

The Life and Culture of Neanderthal Humans

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Student Objectives

- Examine the physical features and lives of the Neanderthals.
- Create a mural of a Neanderthal cave.

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Neanderthals*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- What Neanderthal Remains Reveal About Their Lives
 - Youth and Age in Neanderthals
 - Neanderthals and Fire
 - Neanderthals and Language
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- Newsprint
 - Internet access
 - Poster board
 - Colored markers (for each student)

Procedures

1. Ask students what they know about Neanderthals. Write their ideas on a piece of newsprint. To spark conversation, ask students when Neanderthals lived, whether Neanderthals were related to modern humans, and details they might know about Neanderthals' daily lives.
2. Explain that Neanderthals are the best known of the ancient humans. The Neanderthals lived in Europe and central Asia between 230,000 and 30,000 years ago – longer than *Homo sapiens*, or modern humans, have lived on Earth. They lived during the most recent Ice Age, when vast sheets of ice covered many northern parts of the world. The term “Neanderthal” (also spelled Neandertal) comes from the Neander Valley near Dusseldorf, Germany. This is where scientists found the first Neanderthal fossils in 1856.

3. Explain that scientists believe Homo sapiens first appeared about 120,000 years ago, which means they coexisted with Neanderthals. Scientists have two theories about the relationship between modern Homo sapiens and Neanderthals:
 - **Out of Africa:** The theory states that Homo sapiens first lived in Africa and eventually traveled into Europe and Asia. These humans had evolutionary advantages that allowed them to outlive – and perhaps cause the extinction of – all other hominid groups (as opposed to apes) such as Neanderthal.
 - **Multiregional:** The theory states that modern Homo sapiens evolved from Neanderthal and other hominid groups in Europe and Asia.
4. Tell the class that they will study the physical features and lives of Neanderthals. Divide students into six groups, and assign the groups to the following topics:
 - Physical features and cranial capacity
 - Hunting and diet
 - Tools and weapons
 - Burial of dead and religion
 - Shelter
 - Art, music, and language
5. Have students use the Web sites below to research facts about their topic. Ask groups to write a one-page report summarizing their findings. Encourage students to print out or sketch pictures they find while conducting their research.
 - **Neanderthals and Modern Humans**
<http://www.neanderthal-modern.com/>
 - **In the Stone Ages** (see A Neanderthal's Day and Follow Your Roots)
<http://dsc.discovery.com/stories/science/stoneages/stoneages.html>
 - **Neandertals: A Cyber Perspective**
<http://sapphire.indstate.edu/~ramanank/>
 - **Homo Neanderthalensis**
<http://www.handprint.com/LS/ANC/hfs9.html>
 - **Neanderthal for High School Students**
<http://members.iinet.net.au/~chawkins/frames.htm>
6. As a class, create a mural of a Neanderthal cave. Each group should draw at least two pictures based on their research. Ask groups to turn in their summaries or hang them around the mural.
7. After each group has added its drawings to the mural, the class should have a collage of pictures that depicts aspects of Neanderthal life. In what ways might we consider Neanderthal culture advanced? In what ways was it primitive?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students actively participated in class discussion; demonstrated strong research skills; made a clear, thorough presentation with several facts and images.
- **2 points:** Students participated in class discussion; demonstrated on-grade research skills; made a complete presentation with some facts and images.
- **1 point:** Students participated little in class discussion; demonstrated weak research skills; made an incomplete presentation with few facts and images.

Vocabulary

bipedalism

Definition: The ability to walk on two legs

Context: Bipedalism is an early defining human trait.

cranial capacity

Definition: The volume occupied by the space inside the cranium; the approximate brain volume

Context: Neanderthal cranial capacity was slightly larger than that of *Homo sapiens*.

hominid

Definition: The scientific family that consists of human beings and early humanlike ancestors

Context: Hominid species can be distinguished from ape species by their upright position, bipedalism, and larger brains.

Ice Age

Definition: The most recent glacial period in Earth's history in which ice sheets covered vast regions of land

Context: The Ice Age in North America and Eurasia occurred during the Pleistocene Epoch, from about 2 million to 11,000 years ago.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History – World History: Understands the biological and cultural processes that shaped the earliest human communities
- Language Arts – Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts



The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
 - Time, Continuity, and Change
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>