

Private collectors have been selling and buying fossils, the petrified remains of ancient organisms, ever since the eighteenth century. In recent years, however, the sale of fossils, particularly of dinosaurs and other large vertebrates, has grown into a big business. Rare and important fossils are now being sold to private ownership for millions of dollars. This is an unfortunate development for both scientists and the general public. The public suffers because fossils that would otherwise be donated to museums where everyone can see them are sold to private collectors who do not allow the public to view their collections. Making it harder for the public to see fossils can lead to a decline in public interest in fossils, which would be a pity. More importantly, scientists are likely to lose access to some of the most important fossils and thereby miss out on potentially crucial discoveries about extinct life forms. Wealthy fossil buyers with a desire to own the rarest and most important fossils can spend virtually limitless amounts of money to acquire them. Scientists and the museums and universities they work for often cannot compete successfully for fossils against millionaire fossil buyers. Moreover, commercial fossil collectors often destroy valuable scientific evidence associated with the fossils they unearth. Most commercial fossil collectors are untrained or uninterested in carrying out the careful field work and documentation that reveal the most about animal life in the past. For example, scientists have learned about the biology of nest-building dinosaurs called oviraptors by carefully observing the exact position of oviraptor fossils in the ground and the presence of other fossils in the immediate surroundings. Commercial fossil collectors typically pay no attention to how fossils lie in the ground or to the smaller fossils that may surround bigger ones.

Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about. Of course there's some negative consequences of selling fossils in the commercial market, but they've been greatly exaggerated. The benefits of commercial fossil trade greatly outweigh the disadvantages. First of all, the public is likely to have greater exposure to fossils as a result of commercial fossil trade, not less exposure. Commercial fossil hunting makes a lotta fossils available for purchase. And as a result, even low-level public institutions, like public schools and libraries, can now routinely buy interesting fossils and display them for the public. As for the idea that scientists will lose access to really important fossils, that's not realistic either. Before anyone can put a value on a fossil, it needs to be scientifically identified. Right? Well, the only people who can identify fossils--who can really tell what a given fossil is or isn't--are scientists, by performing detailed examinations and tests on the fossils themselves. So, even if a fossil's destined to go to a private collector, it has to pass through the hands of scientific experts first. This way, the scientific community is not gonna miss out on anything important that's out there. Finally, whatever damage commercial fossil collectors sometimes do, if it weren't for them, many fossils would simply go undiscovered, because there aren't that many fossil collecting operations that're run by universities and other scientific institutions. Isn't it better for science to at least have more fossils being found—even if we don't have all the scientific data we'd like to have about their location and surroundings—than it is to have many fossils go completely undiscovered?

Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they oppose specific points made in the reading passage.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The extended family (grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles) is less important now than it was in the past. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.