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Hunter-Gatherers

Anthropology is the study of humans and societies from the past and present. Anthropologists study human behaviors, how humans communicate, and why some societies succeed and others do not. Anthropology has many subfields. One subfield of anthropology is paleoanthropology. Paleoanthropology is the study of the earliest humans.

Today, you will think like a paleoanthropologist and learn about hunter-gatherers, a group of early humans that lived millions of years ago. Follow the steps below.

Step 1: Read about Hunter Gatherers

Hunter-gatherers refer to groups of people who travel from place to place to find food. These groups appeared around two million years ago. This period of history is known as the Paleolithic Age. Hunter-gatherers lived all over the world, including Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Until approximately 12,000 years ago, all humans were members of a hunting-gathering group of some kind.

First, you will read about three key aspects of hunter-gatherer societies: community, movement from one place to another, and tools. Then, you will learn about modern-day hunter-gatherer groups. After you read the passage, answer the questions.

Community



This is a picture showing a group of hunter-gatherers. In the picture, some of the men are making tools. Other men are returning from a hunt while women are working with animal skin and bones. Hunter-gatherers relied on resources they could find in their environment. For example, hunter-gatherers hunted animals for meat and gathered wild plants, berries, and nuts for eating. Animal bones and plants were used to make tools, while animal furs provided clothing and coverings for their homes.

Take a look at the picture on the right of a hunter-gatherer group. Look closely at how each member of the group has a task. Hunter-gatherers lived together in small groups that were made up of several families. The average size of a group numbered around 30 people, but could be as large as 100 people in one group. The size of the group was important for survival because groups had to live on a large enough piece of land to feed everyone. Men, women, and even children each had specific tasks to do and the labor was equal for both men and women. For example, men hunted and fished. Women gathered foods, such as berries, nuts, and plants. Children helped their parents beginning at a young age. Older people in a group might help in gathering, building and tending fires, or looking after children.



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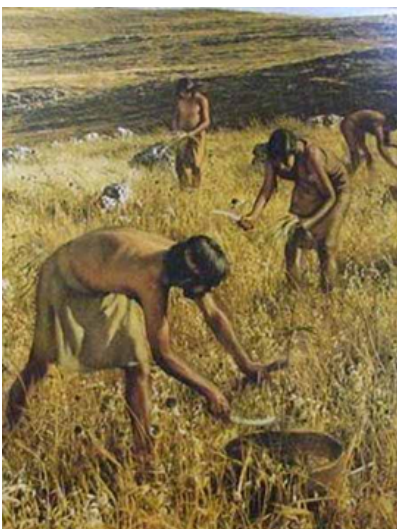
Hunter-Gatherers

Movement

Hunter-gatherer groups were nomads. A nomad is a person who travels from place to place and has no permanent home. Hunter-gatherer groups traveled as the seasons changed. For example, a group might go to a place because certain animals gather there in the winter. Or, they might travel to an area in the summer where wild fruits and vegetables are ready to be picked. Sometimes, groups came together to meet. During these gatherings, people would share news, possibly look for a marriage partner, or celebrate a special occasion.



Early hunter-gatherers walked across thousands of miles to find new places to live. The act of moving from one place to settle in another is called migration. Migrations may have been the result of different groups following migration routes of animals. By around 15,000 B.C., hunter-gatherers migrated throughout much of the world. This a picture of a land bridge hunter-gathers crossed that connected the land now known as Alaska and Siberia, an area on the Eurasian continent. This land bridge is under water today. Nevertheless, the hunter-gathers who crossed this bridge would become the first Native Americans.



This illustration shows hunter-gatherers farming. Between 11,000 and 10,000 years ago, hunter-gatherers stopped moving from place to place. Instead, they settled in different places throughout the world. There are several reasons for this change. Climate changes, such as rising temperatures, allowed for longer growing seasons and drier land to farm. This in turn led to more sources of grain to feed more people and increased life expectancy. Many hunter-gather communities started farming to provide their families with a more stable source of food. This discovery would usher in the Neolithic Revolution, or the agricultural revolution, in which farming allowed humans to produce their own food.

