MARY ANNING

Mary Anning was a famous female palaeontologist – a scientist who discovers and studies fossils. She lived from 1799 to 1847.

EARLY LIFE

Mary Anning was born in Lyme Regis, in the southwest English county of Dorset. She had nine brothers and sisters and her family were very poor. Mary had to teach herself how to read and write because she was unable to go to school like many girls at that time.

FOSSIL HUNTING

Mary's father, Richard, was a cabinetmaker who collected fossils in his spare time. From the age of six, Mary would join him on his fossil-hunting expeditions on the beaches surrounding their home. Richard taught Mary how to look for and clean fossils to sell in his shop.

At the age of 11 when Mary's father died, it became her responsibility to support the family, so she continued to hunt for fossils and her dog, Tray, was always by her side.

MARY'S FAMOUS DISCOVERIES

A year after her father died, Mary's brother found a strange looking fossilised skull and Mary uncovered the outline of its 5.2-metre-long skeleton! It would go on to be named '*Ichthyosaurus'* – an extinct marine reptile that lived in the time of the dinosaurs. In 1823, Mary was also the first to discover the complete skeleton of *'Plesioaurus'* but male scientists of the time did not recognise Mary's work because she was a woman, even when writing about her discoveries. In 1828 she dug out the remains of *'Pterodactyl'* and she went on to pioneer the study of coprolites – or fossilised poo. Until her death, Mary continued to discover fossil after fossil, sparking a wider general interest in palaeontology.

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EXAMPLE QUESTIONS:

5 questions the children can use for their revision.

1. What did Mary teach herself to do since she couldn't go to school?
2. Who taught Mary how to hunt for fossils?
3. What was Mary's first famous discovery?
4. What did Mary pioneer?
5. Which area of science did Mary spark interest in due to her discoveries?