

The British  
Museum



# The world of Stonehenge

17 February – 17 July 2022  
Guide for teachers



Nebra Sky Disc, Germany, about 1600 BC.  
Photo courtesy of the State Office for  
Heritage Management and Archaeology  
Saxony-Anhalt, Juraj Lipták.

Stonehenge image © oversnap/Getty Images.

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## Planning your visit

We recommend the following planning guidelines:

- Provide a focus for students to keep in mind as they explore the exhibition which you can then follow up afterwards.
- Do some preparatory work in school to develop the focus of the visit and familiarise students with the content of the exhibition.
- Allow students some scope to explore and find objects that interest them.

### Curriculum Links

The exhibition can be used to support the following curriculum areas:

#### **History/The world around us/Social studies:**

British and European prehistory, introduction of the farming life style, human built monuments, the role of the landscape.

**Art and design/The arts/Expressive arts:** human artistic expression, creating and constructing monuments, prehistoric motifs, portable hand held art.

**PSHE/ PD&MU/Health & wellbeing:** sense of community, collective response, changing lifestyles, changing connections and meeting new people, making sense of your world.

## Using this resource

This resource is designed to support your visit to the BP exhibition *The World of Stonehenge*.

It aims to be cross-curricular and offer opportunities to work the exhibition into different curriculum subjects.

The resource is accompanied by a downloadable image bank of objects displayed in the exhibition.

The images can be used to introduce students to some of the objects they will see in the exhibition. The images are grouped under curricular areas which link to the follow-up activity suggestions in this guide. They can also be used as starting points for teacher designed activities which support the themes of the exhibition and particular topics and skills being studied in the classroom.

## Introduction to the exhibition

Stonehenge was one of many important ceremonial monuments built across Britain, Ireland and continental Europe during prehistory. This exhibition explores narratives of connectivity, exchange, mobility and migration, in an ancient world shaped by peoples' relationships with nature, the heavens and one another.

## Using the exhibition

### In advance

Decide on a focus for the visit and follow-up activities. Go through this with the students. Use the image bank to familiarise students with some of the exhibition content. Go through any exhibition activities with the students and accompanying adults beforehand.

### On the day

Encourage adults to allow students to linger at objects which interest them and to discuss what they see and share ideas as they go round. Remind students to behave calmly and politely. Photography is allowed in the exhibition and students may also take photographs of relevant objects in the Museum's permanent galleries. There are a set of young learners labels for students to engage with in the exhibition space.

### Afterwards

Use the information (written, drawn, photographed and/or discussed) gathered by the students in the exhibition and the Museum galleries as a starting point for follow-up activities back at school.

## The 'Big' questions

It is a good idea to have a big question for students to keep in mind during their visit to the exhibition.

Here are some possible examples:

- Which did I think, and why, was the most interesting object in the exhibition?
- What did I learn about prehistoric Europe that I did not know before?
- What sources of evidence does the exhibition include and how useful did I find them for learning about prehistoric Europe?
- What else would I put in the exhibition to make it engaging/informative?

## Exhibition themes

The exhibition is divided into themed sections.

### Introduction

Stonehenge is one of the most famous monuments in the world, offering a unique gateway into the story of Britain and Europe 3,000 to 6,000 years ago. This exhibition explores themes of connectivity, exchange, mobility and migration, in a world shaped by peoples' relationships with nature, the heavens and one another.

### Working with nature

About 6,000 years ago, communities in Britain redefined their relationship with nature. The old ways of hunting and gathering were changed forever by the farming lifestyle of migrant communities from the continent. With fields of cereals to protect and livestock to tend, ideas of ownership, labour and time were altered. So was land. Monuments acted as roots, staking claim to special places for the first time. Stone, wood and clay objects were both tools and symbols of the new relationship between people and nature.

### Sermons in stone

Around 5,000 years ago, communities across Britain and Ireland created long-distance connections through a new style of art. Spirals, circles and geometric patterns were applied to tombs, house interiors, open air rocks and objects. This new art style coincided with a flourishing of monument building at locations across Britain and Ireland. The architecture and imagery drew together large numbers of people in works of collaboration and creativity.

### Seahenge

The transformation of stone into a molten metal that could be cast into new forms was a dramatic, and even magical, event. Unlike stone working, metal could be recycled and reshaped. Copper and bronze axes cast in stone moulds revolutionised tree-felling and wood working, enabling critical innovations in carpentry, joinery and boat building.

### Under one sky

The introduction of metal to Britain and Ireland around 4,300 years ago enabled cosmological beliefs represented by Stonehenge and other monuments into a range of portable objects.

