



Why is pre-history important today?

Background Information

Pre-history is the period of time that starts with the appearance of the first human being. This period can be categorised into three main eras: The Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. Did you know that these eras cover 98% of human history in Britain?! The evolution of humans from the earliest hominins to Homo sapiens occurred in this period. Interestingly, each of these periods is noted by distinctive differences in the ways that humans used the land and interacted with each other. Also, some of the major advances in technology were achieved during this period, including the control of fire, agriculture, metalworking and the wheel. The useful term 'prehistory' was coined by a Scottish archaeologist, Daniel Wilson, in 1851 to refer to this time before written history.

In this unit the children will learn:

- Why we cannot definitively say what the past was like but how we can make educated assertions.
- What evidence we have about pre-history.
- The different opinions about pre-history and how they differ.

A representation of a Mesolithic dwelling



Historical Skills and Concepts

- Identify why the types of sources referred to can vary when researching pre-history.
- Place events, objects and themes from a specific topic on a timeline
- Use terms relating to historical periods e.g. millennium.
- Ask questions about the viewpoints provided by simple picture source.

Tools typically associated with hunter-gatherers



Timeline of Key Events

- 2.5 million – 8500BC - Palaeolithic era.
- 12,000BC – The last Ice Age ends. Animals and hunter-gatherers migrate to Britain.
- 8500BC – 4500BC - Mesolithic era.
- 4500 – 2200BC - Neolithic era.
- 2200BC – 800BC - Bronze Age
- 800BC – 43AD - Iron Age

Stone Age Cave Painting – Lascaux, France





Key facts

- When humans first ventured out of Africa some 60,000 years ago, they left genetic footprints still visible today. These great migrations eventually led the descendants of a small group of Africans to occupy even the farthest reaches of the Earth.
- Our species is an African one: Africa is where we first evolved, and where we have spent the majority of our time on Earth. The earliest fossils of recognizably modern *Homo sapiens* appear in the fossil record at Omo Kibish in Ethiopia, around 200,000 years ago.
- According to the genetic and paleontological record, we only started to leave Africa between 60,000 and 70,000 years ago.
- The chronology of this time period is noted as *BC*, meaning *Before Christ*.
- The Stone Age can be split into three distinct eras; Palaeolithic (Old) Stone Age, Mesolithic (Middle) Stone Age and Neolithic (New) Stone Age. This was followed by the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. This moved into a period noted as *AD* (Anno Domini, Latin for 'the year of our Lord'), not *BC*.
- The type of dwelling that early humans inhabited changed throughout these eras.
- We call them hunter-gatherers because they had to hunt animals and fish and gather wild food. It wasn't until the Neolithic period that they grew and raised their own food.
- Early man communicated stories, dreams and victories with each other through cave art.
- The very first cave paintings were discovered in 1896 in the Altamira Cave in Santander, Spain. These paintings dated back to 14,000 BC and showed bison over 8' long! This particular painting is called the Bisons of the Altamira Cave.

Key Vocabulary:

- **AD** – Anno Domini (the year of our Lord) is the full form of AD and marks the passing of time after the birth of Jesus Christ.
- **BC** – Before Christ is the full form of BC and marks the passing of time before Jesus Christ was born.
- **Bronze** - a metal, a yellowish-brown alloy of copper with up to one-third tin.
- **Celt** - The **Celts** were a large group of Caucasian tribes in Europe.
- **Dwelling** – a house or other place of residence, where somebody lives.
- **Homo sapiens** - the primate species to which modern humans belong; humans regarded as a species.
- **Hillfort** - a fort built on a hill, in particular an area on a hilltop enclosed by a system of defensive banks and ditches, as used by Iron Age peoples in north-western Europe
- **Hunter gatherer** – a member of nomadic people who lived by hunting, fishing, and harvesting wild food.
- **Mesolithic** – Middle Stone Age, a period of time that took place between the Palaeolithic and Neolithic era.
- **Nomad** - a member of people that travels from place to place to find fresh pasture for its animals and has no permanent home.
- **Neolithic** – New Stone Age, a period of time that took place after the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic era.
- **Palaeolithic** – Old Stone Age, a period of time that took place before the Mesolithic era.
- **Quern** - a simple hand mill for grinding corn
- **Roundhouse** - Roundhouses were the standard form of **housing** built in Britain from the **Bronze Age** throughout the **Iron Age**,
- **Settlement** – a place, typically one which has previously been uninhabited, where people establish a community.
- **Stone Age** - a prehistoric period when weapons and tools were made of stone or of organic materials such as bone, wood, or horn.