

Impact Statement

Arnesia Williams, Grade 10

A Stroll Through Time, 2026

Acrylic, mixed media, plaster on wood panel, 22 x 28 inches

Burlington USD 244, Burlington, KS

Unsung Hero: Mary Anning

Mary Anning was an indigent Victorian lady who discovered prehistoric fossils, uncovering dinosaurs on the Jurassic coast. She teaches us that it does not matter what status you have in life, rich or poor, you can always find your way to treasure. Mary Anning is an admirable person for a few reasons. In the early 19th century, most people assumed unrecognizable creatures, such as dinosaurs, had migrated to far-off lands. While others mistakenly thought it was a crocodile, she discovered the first ichthyosaurus in 1811. Mary had stumbled upon a remarkable example of what ancient marine reptiles consumed daily as the stomach contents remained intact. A dozen years later, with a newfound fascination, she discovered a completely intact plesiosaurus fossil which stirred controversy regarding authenticity. Male scientists who sought fame wrote about these scientific discoveries often discrediting her. Her discoveries helped impact many scientists by giving crucial evidence for prehistoric life. These fossils would also challenge religious views and lay out the foundation for the theory of evolution.

In my piece, I wanted to portray Mary Anning as she was uncovering the Jurassic world. She is peering into view of what she had unearthed. My painting illustrates the fossils she discovered. Although her discoveries were several years apart, I wanted to showcase both at one moment in time. My piece exhibits what the plesiosaurus and ichthyosaurus would have looked like in prehistoric times. Tray was the name of Anning's spaniel and served as a loyal companion for Mary. In children's books he was known as the "dog who dug up dinosaurs". He symbolizes Mary's solidarity in her work and being her only companion to her discoveries.

The selection of materials was crucial in bringing this vision to life. I chose to use the following for my art supplies: a wood panel as my substrate, acrylic paint, armature wire and plaster bandages. The acrylic paint used helped express my vision. I spent considerable time working on the brushstrokes, striving to imbue them with the fluidity and movement of water. The acrylic paints were chosen for their vibrancy and ability to convey the dynamic textures of the scene. I decided to use plaster draped over wire to give the fossils a 3D element. It gives a great visual of what Anning had discovered to come to light. My piece is mixed media because I wanted to highlight the fossils Mary Anning discovered. Making them 3D gives a great focal point to the piece.

My fascination with Mary Anning stems from her indomitable spirit and the profound message her life conveys. It's a message that resonates deeply with me. I chose her for my piece

because her story inspires me by showing that no matter where I am in life there will always be something valuable for me to discover. It could be fossils that give us a new understanding of the Jurassic world, finding someone new and developing with him/her a meaningful friendship, or exploring a new art opportunity that helps me grow as an artist. No matter one's standing in life, there is always something valuable to be discovered.