Review of sources available for selection of Non Fiction: Fossils

Ten Selected Titles for Collection Development on Fossils
(Arranged alphabetically by title)

Title: The Best Book of Fossils, Rocks, and Minerals
Author: Chris Pellant
Illustrators: Chris Forsey, Ray Grinaway
Age Range: 6-8 years
Price for Library/Hardcover Binding: $12.95
Reader’s Annotation: A brightly illustrated book that introduces basic geological processes, minerals and gemstones, fossils, and fossil hunting and collecting.
Summary/Review: Any child interested in geology and fossils will love the dynamic and colorful illustrations used to illuminate and identify earth’s formations. Drawings and photographs of minerals and gemstones are clearly labeled for identification, and pan-page drawings of stratification, fossil formation, and paleontologists at work are lively and informative. Diagrams of layers of earth surface and rock types are particularly useful in describing the fossilization process and in showing how fossil fuels are extracted from the earth. Large text heads the tops of the pages, and substext sections are labeled to keep readers engaged. Young collectors of fossils and rocks can appreciate the section on maintaining a personal collection, as well as the cleverly illustrated table of contents, glossary and index.

Title: Dinosaur Mummies: Beyond Bare Bone Fossils
Author: Kelly Milner Halls
Illustrator: Rick Spears
Age Range: 8-12 years
Price for Library/Hardcover Binding: $17.95
Reader’s Annotation: Fossilized soft tissue is a special kind of fossil, and few have been found. This book discusses recent finds and current research on dinosaur fossils that include soft tissue remains.
Summary/Review: Readers that are experienced with literature on fossils will enjoy this book, which focuses specifically on dinosaur fossils that include skin imprints and organs that have turned to stone. While fossilized mummies are rare, Halls discusses the probable ways they are made, and the natural weathering processes that lead to their discovery. Specific fossil specimens are highlighted in individual chapters, each focusing on the discoveries of the particular fossil and research conducted that tells us more about the dinosaur the fossil represented. Scientific theory and processes behind the research is given simply and matter-of-factly. All pages are stocked with appropriately credited
Title: A Dinosaur Named Sue: The World’s Most Complete T. rex
Author: Pat Relf, The SUE Science Team
Age Range: 6-12 years
Publication Info: Scholastic, 2000, 64p.
ISBN 10: 0-4390-9985-4
Price for Library/Hardcover Binding: $15.95
Reader’s Annotation: Sue is the name given to the most complete Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton ever found. The excavation and preparation processes are documented. Summary/Review: In a chronological organization of the discovery, excavation and preparation of Sue the T. rex, Relf shows curious minds the inside story of fossil collecting. Excavation procedures and the precautions taken prior to putting Sue on public display in Chicago Field Museum are documented with detailed photographs. Readers do not need to be planning a trip to see Sue to find this information interesting. Relf’s attention to concise details of removing fossils from plaster and conducting experiments to find out how big Sue’s brain was, are fascinating enough for the budding paleontologist. Her discussion of the importance of fossils found nearby Sue in the excavation is enlightening, as is her coverage of the ownership battle over Sue’s remains. Questions about Sue in particular are addressed in a Q&A format, while the majority of the text is informational and lively. Captioned photographs of researchers at work will keep readers engaged. Phonetic pronunciation guides within the text will assist readers, but the book lacks a glossary. Table of contents and an index are provided.

Title: Dinosaurs Walked Here and Other Stories Fossils Tell
Author/Illustrator: Patricia Lauber
Age Range: 9 - 11
Publication Info:
Price for Library/Hardcover Binding: $15.95
Reader’s Annotation: Lauber’s book discusses theories behind fossil formation and distribution, and relates fossils to acquiring knowledge about dinosaurs. She shows how fossils tell of earth’s history in this broad and informative book. Summary/Review: This book provides an overview of general information about fossils from how they form, and what they tell us about the plants and dinosaurs that have been fossilized. For example, theories about how fossils can tell us about dinosaurs - such as how fast they ran - are briefly discussed. The fundamental ideas of plate tectonics are discussed alongside potential reasons why animals became trapped in the La Brea tar pits. While this book does not place an emphasis on learning by looking at visuals, illustrations and photographs are placed logically within the text with long and descriptive captions. Informative chapter titles and an index make specific information
accessible, and illustrated maps show the distribution of fossils over the globe. The small
font indicates that this book would be useful for more experienced readers.

