



Process of Paleontology Activity

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Grade Level: K-12

Preparation Time: 5 minutes or less

Activity Duration: 15 minutes

Concepts Addressed

- Many specific steps and techniques are followed and used between finding a fossil and museum display—this is the process of paleontology.
- Excavation of fossils is done carefully to accurately record as much scientific data as possible.
- Fossil preparation, completed by fossil preparators, is the step in the paleontological process where fossils are carefully removed from matrix, cleaned and prepared for study or display.
- Different fossils may follow different paths through parts of the process of paleontology.

Objectives

The student will:

- Be able to explain major steps and the general path a fossil follows from discovery to museum display.

Materials

- Laminated process of paleontology images
- *List and Explanations of Major Steps in the Paleontological Process*
- Masking tape
- Whiteboard or large (6-8 foot long) piece of paper from roll
- Whiteboard markers or washable markers

Background

Lots of kids dream of becoming a paleontologist, but may not truly understand what the job entails! How do we really excavate fossils? How do we transport them? How are they labeled? Stored? Studied? This activity gets kids thinking about what has to happen for a fossil to travel from discovery to display and what paleontologists actually do.

Procedure

Set-up

1. Using tape, place “fossil discovery” image at the far left end of a large sheet of paper (taped to wall, length parallel to floor) or whiteboard.
2. Place “museum display” image at the far right end of the paper or board.

Activity

1. Ask the students if they know/do they wonder what happens between finding a fossil and seeing a fossil on display in a museum?
2. Explain to the students that the image to the left represents the initial discovery of a fossil (could be by anyone—not just a paleontologist). Explain that the image to the right shows the same fossil as part of a finished museum display.
3. Ask if anyone can think of a step that happens in between these two images (usually a lot of hands go up).
4. Allow one student to say what they think should be added and then to go to the board or paper and add a simple sketch and label if possible to represent that step.
5. Choose another student and allow them to add a sketch. You may want to gently help with the order of events as this process continues—although event order should be covered at the end of the activity as a group.
6. Continue allowing students to add sketches until they, or you decide they are done.
7. Go back over the drawing as a group to elaborate on all of the different steps in the process of paleontology and to modify the order of the steps as necessary.
8. Leave the drawing up in the room for reference during the study of paleontology.

Activity Variations

1. Create laminated drawings of all the major steps of the process of paleontology. A modification for this activity would be to put each one up in order and discuss as a group what each shows.
2. You could also hand them out one at a time to various students and have them try to place them in order—discussing each step as you go.

Assessments

- Provide the same first and last drawings on a worksheet for each student and have them work independently to fill it in after the class has done the activity together.
- As older children to write a step by step description that narrates the images from the activity—with or without looking at them.