Use this biography, stories and other research about Mary Anning, to help you gather information about the part of Mary’s life that you will need to answer questions about. Remember, you will be in role as Mary, answering other children’s questions as if you are her.

Mary Anning was born on 21 May 1799 in Lyme Regis on the Jurassic coast in Dorset. She and her brother Joseph were the only survivors from ten children born into the family.

Her parents, Richard Anning and his wife Mary Moore, were very poor and sometimes struggled to feed their family. Richard worked hard as a carpenter and cabinet-maker, making and repairing furniture. He tried to supplement his family’s income by collecting and cleaning fossils that he found on the beach at Lyme. Mary learned much from him, helping him to find fossils. They would then sell the fossils on a stall on the sea-front.

The family remained very poor. The situation was only made worse when Mary’s father Richard tragically died, after a fall from the cliffs, when he was only 44. Mary took responsibility for looking after the family, searching for fossils that she could sell to the wealthy visitors who came to Lyme for their holidays.

In 1811 Joseph and Mary made their first significant find. Joseph saw a skull sticking out of the cliff face. Mary painstakingly uncovered the whole skeleton, but it took a very long time. It was an Icthyosaurus or ‘fish lizard’. This find brought Mary to the attention of some important scientists of the time, and they began to visit and correspond with her.

Over the years, Mary made many other sensational finds and, despite her lack of education, she was revered by the public, patronised by important (and wealthy) people and recognised by many scientists of the time. She taught herself geology and anatomy and became a noted expert in the fossils of the Jurassic Coast. All this started from a casual interest in her father’s hobby, which developed and grew to become a life-long passion, as well as a thriving business.

Mary died at the very young age of 47 and her death in 1847 was recorded by the Geological Society (which did not admit women until much later). Locally, a stained glass window was erected in her honour in the local church, recognising her importance to the community of Lyme Regis.

For further details, visit the Natural History Museum website.