

Photo Description



This image shows several fossil shells and rocks found together on the ground. The fossils have spiral shapes and ridged patterns that show us what sea creatures looked like millions of years ago. These ancient shells got trapped in rock and turned into stone over a very long time.

Scientific Phenomena

The anchoring phenomenon here is fossilization - the process by which living organisms are preserved in rock over millions of years. This occurs when organisms (in this case, marine mollusks) die and are quickly buried by sediment. Over time, minerals replace the organic materials while preserving the original shape and structure. The spiral shells visible in the image demonstrate how hard parts of organisms are more likely to fossilize than soft tissues, creating a record of ancient life that helps us understand Earth's history.

Core Science Concepts

1. Fossil Formation: Fossils form when dead plants or animals get buried quickly and turn to stone over millions of years
2. Evidence of Past Life: Fossils show us that different kinds of living things existed long ago, including creatures that no longer live on Earth today
3. Rock Layers and Time: Fossils are found in sedimentary rocks that formed in layers, with older fossils found in deeper layers
4. Environmental Changes: Marine fossils found on land tell us that areas that are now dry land were once covered by oceans

Pedagogical Tip:

Use the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy when introducing fossils. Have students first think about what they notice in the image, then discuss with a partner, and finally share observations with the class. This builds confidence and helps all learners participate.

UDL Suggestions:

Provide multiple ways for students to engage with fossil concepts: tactile experiences with real or replica fossils, visual diagrams showing the fossilization process, and kinesthetic activities like creating their own "fossils" using clay impressions.

Zoom In / Zoom Out

Zoom In: At the microscopic level, fossilization involves mineral replacement where tiny particles of minerals like silica or calcium carbonate slowly replace the original shell material molecule by molecule, preserving the detailed structure while creating a rock-like copy.

Zoom Out: These marine fossils connect to the larger Earth system, showing us that our planet's surface has changed dramatically over geological time. Areas that are now mountains or deserts were once ocean floors, demonstrating plate tectonics and climate change over millions of years.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think these spiral-shaped fossils tell us about where this area used to be long ago? (Bloom's: Analyze | DOK: 3)
2. Why do you think we find more shell fossils than fossils of soft body parts like jellyfish? (Bloom's: Evaluate | DOK: 2)
3. How are these fossil shells the same as and different from shells you might find at the beach today? (Bloom's: Compare | DOK: 2)
4. If you found a fish fossil on top of a mountain, what would that tell you about how Earth has changed? (Bloom's: Apply | DOK: 3)

Potential Student Misconceptions

1. Misconception: Fossils are the actual bones or shells of dead animals
Clarification: Fossils are rock copies of living things - the original materials have been replaced by minerals over millions of years
2. Misconception: All dead things become fossils
Clarification: Fossilization is very rare and requires special conditions like quick burial and the right type of sediment
3. Misconception: Fossils are only a few hundred or thousand years old
Clarification: Most fossils are millions of years old, formed long before humans existed

Cross-Curricular Ideas

1. Math - Measurement & Patterns: Have students measure different fossils using non-standard units (paper clips, blocks) and create bar graphs comparing their sizes. They can also look for repeating patterns in the spiral shells and predict what the next spiral would look like in a sequence.
2. ELA - Informative Writing: Students can write simple "All About Fossils" books with illustrations, using the vocabulary words and key concepts learned. They could also create "fossil field journals" where they pretend to be paleontologists discovering and describing these shells.
3. Social Studies - Local History: Research what your local area looked like millions of years ago. If your region has fossils, create a timeline showing how the land has changed from ancient ocean floor to present day. Invite a local paleontologist or museum educator to visit your classroom.
4. Art - Fossil Replicas: Students can create their own fossil impressions using clay and shells, or make salt dough fossils. They can also draw and paint detailed pictures of the fossils, experimenting with earth-tone colors to match the actual specimens.

STEM Career Connection

1. Paleontologist - A paleontologist is a scientist who digs up and studies fossils to learn about plants and animals that lived long ago. They work in museums, universities, and dig sites around the world, carefully uncovering fossils and figuring out what ancient creatures were like. Average Salary: \$65,000/year
2. Museum Educator - Museum educators work at natural history museums and teach visitors (including school groups!) about fossils and how they formed. They give tours, lead hands-on activities, and help people understand why fossils are important to science. Average Salary: \$35,000/year
3. Geologist - Geologists study rocks and Earth's layers to understand how fossils formed and what the environment was like millions of years ago. They might work for universities, government agencies, or companies that explore for natural resources, and they use tools to examine rocks and fossils up close. Average Salary: \$92,000/year

NGSS Connections

Performance Expectation: 2-ESS1-1 Use information from several sources to provide evidence that Earth events can occur quickly or slowly

Disciplinary Core Ideas:

- 2-ESS1.C - The History of Planet Earth
- 4-ESS1.C - The History of Planet Earth

Crosscutting Concepts:

- Patterns - Patterns in the natural world can be observed and used as evidence
- Scale, Proportion, and Quantity - Natural objects exist from very small to very large scales

Science Vocabulary

- * Fossil: The remains or traces of living things that died long ago and turned to stone
- * Sediment: Tiny pieces of rock, sand, and mud that settle in layers
- * Extinct: When a type of plant or animal no longer lives anywhere on Earth
- * Paleontologist: A scientist who studies fossils to learn about life long ago
- * Mineral: A natural substance found in rocks that helps form fossils
- * Ancient: Something that is very, very old, from millions of years ago

External Resources

Children's Books:

- Fossils Tell of Long Ago by Alike
- Digging Up Dinosaurs by Alike
- National Geographic Readers: Fossils by Kathleen Weidner Zoehfeld