**Title:** Fossil: DK Eyewitness Books  
**Author/Illustrator:** Paul D. Taylor, et al.  
**Age Range:**  
**ISBN 10:** 0-7566-0681-0  
**Price for Library/Hardcover Binding:** $19.99  
**Reader’s Annotation:** Loaded with photographs and informative captions, readers will recognize the familiar Eyewitness Books series format. Covering plants to humans, the wide range of fossils and the history of studying them are discussed.  
**Summary/Review:** Pages are divided into two-page spreads focusing on a specific area of fossils, which is clearly announced in the upper left hand side. Each segment has a short text blurb, and is then heavily supplemented by drawings and photographs with long captions. Right away, Taylor discerns what are and are not true fossils, and then moves into a bit of geology and the beginnings of paleontology. The bulk of the book illustrates the variety of specimens found, concluding with the tools used for finding fossils, and a brief guide to common fossils readers may see in small collections. An illustrated glossary follows a page listing websites and places to visit to see more fossils. Photo credits are given at the back of the book. While this book may appear cluttered to some, it is truly a thorough report on the many kinds of specimens and types of fossils that exist.

**Title:** Fossils  
**Author:** Sally M. Walker  
**Age Range:** 6-9 years  
**Publication Info:** Lerner Publications, 2006, 48p.  
**ISBN 10:** 0-8225-5945-5  
**Price for Library/Hardcover Binding:** $25.26  
**Reader’s Annotation:** Produces a general overview of the fossilization process and how fossils are found. A good beginner book with large text and colorful photographs, and will also be a useful introduction to reference aids found in other non-fiction books.  
**Summary/Review:** This is a great book to introduce young children to the more technical side of exploring fossils. Walker points out the glossary and lists new words on the first page, calling for readers to become “word detectives.” This is supported by a table of contents and an illustrated index. Chapters are straightforward and move in a logical progression towards a better understanding of what fossils are and why they are important. Color photographs showing various fossils, landscapes, and paleontologists preparing fossils do not necessarily correspond with the main text, but supplement it nicely in neatly placed boxes with clear captions. Walker covers many types of fossils by avoiding a particular emphasis on dinosaurs, and discusses fossils formed by rock, ice and asphalt, specifically mentioning the La Brea tar pits. Walker includes a page of other books and websites that provide more information about fossils at the back of the book,
and photo credits are given on the title page. Newly independent readers will appreciate this exploration of fossils.

**Title:** Fossils: DK Handbooks  
**Author:** Cyril A. Walker, David J. Ward  
**Age Range:** 9-12  
**Publication Info:** Dorling Kindersley, 2000 (2nd ed.), 320p.  
**ISBN 10:** 1-5645-8071-7  
**Price (Paperback only):** $25.49  
**Reader’s Annotation:** A guide to fossils that shows the many different organisms from small plants and invertebrates to humans and dinosaurs. As useful for the pictures as it is for the identification features.  
**Summary/Review:** Complied by head paleontologists Walker and Ward, an incredible amount of information is provided in this photograph-based guide to fossil identification. Divided into sections for plants, invertebrates, and vertebrates, a plethora of previously discovered fossils are pictured with illustrations of the creatures they came from and their scientific names, in addition to where these fossils can be found and how common they are. For example, every kind of ammonite is pictured alongside its corresponding illustration and location information. As a guidebook, there are no true age ranges to which this book should apply. Adults can use it in addition to curious children. The detailed color photographs of such a wide range of real fossils are captivating, as are the photographs provided of common excavation tools and a discussion of what is and what is not a fossil. A glossary provides definitions for names of unfamiliar body parts as well as a thorough index and table of contents. In design, the book follows the same straightforward format from start to finish and keep pages from becoming overly cluttered by using a consistent white background.

