Some creatures and plants have changed little over millions of years. They offer clues to the past.
Across the U.S., Kaboom! volunteers are building areas where kids can be active.

The playground at Sharon Hills Elementary School, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, wasn’t much fun. It had monkey bars, a small basketball court and a climbing structure that only the youngest kids could use.

This year, the playground was transformed with help from Kaboom!, a nonprofit group dedicated to building play spaces for kids. Now, Sharon Hills has swings, slides, a climbing wall and three new basketball courts. There’s even a garden, complete with birdhouses, picnic benches and tables with built-in checkerboards. “The children are enjoying themselves more,” says teacher Renee Lee. “There’s something for every child.”

Students helped design their dream playground. Once a design was chosen, kids, parents, teachers and other volunteers built the playground on a Saturday. The playground will serve 4,500 children from the school and nearby neighborhoods.

Go Ahead and Play!
Darell Hammond started Kaboom! in 1996. So far, it has helped build more than 2,000 play spaces across the country. Hammond says that 5.5 million kids have benefited from Kaboom! play spaces. “It gives me a lot of pride,” he says.

Still, Hammond says there is more work to do. According to a U.S. government study, just one out of five kids in the U.S. lives within walking distance of a playground. “The next thing is not just to build more playgrounds,” Hammond says, “but to build better playgrounds that will get kids to play longer, play harder and want to play more often.”

—By Jaime Joyce