



Impact Statement

Sophie Zhao, Grade 9

The Plesiosaur of Mary Anning, 2026

Colored pencil, watercolor on paper, 17 x 11 inches

Elk Grove Space 4 Art, Elk Grove, CA

Unsung Hero: Mary Anning

Mary Anning is an influential fossil collector and paleontologist, known for her discoveries in marine fossils beds. Born in England in 1799 in the small town of Lyme Regis, Anning came from a poor household. At a young age, she was taught by her father how to discover and sell fossils. These teachings would allow Anning to continue in pursuing fossil collecting to support her family in a time in which the popularity of fossils was rising. In her time as a fossil collector, Mary Anning amassed a multitude of major fossil discoveries, including bezoar stones, an ichthyosaur, plesiosaur, pterosaur, as well as several other marine creatures. Her work in early paleontology pioneered evidence for our understanding of the living of ancient times. At the age of twelve, Anning's first major discovery was the skeleton of an ichthyosaur. These ichthyosaur remains were the first to reach the attention of London's scientific circles, arising discussion on the interpretation of Earth's history, in which it proved the possibility of the evolution and extinction of organisms. In much of Anning's life, she faced struggles because of her identity as both a woman and being of poor background.

Despite her limited education, Mary Anning was highly acquainted in her field, obtaining more knowledge in fossils than many of her peers in science. Yet, even with the notoriety of her skills and discoveries, Anning herself was often unrecognized and uncredited for her work. Because of this, Anning faced challenges throughout her career because of prejudice, extending to having her accomplishments said to come from a "wonderful instance of divine favor" and being ineligible to join the geological society of London as a woman. Mary Anning persevered through the boundaries of class and sexism, using her knowledge to become a key figure in influencing early fossil discoveries and paleontology.

With my artwork, I wanted to display Mary Anning with some sort of representation of her discoveries around her. I decided to use Anning's plesiosaur as it was best suited for the composition I wanted to create. Because I wanted to use the statue of Mary Anning's in her hometown of Lyme Regis by sculptor Denise Dutton as a reference for my artwork, I felt it would be interesting if instead of the ammonite fossil that she's originally holding, she would be holding the snout of the plesiosaur fossil instead. For Anning herself, I used color pencils, with Anning's oil painting depiction of her as a guidance to my color selection. With my artwork, I wanted to include vivid colors into my drawing, leading to decisions like the blue tone of the skeleton in the area in which Anning is holding it. In addition to color pencils, I used water color in the background of my artwork to replicate the browned appearance of both older paper and fossils. With this artwork, I want to highlight both Mary Anning and her accomplishments in this drawing in a way that displays her as someone of significance.