

## Impact Statement

Gaurangi Gupta, Grade 9

***Unearthing History***, 2025

Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 20 inches

Independent Study, The Overlake School, Redmond, WA

Unsung Hero: Mary Anning

I chose the unsung hero from the list provided by the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes ARTEFFECT project. The unsung hero I chose for my art piece is Mary Anning, a fossil hunter and paleontologist from Lyme Regis, England. I chose to focus on her story because she seemed like an influential woman in science who helped shape our understanding of the natural world but was never fully recognized during her lifetime.

Mary Anning stood out to me not only because of her discoveries but also because she achieved them despite overwhelming obstacles which included poverty, gender discrimination, and a lack of formal education. What I admire most about Mary Anning is her determination, curiosity, and resilience. From a young age, she explored the cliffs near her home. Eventually, she uncovered some of the most important fossils in history that helped lay the foundation for the field of paleontology. She shared her knowledge with visiting scientists who unfortunately often took credit for her work. Despite this, Mary never stopped. She opened a fossil shop to support her family and continued to make discoveries that advanced science. Her persistence in learning and her ability to contribute to science, even when she was excluded from the scientific community, makes her a role model. She proved that passion and perseverance can break through barriers, and in my eyes, that makes her a hero. Mary Anning's discoveries changed the way people viewed the history of life on Earth. At a time when many believed the world was only a few thousand years old, her fossil findings all provided evidence that the Earth was much older and full of extinct forms of life. I wanted my artwork to show my unsung hero's impact and the importance of her findings. My artwork features Mary Anning standing beside her younger self, both proudly gazing over the fossil-rich cliffs of Lyme Regis.

I painted her surrounded by live versions of the fossils she discovered. I depicted many Ichthyosauruses swimming in the sea, Plesiosaurus peeking out from the waves, and even her flying discovery of pterosaurs in the air. I painted this scene to show how Mary Anning's work helped bring prehistoric creatures "back to life" in the world of science. The presence of her younger self highlights how early her passion began and how she stayed committed throughout her life. Painting both versions of her together was my way of honoring her journey from being a curious child to a world-changing scientist. Acrylic paint allowed me to add texture and depth to the landscape and sea while

keeping the color palette natural and muted. This allowed me to symbolize her deep connection to the land and history beneath her feet.

The process of creating this art was enlightening and has deepened my appreciation for unsung heroes like Mary Anning, whose stories are often hidden beneath the surface, just like the fossils she uncovered. Even though she lacked formal education and couldn't publish scientific papers, her fossil work helped lay the foundation for the field of paleontology. Her legacy still lives on in museums and scientific journals, and she is finally beginning to receive recognition for her contributions.

Her story inspired future generations of women in science, proving that knowledge and impact aren't limited by social status or gender. Her story has inspired me to stay curious, speak up, and pursue my interests, even when the path is not easy or obvious. I've learned that true impact isn't always about fame, but rather about doing work that matters, even if the world does not notice right away.

Reference:

"Who Was the Fossil Hunter Mary Anning?" *BBC Bitesize*, BBC, 28 Jan. 2025, [www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zf6vb82](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zf6vb82).