

ANCIENT BRITAIN: STONEHENGE



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Description

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the different theories of how and when Stonehenge was built, what the site's purpose may have been, and how it's seen today, both by the British and by visitors from around the globe.

Subjects

Ancient History
European History
World History
Anthropology
English / Language Arts

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

180 minutes (2 x 90 min)

Tour Links

- [Stonehenge](#)
- [British Museum, London](#)

Essential Questions

- What is Stonehenge?
- Who built Stonehenge? Why did they build it? When was it built?
- How have interpretations on Stonehenge changed over the last millennium?
- Why is Stonehenge one of the most visited sites in the world today?

Academic Summary

No one can work out how the stones were so skilfully lifted up to such a height or why they were erected.

Henry of Huntingdon, Archdeacon of Lincoln, Historia Anglorum, approx. 1130 CE

That year Merlin, not by force but by art, brought and erected the giants' round from Ireland, at Stonehenge near Amesbury

Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia Regum Britanniae (History of the Kings of Britain), approx. 1136 CE
... the Schem also by which this work Stoneheng formed, was an Architectonically Schem used by the Romans.

John Webb / Inigo Jones, The Most Notable Antiquity of Great Britain, Vulgarly Called Stoneheng on Salisbury Plain, 1655

Monuments, we can scarce say, whether more wonderful in themselves, more observ'd, or less understood! among them, Stonehenge has been eminent from the remotest ages, tho' 'tis not the greatest, most considerable, or most ancient. But 'tis my intent to begin my discourse from it, because the latest, and from thence proceed upwards in our inquiries, about the times and authors of these stupendous works, the temples of the Druids in our Island: for I cannot doubt that Stonehenge was such.

William Stukeley, Stonehenge, A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids 1740

Stonehenge... a celestial calendar built by ancient Celts... an ancient druid temple... an ancient burial ground... an ancient monument to the gods... an ancient Roman structure... an ancient structure built by Merlin the Magnificent to honor King Arthur... an ancient healing and pilgrimage site... an ancient site dedicated to the Cult of the Dead... Different interpretations and different theories... very few facts. One term of agreement: ancient.

Stonehenge is a prehistoric monument consisting of a series of concentric rings of massive standing stones set within earthworks approximately 8 miles north of Salisbury and about 2 hours west of London in the countryside of Southern England. The site today is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is one of the most famous archaeological and cultural sites in the world, visited by hundreds of thousands of people every year. It is one of the oldest man-made structures in the world, possibly going back over 5000 years.

It is also one of the least understood structures in the world, and always has been. Even today, in the modern age of the 21st century, with all of the scientific advances and enlightened discoveries of the last 300 years, Stonehenge remains a mystery that may never be unlocked, and yet, most people who visit don't seem to mind the disagreements. Some come for the history, trying to understand how ancient people (whoever they might have been) moved such large and heavy rocks not native to the site on which they now sit. Others come for the science, trying to understand how ancient people set up these rocks so that, even today, they align with the Summer solstice and Winter solstice every year. Some come because they "feel" somehow connected to the area around Stonehenge. Others come just as tourists, because to visit England and not visit Stonehenge would somehow be akin to going to Egypt and failing to visit the pyramids, going to Rome and not visiting the Colosseum, or going to China and somehow missing the Forbidden City or the Great Wall. So many reasons to visit... so many stories... one Stonehenge.

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the different theories of how and when Stonehenge was built, what the site's purpose may have been, and how it is seen today, both by the British and by visitors from around the globe.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the different theories about how, by whom, when and why Stonehenge was built.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the different theories as to what purpose might have Stonehenge been used for, and how those theories have changed (and continue to change) throughout history.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how Stonehenge is seen today, both by Britons and by visitors from around the globe.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Why might ancient people have built great stone structures such as those at Stonehenge and Easter Island? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief overview of Stonehenge. (30 min)
- Video – Secrets of Stonehenge (60 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles on Stonehenge, taking notes as appropriate. (30 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles/photographs to each group.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: What are the different theories of how and when Stonehenge was built, what the site's purpose may have been, and how it's seen today, both by the British and by visitors from around the globe? (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the different theories of how and when Stonehenge was built, what the site's purpose may have been, and how it's seen today, both by the British and by visitors from around the globe.
- Homework – How might future people see our megalithic stone structures, such as the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument or Mount Rushmore?

Extension

On tour: Stonehenge

While on tour in Great Britain, students will visit Stonehenge, where they can see for themselves the great monolithic structure. Students and teachers alike can thus join the great conversation that has raged for eons as to who built it, why and when it was built, what it was used for and how it should be seen today. There may be no real answers to any of these questions, and yet Stonehenge remains an important part of our common history.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- alexwraggemorley.wordpress.com/2013/07/20/interpreting-stonehenge-in-the-17th-century/
Interpreting Stonehenge in the 17th Century (website) – from Alexander Wragge-Morley, lecturer at Somerville College, University of Oxford (UK)
- www.bradshawfoundation.com/stonehenge/stonehenge.php
Stonehenge: The Age of the Megaliths (website) – from the Bradshaw Foundation
- www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/stonehenge/
Stonehenge (website) – from English Heritage
- www.stonehenge.co.uk/
Stonehenge (website) – from the Stonehenge historical site
- witcombe.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/stonehenge.html
Stonehenge, England (website) – from Dr. Christopher Witcombe, art history professor at Sweet Briar College (VA)
- www.archaeologyuk.org/ba/ba92/feat1.shtml
A new Medieval View of Stonehenge (web article) – from Archaeology UK
- www.history.com/topics/british-history/stonehenge
Stonehenge (website) – from the History Channel
- www.ashland.k12.ky.us/userfiles/166/Classes/7362/Stonehenge%20worksheets.pdf
The Mystery of Stonehenge (PDF/worksheets) – from Ashland Independent Schools in Ashland, KY
- www.heritage-explorer.co.uk/web/he/search.aspx?crit=stonehenge
English Heritage Teachers Kit: Stonehenge. PDF file from Heritage Explorer (UK). For UK teachers. Contains great photos and architectural drawings – highly recommended for teachers and students.
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- http://anglisztika.ektf.hu/new/english/content/letoltesek/anglisztika/segedanyagok/AN185/stonehenge_show.ppt
Stonehenge (PowerPoint) -- Outstanding PowerPoint, great images and information.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8DqKArmdyo
Timewatch - Stonehenge (video) – from the BBC
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pXtHqAGN6E
Secrets of Stonehenge (video) – Nova video on Stonehenge. Highly recommended for students and teachers. Includes great scientific, historical and theoretical information. The video is 15 minutes and is therefore Part 1 of 4 (overall video is about 1 hour long). Long for many in-class viewings, it is worth it if at all possible.

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonehenge
Stonehenge – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theories_about_Stonehenge
Theories about Stonehenge – Wikipedia article
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/the_united_kingdom/country_profile
On the Road: Britain (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/the_united_kingdom/stonehenge_to_winchester
On the Road: Stonehenge to Winchester – from Passports Educational Travel
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/the_united_kingdom/stonehenge
On the Road: Stonehenge – from Passports Educational Travel

Key Terms

- Ancient
- Celts
- Druids
- Megalithic
- Monolithic
- Stonehenge

