

# You Just Found a Dinosaur Fossil. Now What?

Mia and her brother James disagree about what to do with the dinosaur fossil they found in their backyard. **Who makes the best case?**

## SELL IT

Let's make some \$\$\$\$.

Dear James,

Can you believe we found a dinosaur fossil in our backyard? Hundreds of millions of years ago, actual dinosaurs stomped around the very place where we have our birthday parties! But that isn't what excites me most about our discovery. What I'm truly excited about is this: We could be millionaires.

According to my research, dinosaur fossils can be worth a lot of money. In June 2018, a fossilized dinosaur skeleton found in Wyoming sold for \$2.3 million. Even small fossils, like dinosaur eggs, can sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Imagine what we could do with that kind of cash. We could pay for college. We could take that trip to the **Galápagos Islands** you're always dreaming about. We could get a dog!

I know you're going to say that selling our fossil is wrong—that we should donate it to a scientific institution. But legally, we have the right to do whatever we want with it. According to U.S. law, when you find a fossil on your property, it belongs to you.

Besides, if we sell the fossil at an **auction**, museums and other scientific institutions will get a chance to buy it anyway. And even if none of them do, there's no reason to assume the fossil will just collect dust on a shelf somewhere. Some fossil buyers actually lend their fossils to museums, so many people can enjoy them.

Still, I am willing to compromise with you. What if instead of auctioning the fossil to the highest **bidder**, we go to a museum or research institute and offer to sell it to them first? That way, we'll still make money, but the fossil will end up in a place you feel good about.

Promise me you'll at least consider what I've said.

Your older (and wiser) sister,

Mia

**P.S.** If we sell the fossil and get a dog, I'll let you name him.



## DONATE IT

Let's give it to science.

Dear Mia,

I completely agree that finding that fossil was EPIC. Now every time I look out the window, I picture a massive *Stegosaurus* stomping around our yard.

But I disagree that the best part of our discovery is the chance to get rich. The best part is what we can do for science. We still have so much to learn about dinosaurs and what Earth was like millions of years ago when these creatures were roaming around our planet. Our fossil could help! That's why it is essential that we donate this fossil to a place where **paleontologists** will be able to study it.

You say that if we put the fossil up for auction, museums could purchase it. But museums often can't afford to pay the millions of dollars that fossils sell for these days. Our fossil would likely end up as a piece of **decor** in some rich person's house.

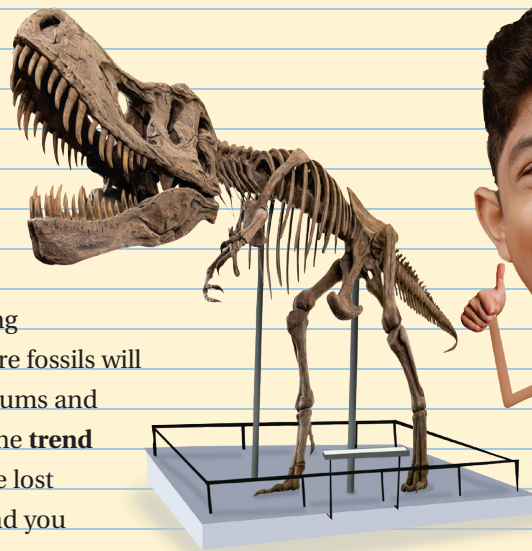
Plus, donating this fossil to a museum ensures that it will be properly cared for. If we sell it to just anyone, who knows what will happen to it. What if it gets damaged? Or worse?

But you know what? I don't think the fossil is ours to sell anyway. Yes, legally it belongs to us. But is it right to claim a precious piece of Earth history as our personal property just because it happened to be in our backyard?

And this is about a lot more than just our one fossil. As more fossils are sold for outrageous prices, more people will go hunting for fossils as a way to get rich. This means more fossils will get snatched up and sold for prices that museums and researchers cannot afford. In other words, if the **trend** of selling fossils continues, more fossils will be lost to science. I don't want to be a part of that, and you shouldn't want to be either.

Your younger (and wiser) brother,  
**James**

**P.S.** I'm sure we'll get a dog someday; maybe I'll name him "Clear Conscience."



### Scavenger Hunt

#### Directions

1. Underline the **central idea**, or **central claim**.
2. Star two pieces of **supporting evidence**.

**YOU decide: Who makes the stronger argument?**