

Week 5. Guided Reading and Reading Comprehension.

WALT ask questions to improve our understanding.

The untold tale of the woman who dug up ancient sea monsters



▲ Late William and Sarah Foxton on the site of Anning's life. Photograph: GC Images

Born poor and nonconformist, Mary Anning's contributions to the birth of palaeontology had been forgotten. But not any longer

Born in 1799 in Lyme Regis, Anning helped her father Richard sell the fossils he gathered on the Dorset coast. He died when Mary was 11, so she and her brother Joseph took over the business - with spectacular success, uncovering in 1811 the 16ft fossil of a sea monster belonging to the genus now known as *Ichthyosaurus*. These were followed by other major finds, including plesiosaurs and pterosaurs.



▲ The only known portrait of Mary

These were crucial discoveries. The French naturalist Georges Cuvier had just proposed the idea of extinction - that in the past some species had simply died out. "It was controversial because it implied not all God's creations were perfect. Some were doomed to failure," said Barrett. Anning's findings played a vital role in this debate.

Within a few years, her advice was being sought from all quarters - by men who published papers that relied heavily on her discoveries and interpretations, but who gave her no credit. Only recently has Anning's full impact become apparent.

"She was poor, she was a woman and came from a nonconformist family," said Barrett. "These factors all worked against her - although, without doubt, being female was the worst impediment. Women were then not allowed to join scientific societies. So the Geological Society discussed her findings, but would not let her in those meetings because women were banned."