead animals.
- ☐ Skeletons of dead animals.
- ☐ Animals that live in the sea.
- ☐ Animals that existed long before there were human-like creatures on earth.

9 Which of these items did Mary **NOT** sell in her shop?

- ☐ fossils
- ☐ shells
- ☐ sand
- ☐ rocks

10 What does the expression 'far and wide' mean ?

- ☐ Only locals came to visit the shop.
- ☐ Only a few people came to visit the shop.
- ☐ Visitors came from a large number of places, some of them far away.
- ☐ Far and wide is the name of a place where fossil collectors come from.

Score:

# Answers

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- 1 What year was Mary Anning born in? 1799
- 2 How many of Mary Anning's siblings survived into adulthood? one
- 3 Which fact about the lightning strike is true? ☒ The woman who was carrying Mary died.
- 4 How do we know that Mary was an independent child? ☒ She taught herself to read and write.
- 5 Which word in paragraph 4 is used to show that the creature that Mary found was unusual or strange? mysterious
- 6 What was the name of the reptile that Mary found when she was just 12 years old? Ichthyosaur
- 7 Why was Mary so popular with other scientists at the time? ☒ She was very knowledgeable about fossils.
- 8 What are prehistoric animals? ☒ Animals that existed long before there were human-like creatures on earth.
- 9 Which of these items did Mary **NOT** sell in her shop? ☒ sand
- 10 What does the expression 'far and wide' mean? ☒ Visitors came from a large number of places, some of them far away.