

The First Peoples

The Big Idea

Prehistoric people learned to adapt to their environment, to make simple tools, to use fire, and to use language.

Main Ideas

Scientists study the remains of early humans to learn about prehistory.

Archaeologists make important discoveries by finding bones of ancient hominids. These discoveries teach us about human development and early human physical appearance.

Hominids and early humans first appeared in East Africa millions of years ago.



Australopithecus appears in Africa about 4-5 million years ago. Louis Leakey discovered a Homo habilis bone, which is believed to be about 2.4 – 3 million years old. Fossils have also been discovered from the later early-human groups such as Homo-erectus (1.5 million years old) and Homo sapiens (200,000 years old.) Scientists believe that modern humans are Homo sapiens.

Stone Age tools grew more complex as time passed.

During the Paleolithic Era, or Old Stone Age, people used stone tools. Early-humans used sharp, jagged, stone tools to help them process food (cut and chop meat). Later people learned to make better tools, such as hand axes. Tools improved during the Old Stone Age because people learned to use flint to make tools and to attach wooden handles to the tools, as a result, people could hunt larger animals.



Hunter-gatherer societies developed language, art, and religion.



Early humans lived in small groups, called bands. Because they lived in small groups they began to form societies. These societies hunted and gathered together and developed a language used to communicate. They also communicated and expressed themselves through cave art; some believe the cave art served as a “how-to” guide to hunt or had religious meaning.

Objectives

- Know the definitions of all academic vocabulary and key terms.
- Explain why it's important to study early human remains from prehistory.
- List the four major groups of hominids in order of appearance. Know the meaning of each group's name.
- Explain the development of tools during the Stone Age, providing examples for each development.



Key Terms

<i>distribute</i>	<i>to divide among a group of peoples</i>
prehistory	the period of time before writing
hominid	an early ancestor of humans
ancestor	a relative who lived in the past
tool	any handheld object that has been modified to help a person accomplish a task.
Paleolithic Era	first part of the Stone Age (Old Stone Age). People used stone tools and hunted and gathered for food.
society	a community of people who share a common culture
hunter-gatherers	people who hunt animals and gather wild plants, seeds, fruits, and nuts to survive