**Title:** Fossils Tell of Long Ago  
**Author/Illustrator:** Aliki  
**Age Range:** 6-9 years  
**ISBN 10:** 0-6900-4829-7  
**Price for Library/Hardcover Binding:** $12.89  
**Reader’s Annotation:** In this concept picture book, readers are guided through the varying processes of fossil formation of different kinds of creatures. Input from cartoon-style illustrated children puts the textual information into an everyday context.  
**Summary/Review:** Aliki’s book is illustrated with friendly drawings of prehistoric scenarios and diagrams showing how different creatures - such as dinosaurs, fish, bugs, and mammoths - can become fossils. The sentences are clear, short and simple, and correlate directly with the informational drawings. In the *Magic School Bus* style, a host of illustrated children appear on each page with cartoon-style text bubbles to help readers put the textual information into context: i.e. they may have seen amber in their mother’s jewelry. They also serve as captions to the drawings. This is a surprisingly thorough book, given its short length and simple layout. Children will see the fossilization process and the discoveries of fossils as joyful and exciting.
Title: Fossil Feud: The Rivalry of the First American Dinosaur Hunters  
Author: Thom Holmes  
Illustrator: Cameron Clement  
Age Range: 10-12  
ISBN 10: 0-3823-9148-9  
Price for Library/Hardcover Binding: $14.95  
Reader’s Annotation: Edward Cope and O.C. Marsh were the original American dinosaur fossil hunters. Their life long competition is presented in a graphically unique format.  
Summary/Review: With an innovative design, Holmes presents the history of Edward Cope and O.C. Marsh’s well publicized fossil collecting rivalry using illustrations, photographs, varying size and styles of text, and faded images serving as backgrounds to the text. Biographical information of the lives of these two nineteenth century men follows their careers as collectors of dinosaur fossils. These men moved American fossil collecting out into the wild west, where encounters with Native Americans and the dangers of entering remote lands were not uncommon. Special detail is given to the excavating techniques they developed, such as using plaster casts and creating sketches of dig sites. The race to find the most fossils resulted in the development of huge museum collections and positions of power for the men, but their constant rivalry was neither beneficial to the field of paleontology nor to each other. The table of contents direct readers to the aptly named chapters, as well as the six appendices related to fossil collecting, readings lists, and suggested museums at the back of the book. This is a lengthy read that serves as both biography and informational literature about the beginnings of fossil collecting in the United States.

Title: I Dig Fossils!  
Age Range:  
Publication Info: Mazon Productions, 1993, 30 min  
Format: VHS only  
Price: $14.95  
Reader’s Annotation: Scott and his father like go fossil hunting on weekends. They drive to the hills and find fossils of plants, while giving safety tips and hints for finding fossils.  
Summary/Review: This video is a refreshing break from glorified dinosaur hunting, as it has an emphasis on other types of fossils and a format that makes fossil hunting understandable and realistic for children. Narrated by young Scott, viewers are treated to a day trip with Scott and his father to hunt for fossils of plants and insects left behind from 300 millions years ago, when the land was covered in swamps. A short and informative animation illustrates the geologic changes that led to the fossilization of the marsh plants, and a concise demonstration using clay shows how the fossilization process occurs. Scott shows us tools used to hunt for fossils, and points out rocks that are the most likely to have fossils inside. A special attention is payed to local natural history museums as places to learn about fossils, and to also get tips for getting started on your own fossil hunts. Additional tips for getting started and list of suggested reading is provided at the end of the film.
Introduction

Children are fascinated by dinosaurs, and there is plenty of quality literature available about dinosaurs. But what about fossils? There is a logical connection between the dinosaurs and fossils, but the world of fossils extends beyond the friendly Brontosaurus. Fossils are objects of curiosity that children like because not only do dinosaur skeletons and footprints come from fossils, but things like trilobites, prehistoric mammals, huge plants, small fish, and even insects do, too. Fossils are formed in various ways and can exist in many forms. Perhaps the most exciting thing about fossils, however, is that children can grow up to become fossil hunters. Paleontologists excavate and study fossilized remains of extinct creatures, and paleontology is a top “dream job” that a child can have. To learn about how fossils are formed and studied, children rely on libraries. For this assignment, I kept these children in mind while searching for ten resources any aspiring paleontologist or fossil aficionado would like.

Searching and Selection Process

Searching for non-fiction books requires a different approach than that of searching for fiction books. Rather than searching for a particular genre and filtering through book reviews, I had to take a more active approach. I initially followed the same search methods I had while locating historical fiction titles for my previous assignment, but soon began experimenting with new methods of locating quality books when I was not satisfied with my original results.

From my experience with searching for fiction titles, I knew that resources such as *Essential Children’s Literature* (Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, 2005) were a good place to start. Suggested readings are often provided for different non-fiction areas in these types of informational books on children’s literature. I realized my success with this method would be limited, however, because given the number of topic areas Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (2005) had to cover, there were few listings under books for natural history, and even less for fossils within this list.

