



Impact Statement

Lily Burkett, Grade 11

Mother of the Mesozoic, 2026

Pen, watercolor on paper, 12 x 9 inches

Scio High School, Scio, OR

Unsung Hero: Mary Anning

Throughout history women have been erased, degraded, and completely forgotten regardless of their contributions to the world's studies and Mary Anning happens to be one of these forsaken individuals. Her findings have been absolutely vital to scientist's understanding of paleontology, but only recently has her story been fully uncovered after having been buried by and for the sake of those who wanted to use her findings without acknowledgement. Even other women thought her work was the result of the divine instead of long hard effort. Her resilient attitude in the face of constant obstacles is a trait that I find deeply inspiring and wanted to honor in my work shown here.

When Ms. Anning was a little girl, she was taught by her father Richard Anning how to clean and collect fossils by the south coast of England. After his passing, she continued her hunting and sold the fossils in their shop to support her family. The five fossil types displayed in the painting include the plesiosaurus, ichthyosaur, pterosaur, ammonite, and trilobite on the sand. Anning was the first person to discover the ichthyosaur as a species, found the first full plesiosaurus skeleton, and the first pterosaur outside of Germany, as well as several coprolites and shelled creatures. These discoveries were made just before scientists coined the concept of evolution as this was during a far more religious era when people thought the Earth was only a few thousand years old. However, instead of celebrating her scientific victories, she was shunned due to being a woman. The male scientists used her studies for their own theories without giving credit and she was not allowed to come to paleontological meetings even when they featured her own breakthroughs. Even still, Mary continued and hunted until her death at 47 in 1847 from breast cancer.

In my painting her arguably most important dinosaurs, the plesiosaurus and ichthyosaurus, have swum to her side while the pterosaur flies overhead. The three animals circle around her representing these specimens coming into her life as ammonites and trilobites litter the coast where she grew up. Naturally, I chose watercolor to represent the setting as well as some carefully sketched line art to imitate her scientific diagrams. Her appearance and outfit are inspired by the portrait, "Anning and her dog" painted by an unknown artist, which is one of the only known paintings to exist of that time period and shows her in a green layered dress with a red ribbon and yellow bonnet with her dog laying to the right.

To further honor and support her work, I will be displaying this work in my school's yearly art show. It will be visible to all who work and attend as well as their families. After

this is done with, I want to find somewhere else to exhibit it, likely some sort of museum or gallery or even some libraries in my area. Once I am finished, I will place it in my educational and professional art portfolios with a descriptive excerpt for any who see them.