Making Your Own Fossil Prints

This lesson developed by *Reach Out!*

Recommended Age: Preschool and Early Elementary

Questions

What is a fossil?
Can I make a fossil print?

What You Need (per person)

"Stone" Dough Mix	"Fossils" to Imprint
½ cup salt	Twigs
1 cup flour	Leaves (Stiff leaves, like bay leaves, work best)
½ cup brewed coffee (cold)	Dead, hard-shelled bugs like beetles or pillbugs
1 cup used coffee grounds	Seashells
Measuring cups	Chicken bones
Mixing spoons	Plastic dinosaurs for skin textures
Mixing bowl	Other things to experiment with

What You Do

1. Measure salt, flour, coffee, and grounds; add each to bowl; and stir together until well mixed.
2. Turn this dough out onto a large sheet of waxed paper and knead it until smooth.
3. Break off a piece large enough for the imprint you want to make, roll it into a ball, and use the heel of your hand to flatten it out.
4. Press the object you wish to make a fossil imprint of firmly into the dough. You can use more than one object if you like. Carefully remove the objects to leave the prints behind. Let your fake stone dry overnight and you have an imitation fossil!

What Is Happening

What you are doing is very much like the way real fossil prints were created. A long time ago, plants, bugs, or animals left impressions in soft mud, which dried out and eventually became rock.

Much of what we know about ancient, extinct plants and animals comes from such prints. For example, that is how we know what the texture of dinosaur skin was, and how we are still tracking down the evolution of birds, since neither skin nor feathers are likely to survive as actual fossils, the way bones do.