

## Impact Statement

Claire Evans, Grade 12

***Mary Anning: The Fossilist*, 2025**

Acrylic, colored pencil, clay, gouache, paper, watercolor, pen, graphite on canvas  
36 x 24 inches

Roger Bacon High School, Cincinnati, OH

Unsung Hero: Mary Anning

For years, one of the world's greatest paleontologists has gone unnoticed. Born into an impoverished family, Mary Anning began collecting fossils at a young age and selling them to tourists, using the money to support her family. She discovered the first complete ichthyosaur skeleton at only twelve years old. With no formal education, she taught herself geology and paleontology as well as anatomy through dissection. Her scientific illustrations earned the praise of many scientists. She discovered three complete dinosaur skeletons, including the fossilized remains of an ichthyosaur, plesiosaur, and pterosaur. She also found hundreds of aquatic fossils. Some scientists were skeptical and accused her of faking these discoveries, however, each of the skeletons were proven to be authentic. One may ask, why isn't this woman famous for her discoveries? Well, her discoveries were rarely accredited to her. Even though she was one of the most brilliant paleontologists of her generation, she was not permitted to join the Geological Society of London; due solely to the fact she was a woman born into the lower class. It wasn't until later in life when Mary was struggling with breast cancer that she was granted an honorary membership in the Geological Society of London. Mary Anning was the first woman to be honored with an obituary in the Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society of London after she died in 1847. Anning's discoveries changed the way scientists see the prehistoric age.

Mary Anning has had a large impact on the way scientists think about the prehistoric age. Her fossils provide insight into the creatures of the past, and how they have evolved into the creatures we know today. Anning created many detailed illustrations and recordings of her findings, despite her lack of formal education. Her findings proved that animals could go fully extinct and it paved the way for Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. It's important to remember that Anning didn't spend her life digging up fossils to impress others or to make money for herself. She dug up fossils to help her impoverished family. She gave the money she'd earned from selling fossils to her family, even eventually opening her small store. Digging up these fossils from the cliff by her home was extremely dangerous, and very difficult to navigate. With her pet dog and a mission to help her family, she would risk rockslides and dangerous terrain to make groundbreaking discoveries. Despite the difficulty and dangers of her work, Anning persisted. Despite her financial struggles and death of her father and beloved dog, she persisted. Even when society discredited her as a drunk and thought lowly of her, she

persisted. The well-being and survival of her family and herself were the drivers for her discoveries. Anning not only made a large impact on her family by financially supporting them, but she also changed the world of paleontology forever. Anning is now remembered as one of the greatest fossil hunters in history.

As a young girl, I used to go fossil hunting with my father and brother at a local park. We would travel along a creek, pick out rocks and fossils, then bring them to the Cincinnati Museum. We traded the fossils for points to buy things in the small fossil depot. I have many fond memories of competing with my brother to see who could find the most fossils. I remember slipping on rocks, getting my shoes wet, and breathing in the fresh air of the woods. I believe this is why I connected so much with Anning's story. I can relate to her love of discovery, as well as her experience fossil hunting with her family. I sympathize with the injustice that kept Anning from being recognized in her time. I know women in my own life, who are often overlooked despite their many years of experience and accomplishments. All of these factors are what led me to choose Mary Anning as my unsung hero.

My artistic vision for this piece was to tell the story of Anning and her accomplishments. I've included pencil sketches of the fossils she found- an ichthyosaur, plesiosaur, and pterosaur. I fashioned them off of her scientific sketches. I included a portrait of her fondly looking down at a fossil. I depicted her as a girl in her young teenage years because that is when she made many of her large discoveries. Foam clay, resembling dirt and rocks, frames the top of the canvas with handmade clay fossils emerging from the dirt. I imagined it would have been similar to what Anning would have seen when she was digging for fossils. There is a note bearing the logo of the Geological Society of London, granting her an honorary membership. I don't want my piece to focus solely on her discoveries, instead I want it to focus on Anning herself. Her discoveries are revolutionary; however, they are not the most important part about her story. The most important part of her story is her persistence, bravery, hard work, and determination to help her family despite her unfortunate circumstances.

My impact of this work is to shed light on a woman who has been hidden for so long. When someone looks at my work, I want them to ask themselves "Who is that?". I want them to feel inspired to explore the story of Anning. I want young girls to see themselves in this artwork. I hope to inspire curiosity about fossil hunting and to encourage the viewers of this work to go and find fossils themselves. Most of all, I wanted to pay homage to Mary Anning, who was unfortunately never recognized in her life. I think she deserves many works of art and books dedicated to telling her life story.

#### References:

"Mary Anning: How a Poor British Carpenter's Daughter Became 'the Greatest Fossil Hunter Ever Known.'" *Kwww.Amightygirl.Com*, 2022, [www.iamightygirl.com/blog?p=28556](http://www.iamightygirl.com/blog?p=28556).