

The Old Stone Age (Paleolithic Era)

During this time humans used stone to make tools and stone was used many times as part of the actual tool. Tools are objects that make our lives easier. A computer and smart phone are examples of modern-day tools. Paleolithic is a word that comes from the two Greek words *palaaios*, meaning old, and *lithos*, meaning stone.



The first stone tools were used to meet people's three basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. These were difficult times; there were no stores to buy food, and people had to cooperate in small groups to make clothing and shelter. To hunt for food, early humans formed spears, first by sharpening the ends of sticks, but later by attaching a sharp stone spear-tip to wood using animal sinew. A tool made up of more than one material is called a composite tool.

Flaking was one of the first uses of technology. Technologies are tools and also skills that make our lives easier. Flaking is an example of a Stone Age technology skill. Flaking involves using a hammer stone to form sharp edges on an object stone by striking it on its sides. By flaking early humans could sharpen spear and arrow tips to hunt prey.

How do we know the age of artifacts?

As far as we know today, people have only been writing about their experiences for about 7,000 years. When people write about their existence, we call that history. But what about the time before writing, how can we tell the age of an object?

There are three ways to determine the date of an artifact:

1. **Extraction:** digging down through layers of earth, the deeper the object, the older it is.
2. **Typology:** studying the type of object. If the object is more complex, it is usually more recent, simple tools are usually older.

3. **Carbon-14 Dating:** this is the measure of the amount of a substance called carbon-14 present in an object. This only works for living objects. When a living organism dies, it begins to lose carbon-14 in a predictable way we can measure and then determine the time the object was alive. Objects with less carbon-14 lived longer ago. Eventually a once-living object loses all of its carbon-14, so very old objects cannot be dated using this method.

These three methods are not fool-proof and only offer a reasonable guess as to the date of very old artifacts. These are the tools of an archaeologist, one who studies objects from the past.

Was the world different in the Old Stone Age from our modern world? The answer is yes. The earth's climate was very different. The world was a much colder place to live on than our modern world. Wild herds of animals roamed the land in search of food, which was scarce at that time. In order for Stone Age people to survive, they had to move with these herds of animals.

Old Stone Age people were always on the move. A person who moves from place to place is called a nomad. Because of their nomadic lifestyle, Old Stone Age people built temporary homes, rather than permanent homes. People travelled in small groups, we think these groups could have been extended family groups. Old Stone Age people had two ways of obtaining food, by hunting and gathering. Gathering is finding wild berries and other plants to eat. We sometimes call these people hunter-gatherers.



There were not many humans at this time, and they were spread out, rather than living close together. Experts think there were no more than one million humans living during any time of the Paleolithic Era. That might sound like a lot of people, but today there are about seven billion people, 7,000 times more people than in the Paleolithic Era. Archaeological evidence points to humans beginning in the continent of Africa, and later migrating to other continents.

Name _____

The Old Stone Age – Questions

1. What were the tools made of during the Stone Age?
2. What are tools?
3. What are some examples of modern day tools?
4. Where does the word “Paleolithic” come from?
5. What were the first stone tools used for?
6. How did the spear change over time?
7. What is a composite tool?
8. What is technology?
9. What was flaking?
10. Name the three ways that historians know the age of an artifact.
11. What is extraction?
12. What is typology?
13. What is carbon-14 dating?
14. How was the world different than ours during the Stone Age?
15. How did the Stone Age people survive the extreme cold?
16. What is a nomad?
17. How did Paleolithic people travel?
18. Why were they called hunters and gatherers?
19. How many humans were there on the earth compared to today?
20. On what continent did Paleolithic people live?