

# DINOMECHANICS: EXHIBIT ANALYSIS

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## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

TOPIC: Dinosaur families and the scientific method

THEME: Students explore the mechanics of how dinosaurs moved by comparing them to modern animals using measuring, mathematics, and the dinosaur skeletons found in *Dinosaur Hall*.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: Working in groups, students use the scientific method to compare dinosaurs to modern animals by collecting and analyzing data from specimens in *Dinosaur Hall*. They record their data on an iPad and perform various calculations. A discussion afterwards allows them to share their findings with the group and introduces the topics of error in data collection, assumptions, consensus in the scientific community, and specific challenges in palaeontology.

AUDIENCE: Grades 6–9

DURATION: 60 minutes

LOCATION: *Dinosaur Hall*

GROUP SIZE: 15–30

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Grade 6     **Science:** Evidence and Investigation  
**Math:** Numbers; Patterns and Relations (Variables and Equations);  
Shape and Space (Measurement); Statistics and Probability (Data Analysis)  
**Language Arts**
- Grade 7     **Science:** Planet Earth; Structures and Forces  
**Math:** Numbers; Patterns and Relations (Variables and Equations);  
Shape and Space (Measurement); Statistics and Probability (Data Analysis);  
Patterns and Relations (Variables and Equations)  
**Language Arts**
- Grade 8     **Science:** Cells and Systems  
**Math:** Numbers, Statistics and Probability (Data Analysis)  
**Language Arts**
- Grade 9     **Science:** Biological Diversity  
**Math:** Statistics and Probability (Data Analysis)  
**Language Arts**
- ICT            General Outcomes C4, C5, C6, C7, F1, F6, P2

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## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

1. Describe how palaeontologists infer behaviours of extinct species, by comparing a dinosaur family to modern functional analogues.
2. Draw conclusions based on the data they have collected to answer a scientific question.
3. Think critically about and discuss their methodology (e.g., errors, assumptions, simplifications).
4. Recognize and describe the scientific method.

## SUGGESTED PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

### 1. PROGRAM TERMINOLOGY

Here are some terms you may want to discuss with your class before you attend this program. These terms will help the students with the program activities.

**Scientific Method:** The systematic process used by scientists for testing hypotheses by collecting and analyzing data, to understand the natural world.

**Biomechanics:** The study of the structure and movement of living organisms; how animals move.

**Analogue:** Something that is similar or comparable to something else in structure, function, origin, etc.

**Family:** The taxonomic rank of a group of related organisms. In zoology (including palaeontology), family names end in “-idae,” but often have a different collective name (e.g., species belonging to the family Ceratopsidae are informally called ceratopsians).

### 2. LEAD DISCUSSIONS/RESEARCH INTO TOPICS SUCH AS:

**Brainstorm:** Bringing the past to life. Palaeontologists (scientists who study ancient life based on the fossil record) often have limited data to work with (i.e., often only the hard parts fossilize, and fossil records are incomplete). How might palaeontologists be able to figure out the life histories of extinct animals, such as what they ate, how they lived, how they moved, what killed them, etc.?

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## POST-PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

### 1. KEY TERMS

**Taphonomy:** The study of the processes—burial, decay, and preservation—that affect animal and plant remains as they become fossilized.

**Preservation potential:** The probability of something becoming preserved in the fossil record.

### 2. LEAD DISCUSSIONS ON THE FOLLOWING TOPICS:

**More questions.** Answering one question in science often leads to several more. What are some additional things you'd like to find out about your dinosaur family, or other questions that came up as you were conducting your research? How would you design a scientific study to answer your new question(s)?

**"Scientists say/studies show..."** Having experienced the simplification, assumptions, and potential for error that are part of conducting a scientific study, how much confidence do you have in media reports that claim, "scientists say..." or "studies show..."? Discuss the importance of critical thinking and understanding how science is conducted.

**Consensus in the scientific community** (or lack thereof)

**Standing on the shoulders of giants.** What are some advantages of using a standardized process (the scientific method) for studying and understanding the world? Can you think of any limitations?

**Looking ahead.** In a million years, what evidence might exist to inform future scientists about the life histories and behaviours of species living today? (Prompt students to think outside of the fossil box: e.g., taxidermy specimens, photographs, videos and documentaries, scientific papers, etc.)

**Preservation Potential:** Which of the following would have a high preservation potential? Low preservation potential?

*teeth, hair/fur, bones, soft tissue (e.g., eyes, muscles, brains, organs, skin), scales, feathers, large animals, small animals, leaves, wood, pollen, eggs, DNA, blood, insect exoskeletons, gastroliths, trackways*

What conditions would affect the preservation of fossils? (Answers: climate, pH, depositional environment, pressure, time, original size and condition)

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

### Articles about dinosaur behaviour and locomotion

<http://www.theguardian.com/science/lost-worlds/2014/may/01/how-do-we-know-what-we-know-about-dinosaur-behaviour>

<http://www.mnh.si.edu/exhibits/backyard-dinosaurs/how-did-dinosaurs-behave.cfm>

<http://www.theguardian.com/science/lost-worlds/2014/mar/20/did-losing-their-tails-make-birds-cock-o-the-walk>

### Up-to-date information on all aspects of science, including geology and palaeontology

<http://www.sciencedaily.com>

### The Scientific Method

[http://teacher.nslr.rochester.edu/phy\\_labs/appendixe/appendixe.html](http://teacher.nslr.rochester.edu/phy_labs/appendixe/appendixe.html)

[http://www.biology4kids.com/files/studies\\_scimethod.html](http://www.biology4kids.com/files/studies_scimethod.html)

<https://explorable.com/what-is-the-scientific-method>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA86dYxrg4Q>

### Limitations of the scientific method

<http://science.howstuffworks.com/innovation/scientific-experiments/scientific-method10.htm>

[http://www.biology.ie/docs/WEB\\_SM.pdf](http://www.biology.ie/docs/WEB_SM.pdf)

Note: Links were last accessed February 2020.

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