

# Fossils

Fossils are shapes of dead animals and plants that lived millions of years ago made in rock. Usually when something dies it is eaten or decays and disappears. However, when an animal or plant dies and gets covered over, it can stay there and over time, become a fossil.

## Dinosaurs

Fossils are really important in understanding what has happened a long time ago. Without them we would not even know that dinosaurs existed! People who study fossils are called palaeontologists and these are the people who have found out what we now know about dinosaurs. However, this only started 200 years ago, so we've only known about dinosaurs for 200 years!



### Did you know?

- 'Sue' is the nickname given to the most complete and best preserved Tyrannosaurus Rex specimen ever found.
- The word 'fossil' comes from an old word 'fossilis', meaning 'dug up'.
- Fossils are only found in sedimentary rock.
- The fossils in the pictures are called ammonites. It is the town symbol for Whitby in North Yorkshire. Whitby is good for fossil hunting and long ago, people thought that the ammonites were snakes turned to stone by St. Hilda!

## How a Fossil is Made

When some plants or animals die, their body sinks into mud or is buried by sand. This often happens at the bottom of the sea and stops it from rotting or being eaten by other animals. Whilst it is underground, water and minerals seep into the bones and where the bones and body used to be, to make a hard shape. This is squashed under more layers of sand, mud and eventually rock over many, many millions of years.

Photo courtesy of (Arenamontanus, sk8geek@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution

# Questions About Fossils

1. What does a palaeontologist study?

---

2. What is the nickname of the best preserved Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton?

---

3. What sort of rock are fossils found in?

---

4. Which town has an ammonite fossil as their symbol?

---

5. Why have we only got fossils to find out about dinosaurs?

---

---

6. What does the Latin word 'fossilis' mean?

---

---

7. How come the fossilised animals or plants haven't been eaten by other animals?

---

---

8. Why did the author use an exclamation mark at the end of the Fossil Facts section?

---

---

9. Why aren't there any fossils of cats that lived twenty years ago?

---

---

10. Do you think the ammonites in the pictures look like snakes? Why?

---

---

# Questions About Fossils

## Answers

1. What does a palaeontologist study?

**Fossils**

2. What is the nickname of the best preserved Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton?

**Sue**

3. What sort of rock are fossils found in?

**Sedimentary Rock (layered rock over millions of years).**

4. Which town has an ammonite fossil as their symbol?

**Whitby**

5. Why have we only got fossils to find out about dinosaurs?

**Because they lived so long ago and nothing else would last that long.**

**(Discuss what we have now as evidence: photos, film, books, stories passed down through generations etc.)**

6. What does the Latin word 'fossilis' mean?

**'dug up'**

7. How come the fossilised animals or plants haven't been eaten by other animals?

**They were buried under mud or sand (or similar).**

8. Why did the author use an exclamation mark at the end of the Fossil Facts section?

**To add surprise: It is surprising to us today that anyone could believe that snakes could turn to stone. (Discuss why they might have thought that though).**

9. Why aren't there any fossils of cats that lived twenty years ago?

**Fossils take millions of years to make. Twenty years is not anywhere near long enough.**

10. Do you think the ammonites in the pictures look like snakes? Why?

**Open ended for discussion.**