



DIY ACTIVITY

MAKE A MODEL OF A FOSSIL GRADES 3-5

OBJECTIVES

- Model the formation of fossils to provide evidence of past life.
- Make observations which lead to a claim based on evidence.

PROCEDURE

1. Flatten a large ball of clay into a circle about half an inch thick.
2. Press a toy dinosaur firmly into the clay.
3. Remove the toy to make an imprint in the clay.
4. Use the non-sharp knife or dowel to cut away excess clay from the outside.
5. Then reuse this clay to build the edges around the imprint up higher to build a mold.
6. Ask an adult to mix the water with the plaster of paris (follow the directions on the package).
7. When ready, pour plaster to fill the clay mold.
8. Wait at least two hours for the plaster to set (follow directions on plaster). Carefully remove the clay.
9. To make the fossil model look more authentic, wait 12 hours for the plaster to dry completely, then brush some cold coffee on the surface.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Modeling clay
- Plaster of Paris powder
- Water
- Cold cup of coffee
- Paintbrush
- Toy dinosaur
- Non-latex gloves
- Plastic knife or wooden dowel

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

Real fossils are covered by sediments (mud or sand) and take thousands or millions of years to produce. Trace fossils are formed when an animal makes an imprint of some sort (footprints, body impression, etc.) in the sediment and other sediments settle into that impression to preserve it. The same thing happens in this activity when the plaster fills and preserves the impression of the dinosaur. Paleontologists also use molds like the one we made in this activity to make copies, called casts, of existing fossils they find.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

Trade fossils with a classmate or friend. Observe the characteristics of the animal they made a fossil from. Make a claim about their fossil, but be sure you can find evidence to back it up. For example you might claim that you think the fossil animal was a carnivore because of the evidence you see—sharp teeth and claws.