

Sloth Bones Activity

Lesson Overview: Students will work in small groups to assemble a giant ground sloth skeleton puzzle, deepening their understanding of the ground sloth's skeletal structure and engaging in discussions about the fossilization process.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will . . .

- define the terms “fossil and “paleontology,”
- learn to recognize the giant ground sloth's skeletal structure, and
- discuss types of fossils and the process of fossilization.

TEACHER PREP INSTRUCTIONS

1. Designate a spot as the “dig site” (i.e., several stacks of books on a table can represent layers of exposed rock).
2. Tear or cut along the dotted lines to remove the sloth parts from the skeleton graphic.
3. “Bury” the skeletal parts around the dig site (i.e., hide under or between books so students can “unearth” each bone).

Note: This activity is intended for small groups. Once you divide your class into small groups, either take turns with the activity or print multiple versions of the skeletal puzzle.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask students to define “fossil” and “paleontology.” Break down the root words to help (i.e., paleo- = ancient, onto- = being, -logy = study)
2. Tell each small group of students they will act like paleontologists by searching for signs of ancient life. Instruct them to search the “dig site” to discover the bones as evidence.
3. After all skeletal parts are found, encourage students to discuss their structure. Ask: Do any of the parts look familiar? Guide them to the conclusion that the parts are fossilized bones.
4. Instruct students to collaboratively assemble a complete skeleton with their bones. When the skeleton is assembled, or after a few minutes of struggle, ask the students if they think the skeleton is complete.
5. Tell the students that another team of paleontologists found an incomplete skeleton, and they want to see if the new bones match.
6. Hang the skeleton puzzle where it's accessible to the students and direct them to tape the bones where they think they belong.
7. Ask students to identify each part (answers = skull, vertebra, forelimb, hindlimb) and label each with a marker.

POST-ACTIVITY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use this opportunity to introduce students to types of fossils and how they form.

1. Why do you think some parts of a fossilized skeleton might be missing?
2. How does the assembled skeleton compare to other animals you've learned about?
3. How did your group work together to assemble the skeleton?
4. What challenges did you face during the activity?

Grade Levels: 3-5

Subject: Earth Science

Skills: Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking

Estimated Time: 30 minutes

Educational Settings:

Classroom, Informal (museums, science centers, and camps)

