



What is a Fossil?

If you only have 20 minutes, or want to do a more informal lesson, here are investigation questions for each of the four activity boxes. (For activities with two questions, do either one or both!) These questions are designed to promote close observation and spark curiosity.



Investigation Question #1: What can you learn about an organism based on a fossil?

This activity box contains 38 fossils, including the remains of plants, animals, and traces of living things, such as coprolites and footprints. There are enough fossils for each student to investigate one or more of the fossils on their own or in pairs. Have students touch and observe their fossil and ask: What can you learn about an organism based on a fossil?

Answers might include: Size of the plant or animal when it was alive. What it ate based on the shape of its teeth. How big it was based on the size of its poop. How big or massive it was based on the shape of its footprint. Whether it had a shell or the texture of its skin. Whether it lived on land or in the water.

Investigation Question #2: What do these fossils have in common?

There are a wide variety of fossils in this activity box—there are fish plaques and ammonites, coprolites and teeth. Have students observe two or more different kinds of fossils and ask them how they are different (*some are plants, some are animals, and some are traces of plants or animals*) and what the fossils have in common (*all are the remains of living things that have died.*)

You may want to challenge your students to come up with a shared definition of a fossil based on the similarities they observe. Write their definition on the board and then expand it to include information from this definition from the museum: *Fossils are traces or remains of ancient life—including bones, teeth, shells, leaf impressions, nests, and footprints—that are typically preserved in rocks.*