

## Mary Anning's Curiosity

**Monica Kulling**

**Melissa Castrillon, Illustrator**

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*Kulling's tale introduces young readers to one of science's great characters at a pivotal point in her story.*

Paleontology was a new field early in the nineteenth century, when a young girl named Mary Anning made the first of her several influential fossil discoveries among the limestone cliffs of Lyme Regis in Great Britain. *Mary Anning's Curiosity* by Monica Kulling does an excellent job of novelizing the details of Anning's story in a way that should appeal to a young audience, capturing the sense of mystery and adventure that surrounded early fossil discoveries.

Anning is a plucky and likable heroine. Though she went on to find many important fossils and become a pioneer in her field, this short and well-paced picture book focuses on her childhood and her first major find: the dinosaur-like sea creature ichthyosaurus.

The story opens with Anning's amazing, and true, origins. She survived a lightning strike that killed the women around her, before spending years helping her father find ammonites and other fossils to sell to tourists in his curiosity shop. When he was incapacitated by an accident, Mary became the explorer in the family, seeking unusual specimens from the ancient world.

*Mary Anning's Curiosity* introduces many of the classic elements of an adventure story and puts them to good use. There's a local Lyme Regis legend about a giant crocodile whose bones locals report having seen. A villain arrives in the form of a rival fossil hunter with his eye on Mary's work, and the young heroine also has to find ways to help her mother pay off her father's crushing debt. The book does a good job of making these kinds of stakes feel like real problems without crossing into melodrama, and nicely captures the coastal setting and regional voices.

Illustrations by Melissa Castrillon make the fossils look appropriately otherworldly, and the book includes useful resources for further reading about Anning and about early paleontology overall. *Mary Anning's Curiosity* packs much good material into a slim volume, introducing young readers to one of science's great characters at a pivotal point in her story.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May/June 2017)

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