



Fossils

A fossil is **evidence of ancient life that's been preserved in the rock record**. That definition tells us two things: one, that something used to be alive on ancient Earth, and two, that it left proof that it was here in the rocks.

It could leave that proof in a couple of different ways. It could be a **direct piece of an animal** that has remained behind, like bones, teeth or claws. We call that a **body fossil**. But it could also be something more indirect, what we call a **trace fossil**. This is **like a footprint**. There's no piece of the animal in the print but there's proof that the animal was here.

The important thing about fossils is that they **tell us the stories of what was happening on ancient Earth**.

Vocabulary:

Fossils: any evidence of past life preserved in the Earth's crust

Fossilization: a process involving the burial of a plant or animal in sediment and the eventual preservation of some or all of the organism

Trace/body fossil: a fossil of a track, burrow, trail, or tube resulting from an animal's activities

Sedimentary rock: rock made of layers of sediments (sand, silt, clay) in which fossils are found

Mineralization: the process of converting something into mineral

Coprolite: fossilized dinosaur dung

Paleontologist: a scientist who studies fossils and ancient life

Amber: hardened tree sap

Absolute age: the specific age of a rock or fossil

Relative age: the age of something compared to other things