

## Assignment Discovery Online Curriculum

**Lesson Title:** Neanderthals

**Grade level:** 6-8

**Subject Area:** Life Science, Ancient History

**Duration:** Two class periods

### Objectives:

Students will do the following:

- Understand the two main theories regarding the relationship between Neanderthals and modern *Homo sapiens*
- Examine the physical features and lives of the Neanderthals
- Create a mural of a Neanderthal cave.

### Materials:

- 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. In addition, the Neanderthals 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 that *Homo sapiens* (modern man) first appeared about 120,000 years ago, which means they coexisted with the 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 be exploring the physical features and lives of Neanderthals. Divide students into six groups, and assign 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 images 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 images based on the group's 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 an image that depicts aspects of Neanderthal life. In what ways might we consider their culture advanced? In what ways was it primitive and therefore limited?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How did Neanderthal buildings help them survive the conditions of the Ice Age?
2. Explain the difference between the Out of Africa and Multiregional theories.
3. Why do you think Neanderthals eventually became extinct?

**Extension:**

## **Reasons for Survival**

Although Neanderthals lived longer than any other hominid species, they eventually became extinct, giving rise to Cro-Magnon and *Homo sapiens*. Have students use the Web sites provided in this lesson to learn more about why *Homo sapiens* outlived Neanderthal. They should consider the following traits and explain why each was significant in the rise of modern humans and demise of Neanderthal:

- Inventing tools
- Running fast to escape predators
- Early language skills
- Eating meat
- Eating a vegetarian diet
- Copying the inventions of other hominid species
- Passing down ideas over generations
- Adapting to warm climates
- Adapting to survive cold winters
- Having very large, strong bodies
- Creating art in the form of cave paintings
- Trading tools with other families
- Remaining in the same location as their own family

## **Evaluation:**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate how well students participated in class discussion, researched their Neanderthal topics, and created visual presentations for the mural.

**Three points:** active participation in class discussion; strong research skills; clear, thorough presentation created with several facts and images.

**Two points:** average participation in class discussion; on-grade research skills; complete presentation created with some facts and images.

**One point:** little participation in class discussion; weak research skills; incomplete presentation created with few facts and images.

## **Suggested Reading**

### ***The Illustrated History of Early Man***

John Haywood. Smithmark, 1995.

Using many photographs, this encyclopedic volume follows the development of man and his spread around the globe. Beginning with a description of the Earth before man, followed by descriptions of early ape and human species, each chapter covers a specific time period and culminates in the spread of human civilizations around the globe. There is a chapter devoted completely to the Neanderthal as well.

***The Last Neanderthal: The Rise, Success, and Mysterious Extinction of Our Closest Human Relatives***

Ian Tattersall. Macmillan, 1995.

Neanderthals existed for centuries and survived several ice ages, only to vanish just as the ancestors of present-day humans appeared on Earth. This book explores the mystery of their disappearance and offers an explanation. Many beautiful photographs and several charts and diagrams help the text come to life. Written in a scholarly yet lively style, this is a book for the serious reader.

## **Vocabulary**

### **bipedalism**

Definition: The ability to walk on two legs.

Context: **Bipedalism** is one of the earliest defining human traits.

### **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, bipedal walking, and larger brains.

### **Ice Age**

Definition: A period in Earth's history when ice sheets covered vast regions of land.

Context: The **Ice Age** in North America and Eurasia occurred during the Pleistocene period, from 2 million to 11,500 years ago.

### **Academic Standards:**

The following standard is from the National Council for the Social Studies for students in grades 5-8:

1. Provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

### **Credit:**

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This lesson was developed in consultation with Tom Malone, a middle school social studies teacher.

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