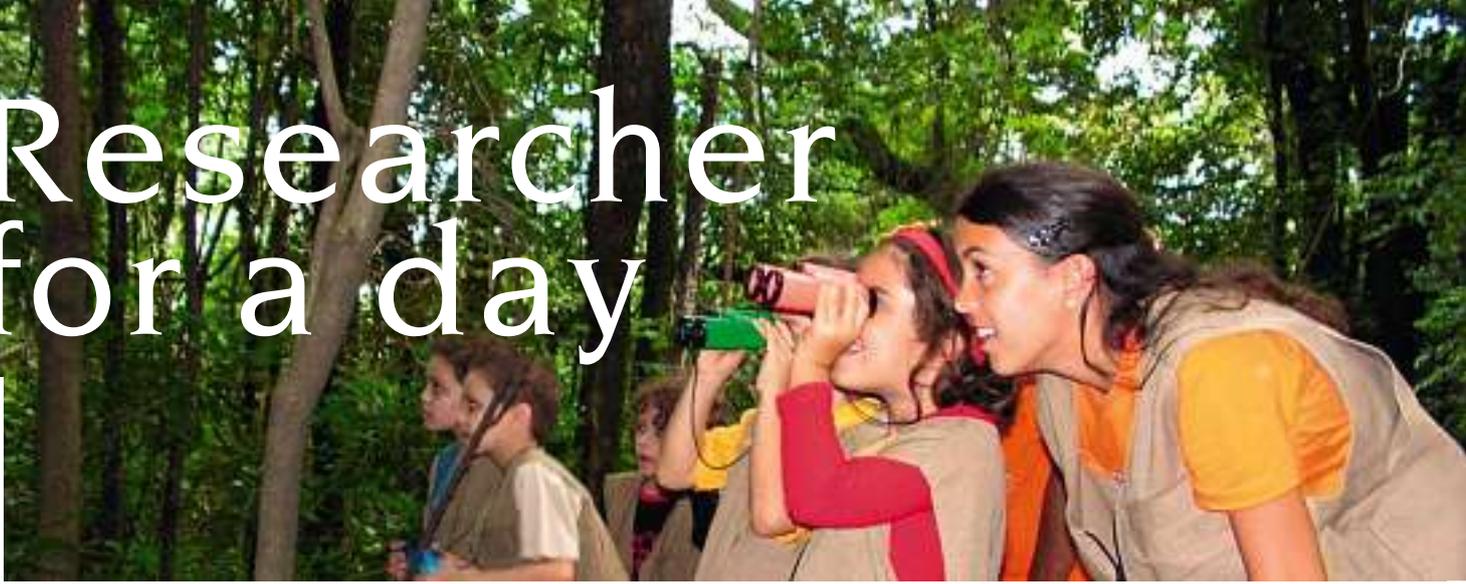


Researcher for a day



at the PUC Minas Museum of Natural Sciences, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

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At the PUC Minas Museum of Natural Sciences, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, children learn how the work of a researcher is and undertake extracurricular educational activities. They can engage in similar activities to a palaeontologist, an archaeologist or a biologist, through the Project 'Little Researcher'.

The project has been underway since 2003, developed by the education team of the museum. Its goal is to extend the science classes beyond the traditional classrooms. Children from 6 up to 12 years old can participate in the educational activities of the project.

About the Museum

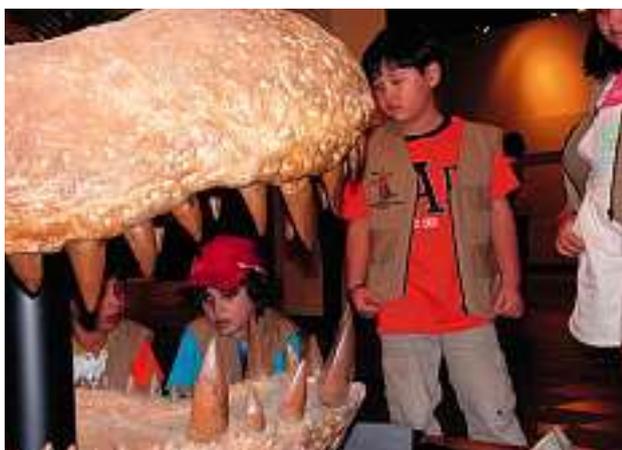
PUC Minas Museum of Natural Sciences has one of the most important scientific fossil collections of South America. Its palaeontology collection has more than 60,000 fossils, including plants, invertebrates, fish, dinosaurs, birds and mammals. The highlights of this collection are the mammals of the late Pleistocene period (around 10,000 years ago), such as armadillos and giant ground sloths. The museum also has collections of archaeology and of the living fauna of amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, especially from the Cerrado (Brazilian savannah) biome.

The motivation to create the Project 'Little Researcher' was to find an interesting and stimulating way to show these collections to the children who visit the museum. This project is a tool to promote interaction between the museum and children. The goals of the project are:

- To stimulate learning and cultural leisure.
- To stimulate children's interaction and interest with the information they get during their visit.
- To talk about environmental issues.

A palaeontological excavation workshop.





A visit to the museum exhibits.

Activities of the Project 'Little Researcher'

We offer three thematic options for the Little Researcher: palaeontologist, archaeologist or biologist. According to the theme there are specific activities.

Visit to the museum exhibits

Children have a guided tour in the exhibits where some fossils or stuffed animals are presented. A discussion about the work of the researchers and museum professionals: from the finding of fossils and animals until they can be exhibited. Moreover, during their visit children are stimulated to value and to contribute to the preservation of the historical, natural and cultural patrimony.

Trail of the Armadillo

Children are involved in a walk through our connecting forest to investigate the local flora and fauna and they receive information from our guides about the importance of caring for the environment. During this activity the children are equipped with binoculars, a magnifying glass and given a researcher's waistcoat to wear. Furthermore, we realize some educational dynamics with the children. In the dynamic 'Web of Life' each child becomes a character of the ecosystem and learns the importance of balance between all the natural elements. The 'Perception Dynamic' focuses younger children: with blindfolded eyes they touch trees, flowers and plants to develop their tactile perception.

Palaeontological Excavation Workshop

In this workshop children learn how to find fossils using tools such as scoops and brushes: we have a large sand-pit where we bury fossil replicas. After each discovery the children are encouraged to find out from which animal the piece belongs just like a paleontologist.



A workshop on cave painting.

Workshop on making fossil replicas

Another workshop involves the making of fossil replicas using plaster, and the children are enlightened as to how they are used in the museum exhibits while the original fossils are preserved in the scientific collections for studies. After making the replicas children can identify the pieces they made by comparing them with the pieces presented in a didactic paleontology kit.

Workshop on cave painting

This workshop has as its main goal to present cave paintings to children and to stimulate their creativity by producing their own paintings using natural paints made of vegetable materials. They learn about the pre-historical people who lived in the State of Minas Gerais, where we are located, and how they used the cave paintings to tell their story to future generations.

Visit to the research laboratories and the scientific collections

A guide takes the children to visit the research labs and collections. They can see how the collections are organised and meet a researcher who explains to them the importance of the research currently being done and answers their questions. After the visit, children are encouraged to write about what they have learned.

Through these activities we provide an educational experience, which derives benefits from the active participation of the children. ◊

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