



The Fossil Hunters

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About the Book

Shelley can't wait to get to her aunt and uncle's cottage on Gray Rocks Lake to see her cousin Kyle. But her excitement quickly turns to disappointment when she discovers that Kyle's best friend Marcus is staying there too. Shelley feels left out of the boys' games. Then the special fossil rock she found on the beach goes missing. Shelley thinks Marcus took it, but is she right? When Kyle's dog Topper loses her ball, the mystery is solved, and Shelley and Marcus are given an opportunity to become friends.

About the Author

Marilyn Helmer is the author of many children's books, including picturebooks, early readers, novels, riddle books and retold tales. Although writing is her main passion, she is also an avid collector. Marilyn has found that collecting is not only an enjoyable pastime, but it is also a great source of story ideas.

The Fossil Hunters is Marilyn's third book with Orca. *Dinosaurs on the Beach*, an Orca Young Reader, was published in 2003 and *Sharing Snowy*, an Orca Echo, in 2008. Marilyn and her husband Gary live in Belwood near Fergus, Ontario.

About the Writing of the Book

Marilyn's inspiration for *The Fossil Hunters* is a result of her son's interest in collecting rocks and fossils. Her son Chris found his first fossil during a family walk along an unpaved city road when he was five years old. He was bitten by the collecting bug, and one of the Helmer family's favorite holiday pastimes was searching beaches and quarries wherever fossil hunting was permitted. In Parrsboro, Nova Scotia, they had the opportunity to meet a well-known amateur paleontologist, Eldon George, and hear stories about some of his fascinating finds.

Teaching Ideas—Curriculum Connections*Prereading Ideas*

- Shelley, who has been looking forward to spending a week with her cousin Kyle at his cottage, is disappointed to find that Kyle's best friend Marcus is staying there too. Shelley feels left out of the boys' games. Have you ever felt left out? Have you looked forward to an event or holiday that turned out to be a disappointment? Describe how you felt and how you dealt with it.
- When Shelley's special fossil rock goes missing, she thinks Marcus took it. What would you do if you *thought* that someone had taken something belonging to you? Should a person ever accuse someone of doing something wrong without having definite proof?
- Have you ever had to decide between buying something special for yourself or spending your money on something for someone else? Describe the situation and explain what you decided to do. Can you give some examples of the difference between being generous and being selfish?
- Are you a collector? Tell the class about your collection. You might like to bring in part of your collection to show the class. What is your favorite item in your collection?
- Have you ever lost something that is really important to you? How did you feel? Did you eventually find it?

Classroom Discussion Questions

1. Let's say you are playing with your friend at recess. You see a new girl or boy who has no one to play with. Would you invite them to play with you too? What if your friend didn't want to play with the new person? What would you do then?
2. What if you went to your friend's house to play only to find that there was another person there who didn't seem to like you. What would you do?
3. Do you like to trade things with your friends? Have you ever traded something and later wished that you hadn't? What did you do about it? Did you ask the person to trade back?
4. Has someone ever had something you really wished you had yourself? Discuss how you felt about this.
5. Have you ever accused someone of doing something wrong and then found out that they weren't guilty? Was this person a friend of yours? Did you apologize? Did the person accept the apology? Has someone ever accused you of something you didn't do? How did that make you feel?

Suggested Activities**Science**

- Examine objects with a magnifying glass. Some of the things you might look at are a flower, rock, twig, leaf or sand. First look at the objects only with your eyes. Then look at the same object with a magnifying glass. Make a list of the differences you see.
- What is your favorite farm animal? Look up some interesting facts about that animal to share with the class.

Drama

- Chapter ten, either the whole chapter or from paragraph 8 to the end, could be read aloud with different voice inflections. How does this change the meaning or the drama of this part of the story?
- Pretend that you are walking along a rocky beach. What interesting things might you find? Compare your list with your classmates. Draw a picture of the beach and the things you found.

Geography

- Some of the best fossil finds in North America have been made in the rocky cliffs of Parrsboro and Joggins in Nova Scotia. Research these towns and the amateur paleontologist, Eldon George.
- Draw a map of the story's setting, including the cottage, car park, Gray Rocks Lake and Rocky Beach. Be sure that the map matches the description in the text.
- Using a large piece of paper and working in small groups, draw the buildings you might find on a city street. How many different types of buildings can you think of? What else would you find on a city street? For example, stop signs and traffic lights.

Vocabulary

tournament (p. 11)
boardwalk (p. 17)
imprint (p. 24)

miniature (p.26)
magnifying (p.39)
plaid (p. 29)

Other Titles and Websites of Interest

Fossils by Melissa Stewart. Heinemann Library, Chicago, Illinois. J560 STE

Ivy and Bean Break the Fossil Record, Book 3 by Anne Barrow. Chronicle Books.
www.chroniclekids.com

Mary Anning, Fossil Hunter On My Own Biography by Sally M. Walker. Carolrhoda Books, New York.

The Missing Fossil Mystery by Emily Herman. Hyperion, New York.

Prehistoric Life by Dougal Dixon. Oxford University Press. J560 DIX

www.surnetkids.com/fossils.html

www.valdosta.edu/~lakidd/topic.html

google: "fossils—children's websites"

Other Books by the Author from Orca Book Publishers

Dinosaurs on the Beach

Sharing Snowy

Awards and Reviews

Dinosaurs on the Beach

CCBC Our Choice selection

"[Marilyn Helmer's] story, packed with cool info about dinosaurs and fossils, has adventure, mystery and a touch of tension to it that will pull readers into Josie's quest."
—*The Hamilton Spectator*

"...contains an important lesson regarding facing your fears and standing up to bullies." —Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada

Sharing Snowy

"It has a good storyline...easy to follow...I think any third grader will really enjoy this book—Highly Recommended." —School Library System

"*Sharing Snowy* is a wonderful story written in small easy to read chapters. Any child beginning to read chapter books would feel very confident reading this story. Recommended." —*CM Magazine*