What can we find out about the people of the Glastonbury Lake Village?

Introduction

The excavation of the Glastonbury Lake Village was major archaeological news after its discovery in 1892. By 1911, when the second volume of the excavation report was published, the Lake Village was so well-known that subscribers to the report included archaeological societies and university libraries throughout Europe and the USA and leading independent libraries in Britain including The London Library, The Leeds Library and The Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society.

The waterlogged ground preserved a great many artefacts – made of wood, pottery, iron, bronze, antler, bone etc – which tell us a great deal about the Iron Age people who occupied the village between c200BC and c50AD. The resources provided here are built around artwork drawings of some of the major artefacts. They enable children to investigate the finds, making their own suggestions about what they were used for and what they were made of before using what they have learned to create a classroom exhibition or display about the people of the lake Village.

The illustrations of the finds are taken from my book *Prehistoric Britain* published in 1983.

My thanks to **The Leeds Library** for taking good care of the two beautifully-illustrated volumes of the excavation report over the last century.

Support

Evidence cards

Captions for use with evidence cards

PowerPoint slides

Notes for Teachers: the history of the site, the finds and links to website resources

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Objectives

Here are some of the understandings that students can develop by using these resources – it's up to you which you wish to focus on with your class:

1. knowledge of the way of life of the Iron Age people who lived in the Glastonbury Lake Village

2. awareness of some of the things that the people were good at e.g. woodworking, building homes, making pottery

3. practice in asking good historical questions

4. knowledge of the range of sources that provide evidence about the Iron Age

5. the ability to use sources to answer questions and to test and support statements

The Activity

I've set out one broad route through these resources but there are obviously other ways of sequencing the activity so I won't pretend this is the best route for everyone. I also haven't tried to identify precise activities or questions because that will vary so much from class to class, nor the use of every PowerPoint slide – they're there to be helpful if you need them. For additional web resources see the Notes for Teachers document.

1. Begin with a short film of the recreated village at:

https://avalon-archaeology.com/archaeology-projects/glastonbury-lake-village/

It's atmospheric and will give children a strong visual sense of the village – without that they don't have a context for the finds they will investigate. The film lasts 5 minutes so you'll need to decide how much of it to use – maybe the first 4 minutes is enough as the only short section which gives too much away is at 4 mins 20 seconds identifying the villagers' working with textiles, wood etc.

Once children have watched the film it's time to get them thinking about how the people who made the film knew what the village looked like e.g.

- what kinds of evidence might have survived for the houses?

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- what other kinds of evidence might have been found?

- what do you think the villagers were good at?

- what questions do you want to ask about the villagers?

2. Introduce the idea of working with individual finds by using PowerPoint slide 4 (and perhaps 5) to model the activity with the whole class. First explain that these finds were excavated by archaeologists and then ask children to suggest answers to these questions (see slide 3):

What do you think they are or were used for?

What are they made of?

What do they tell you about the people who lived in the Lake Village?

3. Give out the rest of the evidence cards 1-9 to the class – maybe one or two cards to a group – and ask students to work with the same three questions, writing down their suggestions. Then round up the answers – what ideas do students have? What do they agree on? Which find are most puzzling?

4. Give out the archaeologists' conclusions which are in the form of captions to go with cards 1-9. Which captions go with which finds? What did children get right when they suggested answers earlier? What have they learned that's new?

When looking at the rings on card 2 you could ask children to use strips of paper to recreate the diameters of the rings so they can see how large they were – who might have work each size of ring. The diameters are in the caption.

5. Now you've looked at this selection of finds you could look at the structure of a house – see slide 13. You could also measure out the size of a house in the hall or outside. The roundhouses were between 5½ metres and 8½ metres in diameter – see Notes for Teachers for further details of their structure. How many children can sit or sleep comfortably in this space?

6. Now that children have examined the finds there's the chance to think about the people of the village using questions such as:

- what were the villagers good at? What kinds of skills did they have?

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- what words would you use to describe these people?

The emphasis here should be on building respect for the villagers – their lives were very different from ours but they had many practical skills which were very suited to their lives. These skills included – expert carpentry, working with bronze and iron, making and decorating pottery, making cloth. A number of finds also suggest that they were concerned with their appearance e.g. rings, bracelets, brooches, the mirror. They must also have been experienced farmers and hunters.

7. When did people live in the Lake Village? This could have been tackled earlier but I think students are more likely to want to find this out if they've first learned about the people and the evidence. You could obviously simply tell children when this was and how it fits in with other events and people they have studied but there are also creative ways to help them develop their sense of chronology. A simply way is to have a pile of pieces of sugar paper representing archaeological layers – with a picture or two in each 'layer' – children start with the top layer representing today and strip away each layer, identifying the period or people until they get down to the iron Age which would have a couple of the Glastonbury finds visible.

For other enjoyable alternative methods see:

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityBase/ClassroomArchaeology.html

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityBase/HumanTimelineKS2.html

And for discussion of chronological understanding see:

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityBase/ChronologicalUnderstanding.html

8. And finally … children could demonstrate all they've learned by creating their own classroom exhibition or display about the people of the Lake Village, choosing illustrations and annotating them or adding their own captions.

Cont.

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Debriefing

As with any activity or series of lessons it's vital to end by asking children to be explicit about what they have learned. In this case there's two areas to focus on:

- What they have learned about the lives of the Glastonbury villagers

- What they have learned about the kinds of evidence that survive from the Iron Age

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