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Tools



This is a picture of tools that were developed and used by hunter-gatherer groups. Pebble tools were made from pebbles or stones about the size of a fist. Hitting one pebble with another created a sharp edge for cutting. This tool helped a person cut the meat off of animal bones and chop up plants. Knocking off edges of a stone created a sharp edged tool called a flake that could be attached to a stick and used as a spear. These tools were very important because they helped humans have more control over their lives. For example, hunters now had specific tools such as bows and arrows that could help them catch and kill animals to eat. Sharper tools for cutting made it easier to cut down branches from trees to build shelter.



This is a model showing how hunter-gatherers made fire. One of the most important events in human history was the ability to control fire. Humans could now cook, stay warm, make tools, and have a source of light. Controlling fire also brought positive changes. Cooking food allowed for changes in diet. Camp fires led to night activities. The fires were built in the center of a handful of stones in a circle. Based on evidence, archaeologists believe that hunter-gatherers began using fire almost a million years ago in Africa and approximately 1.7 million years ago in Asia.

This is a photograph showing some of the tools made and used by hunter-gatherers for cooking. As their diet grew more varied with the use of fire, new tools were created to deal with raw and cooked foods. They made small containers out of wood and antlers to store food. The larger clay container in the photograph was used for cooking, but could also store liquids. The spoons were used for stirring. The long, flat stone and smaller stone are called millstones and were used to pound and grind plants, nuts, and grains for cooking.



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Tools

Even though there has been a large decline of hunter-gatherer groups, there are still some hunter-gatherer societies that exist today. They live similarly to how their ancestors did thousands of years ago and have little contact with the outside world. Take a look at the photograph below of a modern-day hunting-gatherer group called the Hazda. The Hazda people live in Tanzania, Africa where they have lived for thousands of years. The Hazda depend on hunting wild animals for meat. This kind of hunting takes great skill. Not only do the hunters need to be skilled with a bow and arrow, they must know how to track animals and work together as a team. Like the prehistoric hunter-gatherer groups, the men hunt while the women gather berries and plants.



The photograph below is of modern-day hunter gatherers called the the Savanna Pumé who live in Venezuela, South America. The Savanna Pumé are different from some other groups because they have different diets depending on the time of the year. This man is carrying a bow and arrows, which are the only weapons used for hunting. The woman is carrying a digging stick with a sharp steel tip that will help her dig up root plants such as wild potatoes and oca, another kind of potato for eating. Root plants are the main food source during the wet season when it rains constantly. Both men and women tend small gardens where extra food is grown.



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4. How did controlling fire change the lives of hunter-gatherer groups?

5. How did creating tools and weapons help grow the population of hunter-gatherers?

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Step 3: Make a Report Card

Imagine that you are a paleoanthropologist who is grading hunter-gatherers and their way of life. Below, you will see a list of categories you will grade hunter-gatherers on. Think about what you learned about hunter-gatherers from the passage and then grade them A-D in each category shown. You are allowed to give + or - for each grade if desired. In the comments column, describe why you chose your grade and use evidence from the passage to support your answer.

Grade Key:

A - Did an excellent job

B - Did a good job

C - Did ok, not great

D - Did not do well

Subject	Description of Subject	Grade Given	Comments
Society	Worked together to find food and shelter so that everyone could eat. Generations lived together and shared responsibilities.	Student fill in.	Student fill in.
Travel	Traveled long distances as needed to provide food and other needs for groups.		
Innovation	Created new tools or ways of performing a task to improve life in the community.		
Gender Equality	Treated both men and women similarly and gave them similar, meaningful tasks.		
Entertainment	Developed ways to have fun and enjoy spending time with people in the community.		