

Prehistory

Prehistoric People

Imagine living in a world without writing. That's prehistory. Prehistory is the time before humans wrote. Until 5,500 years ago, people had no system of writing. Without such a system, keeping records was more difficult. People couldn't write down information to pass on to the next **generation**.¹ The people who lived during this time are known as prehistoric people.

Scientists have been able to learn a lot about prehistoric people. How? They study the clues these people left behind. The clues include **fossils**² and tools buried in the ground for thousands of years. Scientists study bones to figure out what prehistoric people looked like. Bones can also reveal how long these ancient humans lived. Scientists study prehistoric teeth as well. These teeth can tell them what prehistoric people ate. In addition, researchers study pottery and tools, which tell them about prehistoric life. Other scientists research the plants, rocks, and animals that were around during prehistoric times.

By studying all these things, scientists have learned a lot. For instance, they have learned that these early human beings looked very different from people today. Prehistoric people stood **upright**,³ but they looked somewhat like apes. Their faces were very large, though their brains were only about one-third the size of our brains. The teeth of prehistoric people were large and flat. This made them good for grinding foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, insects, and small animals.

¹ **generation** – people born and living around the same time

² **fossils** – parts of plants and animals (including humans) from the past that have been preserved in earth or rock

³ **upright** – on two legs

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. What is prehistory?

- a. the time before people spoke
- b. the time before people wrote
- c. the time before Jesus lived
- d. the time before people studied history

2. According to the passage, where have scientists found clues about prehistoric people?

- a. in the sea
- b. in history books
- c. in the ground
- d. in groups of apes alive today

3. What have scientists learned by studying clues from early humans?

- a. Prehistoric people ate lots of meat.
- b. Prehistoric people were the same as apes today.
- c. Prehistoric people walked like other animals.
- d. Prehistoric people were very different from modern humans.

4. Read the following sentences: “The teeth of prehistoric people were large and flat. This made them good for grinding foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, insects, and small animals.”

In the passage, the word **grinding** means

- a. crushing into bits
- b. spitting
- c. swallowing whole
- d. drinking

5. This passage is mainly about

- a. animals that lived before humans
- b. ancient people and how they are studied
- c. people who study fossils
- d. ancient people and their famous writings

6. How were prehistoric people different from people today?

7. What might prehistoric pottery and tools tell researchers about the people who made those items?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

Scientists study fossils _____ learn more about ancient people.

- a. because
- b. although
- c. in order to
- d. in spite of

9. Read the following sentence.

People started to write things down 5,500 years ago.

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

1. Who is the main subject of the sentence? people

2. What did people do? _____

3. When? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** record (*noun*): information about the past that has been written down or preserved in some other way.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 700

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines, or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: Prehistory is the time before humans wrote which lasted until 5,500 years ago. Scientists can learn about prehistoric people by studying things like their bones, tools, and teeth.

1. What is prehistory?
 - a. the time before people spoke
 - b. the time before people wrote**
 - c. the time before Jesus lived
 - d. the time before people studied history
2. According to the passage, where have scientists found clues about prehistoric people?
 - a. in the sea
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 - a. animals that lived before humans
 - b. ancient people and how they are studied**
 - c. people who study fossils
 - d. ancient people and their famous writings

6. How were prehistoric people different from people today?

Suggested answer: Prehistoric people were different from people today in that they looked more like apes, had large faces, and had brains about one-third the size of our brains.

7. What might prehistoric pottery and tools tell researchers about the people who made those items?

Suggested answer: Answers will vary. The pottery might tell researchers about how prehistoric people cooked, ate, and drank. The tools might tell researchers about how prehistoric people hunted and fought.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

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- b. although
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- d. in spite of

9. Read the following sentence.

People started to write things down 5,500 years ago.

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

- 1. Who is the main subject of the sentence? **people**
- 2. What did people do? **started to write things down**
- 3. When? **5,500 years ago**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** record (*noun*): information about the past that has been written down or preserved in some other way.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.