

Finding Fossils



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KEYWORDS

fossils

thousands

millions

scientists

prehistoric

underwater

sedimentary

compressed

dinosaur

Hadrosaurus

hardened

mammoths

glaciers

Antarctica

geologic

percentage

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Do you think rocks can tell stories? Yes, rocks certainly can tell great stories if they contain fossils. Are you a budding fossil hunter? Or are fossils new to you? Would you like to learn more about the world of fossils?

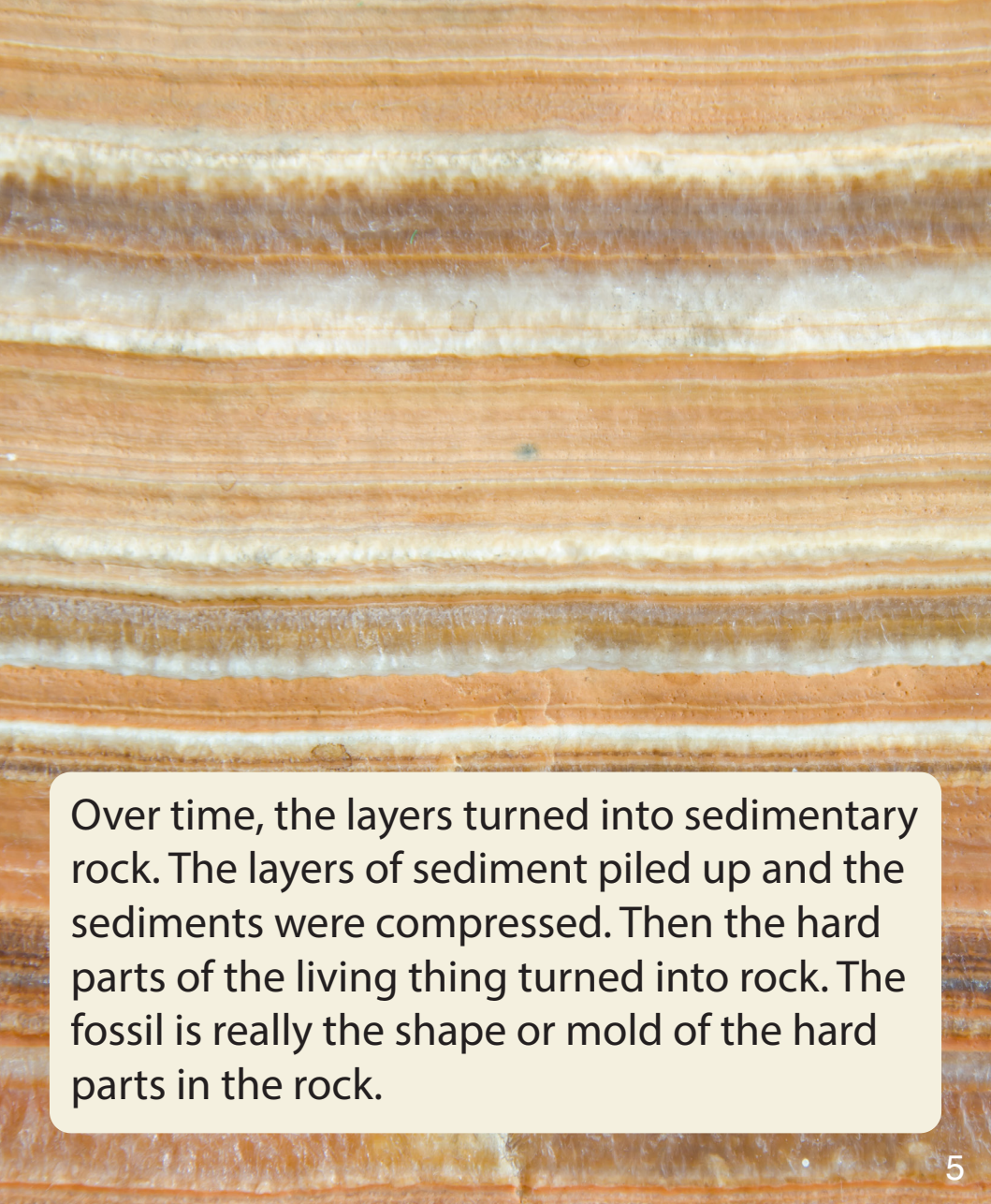


Fossils are the remains or traces of animals and plants that lived tens of thousands or millions of years ago. Fossils give scientists clues about prehistoric life and tell stories about what the world was like in the past.



How do fossils form? Most fossils are found in earth that was once underwater. The hard parts, such as shells or bones, usually form the fossil. After the animal or plant died, it sank to the bottom of the sea and layers of mud and sand built up on top of it.





Over time, the layers turned into sedimentary rock. The layers of sediment piled up and the sediments were compressed. Then the hard parts of the living thing turned into rock. The fossil is really the shape or mold of the hard parts in the rock.



There are two main types of fossils, body fossils and trace fossils. Body fossils form when some portion of the organism's body remains as part of the fossil, such as a piece of body. Body fossils are the most common type of fossil found in the world. Shells, branches, teeth and bones are body fossils.



In 1858 the first almost complete dinosaur skeleton was found in New Jersey. The skeleton was that of Hadrosaurus. This discovery changed the scientific views of the natural world.



Trace fossils are the traces of an animal's activity, such as footprints, trails, lines, scratches and burrows.



Trace fossils often form as imprints on soft material, like dinosaur footprints in mud, that later hardened into rock.



Another type of fossil is a resin fossil. Resin is also called amber. Some trees secrete sticky resin. Insects or bits of plants get stuck in the sticky resin on the tree. Over time the resin hardens and the living thing is preserved in the rock, making a fossil.



There are also some fossils that get preserved in ice by freezing. Woolly mammoths have been discovered in glaciers this way, in places like the Arctic.



Really, the only way we have of learning about dinosaurs and prehistoric life is by studying fossils.



Fossils have been found on every continent on Earth, including Antarctica and some have been found at the top of Mount Everest. This suggests that most of the Earth was covered by water at some time.



Interestingly, most animals through geologic time did not turn into fossils. They decayed and were lost from the fossil records.



Only a small percentage of the dinosaurs that ever lived have actually been found as fossils.



Makes you wonder what other amazing creatures may have existed millions of years ago. Now that you know a bit more about fossils, maybe you can go out hunting for some fossils yourself.

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Word Count: 494

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Written by Anna Kirschberg. Photographs supplied by www.canstockphoto.com.

Published by Junior Learning, Inc., 19744 Beach Blvd, #389, Huntington Beach, CA 92648.

Distributed in the UK by Junior Learning Ltd., Third Floor, 207 Regent Street, London, W1B 3HH.

Distributed in Australia by Junior Learning AUS, PO Box 6163 Yatala, Queensland, 4027.

Distributed in New Zealand by Junior Learning NZ, PO Box 28-312, Remuera, Auckland, 1054.

ISBN: 978-0-9890586-5-0

Printed in China.

juniorlearning.com

JL449





Fluency Level 4 - Non-Fiction

| Guided Reading | Reading Level | DRA Level |
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| M | 22 | 26 |

