

Fictional Fossils

Leonardo's ideas about the formation of the Earth were influenced by his observation of the fossils of sea creatures, which had, in some cases, been found near mountain tops. At the time, mainstream thinking suggested that these were remnants of the biblical flood, washed up on mountain tops as the waters receded. (Surprisingly, some people still believe this to be the case.)

In reality, they are the remnants of creatures that lived millions of years ago, animals which had died and been spared the ordinary ravages of decay by being preserved in layers of mud. Over time, the hard parts of their bodies, such as shells, bones and teeth, were ultimately replaced with minerals from the enveloping mud, effectively turning them into interestingly shaped rocks.

If you haven't already had a go, create your own monster in the *Make a Monster* game, in the *Play* section of the Universal Leonardo web site, and then use the steps below to create a fictional fossil record of your creature.

You will need:

Two clean, flat empty cans (the kind used for tinned salmon are ideal)

Some modelling clay

Plaster of paris

A small, blunt knife

Instructions:

1/ Fill each can with modelling clay, making sure to push it well down into the bottom edges of the cans.

2/ Using the small, blunt knife, carve the shape of one half your “fossil” into each of the cans of modelling clay to create moulds.

3/ Pour the plaster of paris into the moulds, so that each is filled to the top of the shapes you have carved.

4/ Leave the plaster to set for 24 hours.

5/ Very gently remove the plaster casts from the mould. (You may find it easier to remove the remaining lids from each of the cans and push the casts out from underneath.)

6/ Carefully scrape away any remaining modelling clay from each half of your “fossil” and fix your casts together with glue or a little more plaster of paris.

7/ Repeat the above steps for each fossil stage in the evolution of your magnificent monster.