How to fossilize your hamster

By Mike O'Hare

Reviewed by Michalis Hadjimarcou , Cyprus

How to fossilize your hamster is a great book to have even if you don't have a hamster that needs fossilization. It includes an amazing collection of do-it-yourself experiments from Mike O'Hare and *New Scientist* magazine that are easy and fun to try. The experiments investigate a wide range of phenomena observed by both scientists and lay people in everyday life, but probably neither of the two groups ever found the time or the means to search for a scientific explanation to them.

The book is everyone's chance to find out the answers to some of life's more everyday conundrums: what causes the hugely unpleasant experience of accidentally chewing aluminium foil caught in food when you have a metal cavity filling; why uncooked spaghetti almost always breaks into more than two pieces; and many more interesting observations and phenomena.

Most experiments do not require any special equipment and can be easily performed using materials found at home or purchased cheaply at the local supermarket. Where appropriate, simple drawings of the described experiments are included to help with the correct equipment setup and experimental procedure, as well as to make understanding of the scientific interpretation easier. And if the experiment does not provide the anticipated results, the reader has the opportunity to troubleshoot through the *New Scientist* website.

Almost all of the experiments are suitable for the secondary-school science classroom, in less than one teaching period, either by the teacher as a demonstration or by the students as small projects. There are experiments suitable for all science disciplines and at all levels, as well as for interdisciplinary approaches. In fact, many can be performed in any classroom and by any teacher, and many could substantially benefit primary-school students as well, enhancing their curiosity and enthusiasm.

The experiments are designed to allow students not only to observe and have fun experimenting but also to learn some real science. In the classroom, upon presentation of the problem or phenomenon, the students could suggest their own theories to explain what is observed. The experimental procedures will help them to collect useful information for the formulation of scientifically acceptable interpretations. The end products can be checked against the book's interpretations, which are based on solid scientific knowledge.

Not all phenomena investigated in *How to fossilize your hamster* will be of interest to all readers and not all the science will be understood by everyone. But surely, everyone with at least a minimal interest in science will find enough attention-grabbing experiments to make it worth having this book.

Details

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