

A STEM in the Park

Take Home Activity

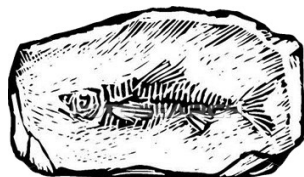
STEM

in the **PARK**™

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Make Your Own Fossil!

Plants and animals have lived on Earth for many millions of years. Many of these species died out long ago. How can we learn about these plants and animals if they aren't here anymore? We can study their fossils!



Most fossils form when a dead plant or animal gets buried in mud or sand. The mud or sand covers up the body. Parts of the body may decay away, but some parts, like shells and bones, stay in the sediment until it turns into rock.

You can model this process yourself! Just follow the steps below to make your own fossil.

What You Need

- Paper and pencil or crayons
- Modeling clay
- A leaf, twig, or other small, once-living object

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What To Do

1. Go exploring outside and look at all the living things around you. Try to identify at least five different living things. Imagine what these living things would look like as fossils. Draw a picture of a living plant or animal and then draw a picture of what its fossil would look like.
2. Now hunt around for a once-living thing that you can use to make your fossil. A leaf or a twig that's fallen off of a tree are good choices.
3. Take a lump of clay and divide it in half. Roll each half into a ball and then flatten them into pancakes.
4. Press your once-living thing into one of the clay pancakes. Put the other pancake on top of the first one, covering up what you put into it. Press down gently.
5. Now carefully peel apart the two clay pancakes, and remove your once-living thing. Look at the mold left behind. Compare the shape of the mold to the shape of the original object. How are they the same? How are they different?
6. Think about the living thing that your object came from. How much of the original plant or animal is shown by the mold? How much is missing?
7. Imagine you are a scientist from the future. You have just found the mold you made as a fossil. Draw a picture of your fossil mold and then try to **reconstruct** what the entire plant or animal would have looked like when it was alive. This is the kind of work that **paleontologists** (scientists who study fossils) must do to understand what ancient life was like.

Investigate Further

1. Show your fossil mold to someone else. See if they can figure out what the original object was, just by looking at the mold.
2. Try repeating the mold-making process with other objects. Do some objects make better molds than others? Why might this be?

This activity is brought to you by the Paleontological Society and the BGSU Geology Department.