Again relying on my previous experience, I also knew that the *Horn Book Magazine*, *Booklist*, and *School Library Journal* were all valuable resources for evaluating a book’s quality. I turned to the reviews in these journals to start my search
for high quality books on fossils. I was disappointed, however, by the small number of results I acquired by searching for these reviews using the Library Literature & Information Full Text database, with which I had had success before. Additionally, I was mildly discouraged by the high volume of search results that were about dinosaurs, not specifically fossils. What I also found surprising was the lack of recent reviews that had been written about books on fossils in general, even outside of these journals. Searches in Book Links, for example, gave me few reviews, all of which were at least five years old. I knew that the lack of reviews did not mean that the book didn’t exist, so I tried a new approach, and a new database.

The Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database (CLCD) became imperative to my work on this project. Instead of searching for specific reviews about a type of book, this database is structured so that a search produces titles of actual books, which then have reviews included in their description. So, rather than searching using a review-based approach, this database is structured to produce titles of actual books, which then have reviews included in their description. Between this database and the Books In Print database, I was able to ascertain the scope and general availability of books on fossils.

The next method I used for searching for books on fossils involved investigating the holdings of other libraries. I figure that if librarians have added a book to their own collection, the book is probably a reliable choice. The Marin County Free Library and the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) systems are the libraries I personally interact with most frequently, and it is important to note that SFPL’s catalog represents the holdings of a major city’s collection. SFPL’s collection is expansive and represented a good portion of what children’s literature on fossils is available. I browsed their catalogs for resources about fossils and paleontology and had great success in finding potential books to add to my list. Additionally, the online catalog for SFPL provides links to reviews from reputable journals for some of their books. If a book was in the catalog and it had a good review, I was sure to make note of it as a possible addition to my final selection.

Once I had compiled a list of potential books through the processes described above, I began selecting what I felt were the best. In general terms, a successful non-fiction book is visually interesting, written clearly and understandably, has reference aids
such as glossaries and indexes, and uses accurate and current facts (Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, 2005; Horning, 1997). When reading potential books, I used this criteria as well as my own: if I simply didn’t think the book was interesting, I didn’t include it.

When looking at my selections as a whole, I wanted to be sure to produce a diverse list of suggestions. This, of course, includes catering to beginning readers as well as the more experienced ones, while also considering the curious minds that will yearn for more than just the basics about fossils. It is redundant to have ten different resources on fossils in a library’s collection if they all say the same thing. Therefore, I strove to choose a set of resources that covered the basic information as well as more specific information, such as fossilized soft tissues in *Dinosaur Mummies: Beyond Bare Bone Fossils*, and a historical look at fossil collecting in *Fossil Feud: The Rivalry of the First American Dinosaur Hunters*. These titles serve as the next step in learning about fossils because readers will already know the basics. Here, they will apply their basic understandings of fossils and paleontology to actual events and discoveries.

In addition to information about various types of fossils and various organisms that are preserved in them, children may also be interested in the prospect of finding fossils themselves someday. The video *I Dig Fossils* is a particularly useful resource for children who want to start fossil hunting, and books such as *A Dinosaur Named Sue: The World’s Most Complete T. rex* provide insight to what it would be like to be a real paleontologist.

Overall, I believe that my final selections accomplish my goals of providing a solid list of resources on fossils that could be considered for acquisition into a children’s library collection. In the future, I hope that the availability of reviews from publications such as *Horn Book Magazine* and *School Library Journal* will be more reliable, but I am also confident that I can use other sources to find good books as well.
Resource Bibliography

Academic Search Premier. [Electronic database]. Accessible from San Jose State University’s King Library: http://sjlibrary.org/research/ejournals/index.htm

Children’s Books In Print. [Electronic Database]. Accessible from San Jose State University’s King Library:
http://sjlibrary.org/research/databases/index.htm?type=3#C

Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database (CLCD) [Electronic database]. Accessible from San Jose State University’s King Library:
http://sjlibrary.org/research/ejournals/index.htm


Library Literature & Information Science Full Text. [Electronic database]. Accessible from San Jose State University’s King Library:
http://sjlibrary.org/research/ejournals/index.htm


An authoritative, practical identification guide to minerals, rocks and fossils of the world. Over 600 specimens illustrated in full colour on 14-2 plates. Every specimen described and illustrated on the same two-page spread. Over 300 line drawings. This guide is designed to enable rapid and accurate identification of minerals, rocks and fossils. It is arranged in the now-accepted tradition of practical field guides, with all the relevant information for identification of a specimen presented together. To make the best use of the book, the contents page and index should be used freely. The contents list will enable you to turn quickly to the appropriate section of the book, whereas if a tentative identification has been made, then reference to the index will immediately direct you to the relevant page.