

Many children are fascinated by these ancient giants. Some will be experts already, while others might recognise stegosaurus, but not yet be familiar with pliosaur. Getting hands-on with tactile dinosaur skeletons as they dig them up and piece them together allows children to imagine themselves as real fossil hunters and opens up many avenues for discussion and investigation.

Dig in!

Engage children's curiosity in the Dinosaur pieces:



- Bury them in sand, soil or mud for children to uncover themselves. What can they see on the pieces? What do they feel like? Does it look like part of an animal they know? You could also bury other dinosaur themed items to engage their interest, such as Yellow Door's Dinosaur Footprint Stones, Prehistoric Teeth or any dinosaur figures.
- Place them in a water tray, perhaps under a thin layer of sand, for children to find. You could even use slime to create a dinosaur swamp.
- Small spades and garden forks will be useful for carefully uncovering the pieces, and brushes will help clear any remaining sand or soil. Magnifying glasses will help children examine what they have discovered.



- Offer placement mats showing either a photo or a silhouette of the complete dinosaur, to help children piece the skeletons together – these are available from www.yellow-door.net/free-resources. Comparing the shape and size of the pieces and rotating them to match the sheets will help develop children's spatial awareness.
- Talk about the parts of the animals' bodies that the children find – can they see a head, tail or legs? This will encourage them to think critically about how the pieces go together correctly. Is the skeleton complete or is there a piece still to find?
- To help children see the fine detail of the skeletons, encourage them to use the pieces to make imprints in dough.



Dinosaur detectives

Use the stones to build on children's knowledge of dinosaurs and their world:

- When the children have pieced together two different skeletons, talk about what is the same and what is different. Which has a bigger head? Do they have feet or flippers? Does one of them have plates and spikes? Can you see any teeth? What shape are their tails – how are they different?



- Do the children recognise either of the animals? Offer pictures of the same animals to help children identify them. Encourage children to listen to others as they share their existing knowledge of pliosaur and stegosaurus. Children may already know that pliosaur was a sea reptile and not a dinosaur.
- What else would the children like to find out about these animals? Research the answers together in books, on a child-friendly website or with video clips – maybe the children want to know what they ate, what sort of place they lived in, whether they were a predator or prey, or how fast they could run or swim.
- Offer the pieces as part of a dinosaur investigation table, alongside books, illustrations, notebooks and dinosaur figures.
- Pliosaur had large flippers to swim with – can the children think of any other animals that swim with flippers (such as penguins, seals, turtles, dolphins, dugongs, manatees, walruses or whales)? Why do divers wear flippers for swimming?
- A stegosaurus' brain was the size of a plum. Can the children find anything in the setting that is a similar size? Try this for other dinosaurs – ankylosaurus' brain, for example, was the size of a walnut.
- Fossil records suggest that Stegosaurs lived in herds. What other animals live in herds or groups? Children might think of cows, sheep, horses, zebras, elephants, buffalos, goats or camels.

Palaeontologist play

Allowing the children to be the experts is empowering for them, and dinosaurs are a rich source of inspiration for role play:

- To help children get into role as palaeontologists, provide sun hats, spades, sieves, buckets, magnifying glasses, brushes, soapy water, clipboards, a digital camera and even a tent.
- Create an outdoor dig for them to work in by taping off an area with the Stones hidden in sand, soil or mud (alongside other remains such as Fossils or Prehistoric Teeth). Encourage children to brush off any loose sand or soil, then sort and arrange the skeletons in a suitable tray.
- Use your discoveries to create a dinosaur museum together. Talk about what should go in the museum, such as model dinosaurs, information posters, photos, display signs, labels, name badges or lanyards, and the assembled skeletons, of course. Model how to be a visitor to the museum and ask the curators about their exhibits. Invite colleagues, family members and carers into your setting so that children can share their knowledge and expertise.



Dinosaur fact file

Pliosaur:

- Not a dinosaur – a reptile that lived in the ocean
- Had large, sharp teeth and a strong bite
- Length: 8m, weight: 5000kg
- Piscivore (ate fish)

Stegosaurus:

- Had a brain the size of a chicken's egg
- Used its spiked tail to defend itself
- Length: 9m, weight: 7000kg
- Herbivore

Get talking – useful words

Prehistoric, dinosaur, skeleton, bone(s), fossil, extinct, sort, examine, compare, similarities, differences, different from, similar to, carnivore, herbivore, predator, prey, hunt, spine, spike, plate, horn, claw, flipper, tooth, teeth, sharp, blunt, curved, flat, palaeontologist, museum, curator, exhibit

Books about dinosaurs

Book of Dinosaurs by Gabrielle Balkan and Sam Brewster

Bone, Bones, Dinosaur Bones by Byron Barton

Whose Dinosaur Bones Are Those? by Chihiro Takeuchi

The Girl and the Dinosaur by Hollie Hughes

Mary Anning by Maria Isabel Sanchez Vegara and Popy Matigot