

Science Hero: Mary Anning

—the girl who sold seashells
and changed science



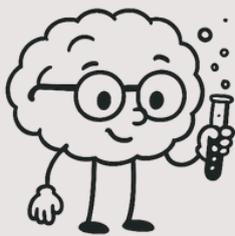
Over 200 years ago—back when women couldn't attend university or wear trousers, which seems just ridiculous now—a curious girl named Mary Anning was already making world-changing discoveries. She lived in Lyme Regis, a seaside town on England's Jurassic Coast, famous for its fossil-filled cliffs.

At just 12 years old, Mary discovered the skeleton of an ichthyosaur—a huge prehistoric sea reptile no one had ever seen before. It was over five metres long, with massive eyes and rows of sharp teeth. Later, she found plesiosaurs and pterosaurs too—creatures scientists didn't even know existed. Her family was poor, so Mary sold fossils to tourists to earn money after her father died. But what she really wanted was to understand the strange creatures she was uncovering. She taught herself geology, anatomy, and drawing—skills that would normally require years at university, which, as mentioned, women weren't allowed to attend at the time.

Scientists from all over Europe came to buy her fossils and learn from her, but she wasn't allowed to join scientific societies or publish papers because she was a woman. The credit for her discoveries often went to the wealthy men who bought them from her. This wasn't because Mary wasn't brilliant—she absolutely was; it was because the rules were unfair.

Even so, her work completely changed how scientists understood prehistoric life and extinction. Years after her death, the famous author Charles Dickens wrote about her in his magazine, calling her “the greatest fossilist the world ever knew.” Yep, the same Charles Dickens who wrote *A Christmas Carol*—turns out he loved fossils almost as much as he loved storytelling!

Mary's story reminds us that curiosity and persistence matter more than titles or degrees. You don't need permission to learn, just the courage to keep digging. The rules were eventually changed. Women like Mary proved those rules were ridiculous, and their work made it impossible to ignore the fact that brilliant minds come in all forms.



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