Smithsonian

Bones on Display

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Where Bones Live

What if skeletons could talk? They can! Well, they can sort of talk to you. You might think that's a little strange, but it is true. Every bone has a story. People just have to learn how to read bones' stories.

Bones can tell you where animals lived or what they ate. They can also tell you when they lived. Some bones date back millions of years! That means we can learn about real animals from long, long ago. You can find these bones at natural history museums. This kind of museum helps people learn about life on Earth.

This *Tyrannosaurus rex* (*T. rex*) is on display at the Hong Kong Science Museum.

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This *Stegosaurus* is on display at the Natural History Museum in London.

This *Triceratops* skull is on display outside Smithsonian's natural history museum in Washington, DC.

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The Smithsonian Institution has a well-known natural history museum. It is called the National Museum of Natural History. It is huge! People can learn a lot of things there. They can see bones, plants, and rocks from the past.

The museum is more than a hundred years old. It has grown a lot through the years. Some **exhibits** have changed. But the purpose has stayed the same. Museum workers hope to teach people about the world. They do this by teaching people about the past.

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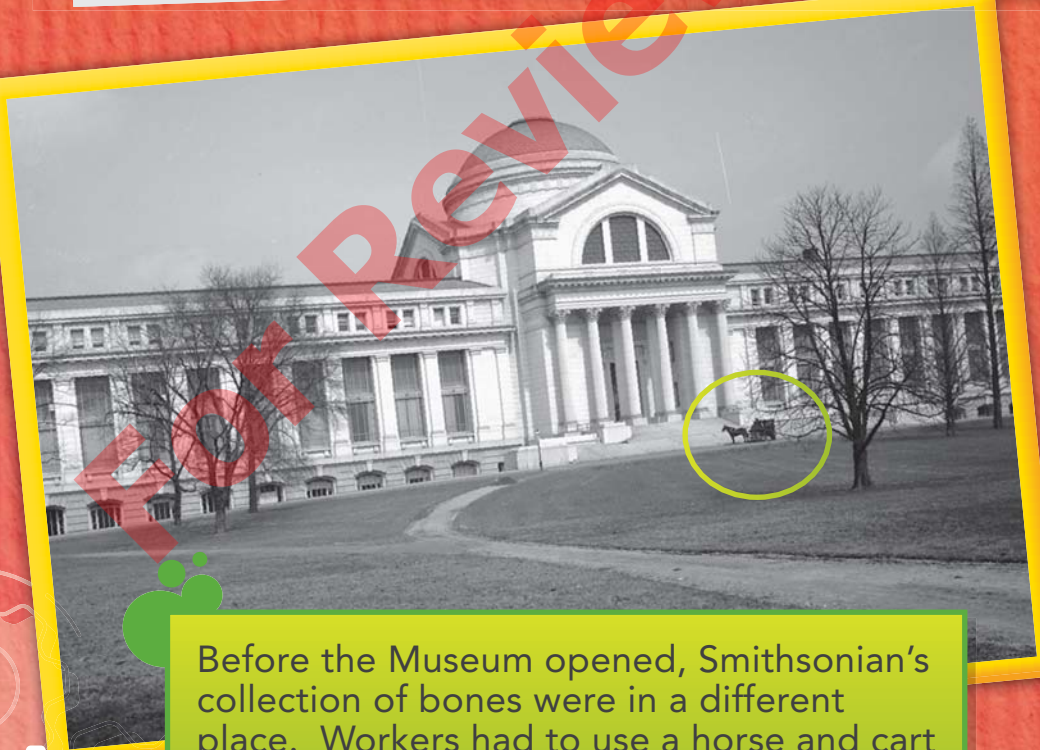

Before the Museum opened, Smithsonian's collection of bones were in a different place. Workers had to use a horse and cart to move 10 million objects to the new site.

Smithsonian's blue whale model at the 1904 World's Fair

Smithsonian's North Atlantic right whale model today

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Smithsonian set up a special exhibit for bones. Workers were not sure that anyone would want to come. But they did! Big crowds went to see the bone displays—especially people who lived nearby.

Soon, exhibits opened in new places around the world. More and more people could see these bones from the past. Now, these exhibits are easy to find. People can visit museums to learn about animals and people from the past.

Stegosaurus display in Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in the 1950s

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Smithsonian's early Bone Hall

Smithsonian's bone collection was on display in this building until 1910.

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STEAM CHALLENGE

Define the Problem

Workers at a natural history museum near your home have found a new skeleton fossil. They want to put the bones on display. They have asked you to make a model of the exhibit.

Constraints: You may only use a shoebox, clay, pipe cleaners, glue, tape, paint, colored pencils, or markers to build your exhibit.

Criteria: Your exhibit must have a skeleton of an animal and its habitat. The skeleton must be standing. You must include a few sentences to teach people about your animal.

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1 Research and Brainstorm

Why should museum workers know how to display bones? How do exhibits help people learn about animals? How do museums make learning fun?

2 Design and Build

Sketch a model of your display. What purpose will each part serve? What materials will you use? Build the model.

3 Test and Improve

Show your model to your friends. Can they tell what your animal is? Can your model stand on its own? How can you improve it? Improve your design and try again.

4 Reflect and Share

What was difficult about this challenge? What did you learn? How could you add technology to help people imagine what your animal looked or sounded like?

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