



Year 3

Stone Age to Iron Age Reading Booklet

Lesson Series:

- 1. Mesolithic Hunter-Gatherers**
- 2. Life in Neolithic Britain**
- 3. The Bronze Age**
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Name: _____

Class: _____

Lesson 1 - Mesolithic Hunter-Gatherers

During the Palaeolithic period, even when the British Isles were joined to the mainland of Europe, people migrated to and from the area now known as Britain, depending on the climate of the time.

Read this

Archaeologists have found skeletons, artefacts and early caving and artwork, which have been used to trace these communities.

The climate warmed very rapidly around 9600 BCE, and the end of the last Ice Age marks the arrival of a new set of communities labelled Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age.

It is believed that these communities were very small, were hunter-gatherers and lived a nomadic lifestyle. However, over the past ten years, new research has shown that some small permanent villages were also in existence, complete with family-sized round-houses, such as Howick House found in Northumberland.

Certain areas, such as the lush woodland and grassland surrounding shallow lakes, were particularly sought-after and were the home to a large number of different settlements. By the end of the Mesolithic period, in fifth and sixth millennia BCE there is evidence that Mesolithic hunter-gatherers were manipulating the forest tree-cover through the use of fire, to attract and keep game. This was just a short step away from farming.



Lesson 2 - Life in Neolithic Britain

By the end of the Mesolithic period, in the fifth and sixth millennia BC, there is evidence that Mesolithic hunter-gatherers were using fire to change the forest tree-cover to attract and keep game. Farming arrived shortly before 4000 BC.



It could easily be argued that farming was the most important development in human history! The new farmers, who came from the mainland of Europe on boats, chopped down trees so they could grow crops and vegetables and kept cattle, sheep and pigs. More and more people began to settle down in one place and build permanent homes. The farms marked the start of a new age in Britain – the Neolithic period (or new Stone Age).

As well as setting up farms and permanent homes, they also built massive tombs and giant stone circles. Some of the monuments and homes they built can still be seen today. Skara Brae, (found on the Orkney Islands off the north of Scotland), is one of the best-preserved Neolithic settlements anywhere in Western Europe. The village is older than Stonehenge and the Pyramids! The houses were circular and made from stone, and archaeologists found furniture and tools. During this period, flint for tools and weapons was being extracted at Grime's Graves in Norfolk (first mined between 2600 and 2200 BC).



Skara Brae

Lesson 3 - The Bronze Age

Read this

The introduction of farming and the building of monuments in the Neolithic age had transformed life in Britain.

Around 2500 BCE, settlers from mainland Europe brought a new skill to Britain - how to make objects from copper, gold and bronze. Some settlers who arrived belonged to the Beaker culture. Beaker people can be easily identified as they were buried with their beaker pottery. It is believed that Beaker people lived in clans led by powerful chiefs, held religious ceremonies at stone circles, and buried their dead in circular graves.

In the past few years, scientists have been studying the DNA of ancient skeletons. They have found that the beaker people, who brought Bronze Age technology to Britain, actually replaced Britain's earlier inhabitants.

By 2100BCE, Britons were mining metals. By this time, people were able to use long wooden boats to cross the channel and began trading precious objects made by metalworkers in mainland Europe. It was during the early Bronze Age that thousands of barrows or burial mounds were constructed, along with some 400 henges and other sites.

During the second half of the Bronze Age, people began building networks of villages and roads, and we see the first construction of hill-forts. Most hill-forts were carefully positioned in the landscape to look over the surrounding settlements. It is also believed these would have been the places where people came at regular intervals to meet and exchange goods, livestock and services; and were where many marriages and new family alliances were formed.

In 2002, archaeologists discovered the grave of a Bronze Age man at Amesbury, Wiltshire. He was nicknamed the 'Amesbury Archer' as he was found with arrowheads and wrist-guards used by archers. Must Farm is a Bronze Age settlement that was found near Peterborough.



Lesson 4 - Stonehenge

Today Stonehenge, one of Britain's most famous monuments, is a World Heritage Site (WHS). It stands on Salisbury Plain, in Wiltshire, and its giant stones can be seen from miles around. Stonehenge was built over many hundreds of years. Work began in the late Neolithic Age, around 3000 BCE.

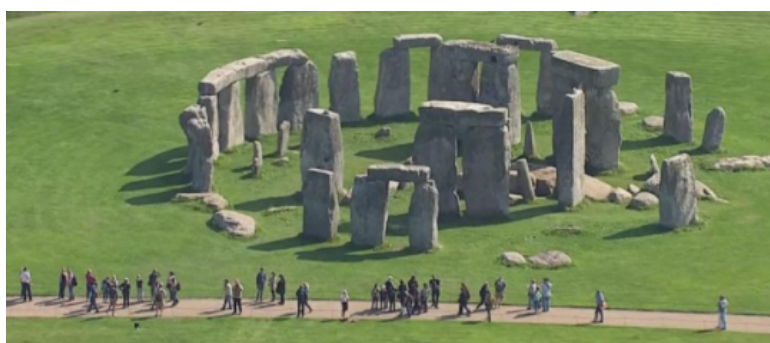


We know little about how Neolithic societies were organised, but we know that building Stonehenge would have needed lots of people working together. Over the next thousand years, people made many changes to the monument. The last changes were made in the early Bronze Age, around 1500 BCE.

The stone monument stands inside a ditch with an inner and outer bank. Archaeologists believe that the ditch was made using picks made from antlers to move the chalky soil. Two types of stone were used at Stonehenge – the larger sarsens, transported from the Marlborough Downs, and the smaller bluestones, which came from south-west Wales. How people at this time were able to move stones all the way from Wales is a bit of a mystery!

Four thousand years ago, the outer circle was made from 30 standing stones called sarsens. Inside the circle, five stone arches called trilithons make up a horseshoe, with a circle of the bluestones outside and inside the horseshoe. There was an altar inside the horseshoe and the entrance- called the Avenue, that lead up from the River Avon.

No one knows for certain why Stonehenge was built, but it is likely that it was used for religious ceremonies. Many experts believe that it was used for funerals. Some people think that Stonehenge was used to study the movements of the Sun and Moon and other people think it was a place of healing.



Lesson 5 - The Iron Age

The period of human history when the use of iron became widespread is called the Iron Age.



In Britain, it began around 800 BCE, when people learned how to use Iron, and ended in AD 43 with the Roman invasion. There is a longer Iron Age in Scotland, as it was not conquered by the Romans.

Iron Age Britain was a violent place. People lived in clans that belonged to tribes led by kings, and rival tribes fought with iron weapons. Many people lived in hill forts, surrounded by walls and ditches, to keep safe from enemy attacks. Inside the hill forts, families lived in roundhouses made from wattle and daub (a mixture of mud and twigs) with thatched roofs.

During the Iron Age, people began using querns to grind grain into flour for bread. They also made tools and weapons out of iron; used a Potter's wheel to make pottery; used iron-tipped ploughs to plough the soil and used looms for spinning wool to make clothes.

Archaeologists believe that people in Iron Age Britain believed in powerful spirits and met to worship the spirits in sacred places. Priests known as druids led religious ceremonies, and it is believed that they sacrificed living things!

Archaeologists have discovered evidence of precious offerings, such as swords and cups, to the spirits. While some may have been buried for safekeeping, historians believe most were probably offerings to the gods.