Gold ornaments had the ability to reflect and perhaps even harness the power of the sun, ensuring wellbeing across the seasons. This marked a significant change, from fixed monuments where the sun was observed and worshipped at prescribed times of year to objects that could be held or worn to express a close, personal connection to the heavens.

### New horizons

From about 4,500 years ago, hundreds of burial mounds were raised around Stonehenge. Burying bodies with valued objects on sacred land became the main way of expressing cultural and spiritual meaning across Britain. The objects that mourners selected for the grave prepared souls for life beyond this world. They were markers of identity, ethnicity and success, but they also expressed hopes, desires, failed ambitions and long-distance pilgrimages. New scientific studies allow us to trace the stories, genetic relationships and movements of people through time, as they became established lineages anchored by ancestral landscapes and ancient monuments.

### Facing the oceans

About 3,500 years ago, the influences of Stonehenge region began to wane. Communities on the south coast of England looked to continental Europe – an important source of bronze and a place to build social and political relationships. As continental connections increased, European metal and exotic goods began to flow across the Channel. New types of objects emerged alongside new ideas about offering up these precious items to supernatural forces. This challenged older religious beliefs, and the role of monuments like Stonehenge.

### Sunset, sunrise

By 3,800 years ago, the world of Stonehenge had been transformed, culturally and environmentally. Stone circles were still used in some parts of Britain and Ireland but they no longer drew large gatherings. The European trade networks that carried ritual objects and materials began to break down; their decline perhaps sealed by climatic and environmental change around the same time. Stonehenge stands not for a landscape, region or even country, but for the generations of people who have made meaning from an enduring place in a changing world.

## Curricular opportunities

### History/The world around us/Social studies

Stonehenge is one of the most famous monuments in the world and helps us to understand the history of Britain and Europe around 4,000-1,000 BC.

Use the exhibition to find out about the role of Stonehenge in prehistory and contemporary human communities and lifestyles.

#### Spotlight objects:

See pages 1, 2, 3 and 4 in the powerpoint that accompanies this resource.

#### Follow up activities:

- Locate Stonehenge on a map. Research examples of other built monuments in Britain and on continental Europe from the same period of time. Create a monument map.
- Research the features of the stone circle at Stonehenge and the landscape in which it stands. Compare these to another large built monument from this period or another historical period. Record your findings on a comparison – same or different – chart.
- Create a time line using objects and events featured in the exhibition showing the themes of objects (material culture), life styles and community connections in prehistory.

### Art and design/The arts/Expressive arts

Stonehenge was a large scale monument created by people in prehistory. The idea of creating objects, decorating objects and sharing objects also occurred on a small scale with hand-held portable objects.

Use the exhibition to explore how people used artistic expression to create everyday objects, spiritual objects and large scale monuments. Discuss the modern creative responses inspired by ancient monuments in the exhibition.

#### Spotlight objects:

See pages 5, 6, 7 and 8 in the powerpoint that accompanies this resource.

#### Follow up activities:

- Discuss the different techniques and materials used to create an artistic outcome on objects

you saw in the exhibition. Review the shapes, motifs and materials used.

- Create your own artistic outcome using lines, patterns and motifs seen on exhibition objects. You might draw your object, use paint, create an object using clay or carve into a soft surface such as soap.
- Discuss the responses to objects from the world of Stonehenge you saw in the exhibition. Think about how you would want to respond to Stonehenge or Seahenge and discuss what you would create. Different responses could be combined to create a class response.

### PSHE/ PD&MU/Health & wellbeing

Building and using built monuments enabled people in prehistory to build, strength and maintain relationships within and between human communities.

Use the exhibition to explore the ways in which these types of site were important to people and how they continue to prompt interest and investigation today.

#### Spotlight objects:

See pages 9, 10, 11 and 12 in the powerpoint that accompanies this resource.

#### Follow up activities:

- Review the changes that occurred during the time of Stonehenge. Discuss how you think these changes affected people at the time. Hold a debate to discuss the pros and cons of say switching from a hunter gather lifestyle to being a farmer, using metal as a new technology for making everyday items or joining with others to team build a large monument in the landscape.
- Select an object which you feel represents an aspect of life during prehistory. Create an annotated diagram identifying the different facets of ancient life shown by the object. Include ways in which the object was used (function), what it looks like (form) and how people might have felt about it (emotional or symbolic value).
- Discuss why you think sites such as Stonehenge are still important today. How do they help us understand people in the past and ourselves today?