For Groups

Hands on History

The Ancients

Use these ancient-themed workshops with groups of kids, families or communities.

The activities are creative, hands-on ways to step back in time and meet our ancient ancestors.

Hands on History is a two-year campaign from BBC Learning. Visit the website with Eric as he travels through time.

You can also find historic sites to visit using our online map and watch animations for more ideas and resources for inspiring groups to get hands on with history.

For Groups

Introductory activity 1 - Use the ancient-themed workshops to

Introduce your group to their ancient ancestors. This may be why some ancient people began to use art to describe everyday life and what happened in the world around them.

But don't worry if they don't, explain that the point of the game is to show just what they will learn.

You can play this quick and simple game to help your participants get into the mind of their ancient ancestors and think about what life must have been like for historians learning about prehistoric life.

You will need:
- A large piece of paper
- A black/whiteboard
- A marker

Hands on History

Create a cave carving

You will need:
- Rolling pins
- Optional - ‘Tools’ for carving

Get Carving

1. Ask the participants to begin to shape the clay using their hands.
2. They can also use modelling tools, or if you have outside space, ask the group to go outside to find twigs and stones to use as ancient tools.
3. Leave the clay to dry.

You can display all the cave art together to create one piece of ancient art.

Top tips
- If you don’t have an outside area nearby, you can bring in a bag of twigs and other natural objects for the group to use on the day.

Create a cave painting

You will need:
- A simple pattern using lines, dots and zigzags
- A ‘modern’ cave painting – using inspiration from nature right outside
- Ancient animals – like deer, cattle and horses
- Ancient messages like those included in the introductory activity
- Ancient tools like the bow, arrow and spear
- Ancient materials like rock, sand and water

Get creative

1. Ask the participants to begin to shape the clay using their hands.
2. They can also use modelling tools, or if you have outside space, ask the group to go outside to find twigs and stones to use as ancient tools.
3. Leave the clay to dry.

You can display all the cave art together to create one piece of ancient art.

Top tips
- You can also run this activity using sand around them into the walls of caves. They often started with a natural feature such as a natural stone or hillside.

Your group can get inspiration for their cave art by looking at the carvings found in many parts of the world today.

You will need:
- Sand in a large tray
- Glue spatulas or old paint brushes
- Paper/card

Find your tools

1. Give each group member a piece of A4 or A3 paper or card works better as it is less likely to wrinkle under the glue.
2. Ask each participant to paint their card with PVA glue.
3. Ask the group to look for twigs, stones, feathers and leaves to use as painting tools.

Take your picture

1. While the ‘cave wall’ paper is drying, take the group outside into a communal area.
2. Ask each group to think of the scene they’d like to portray. Here are a few ideas:
   - A hunting scene, with men following a deer
   - The night sky with the moon and stars shining brightly
   - A simple pattern using lines, dots and zigzags
   - A ‘modern’ cave painting – using inspiration from nature right outside
   - Ancient animals – like deer, cattle and horses
   - Ancient messages like those included in the introductory activity

You will need:
- Sand in a large tray
- Glue spatulas or old paint brushes
- Paper/card
BUILD A STONE CIRCLE

This activity can be run with individuals, but it also works well with participants working in pairs or small groups.

You will need:
- One sand tray per participant/group (an unused cat litter tray, or seed tray with drainage holes covered, works well)
- Lots of clean sand from a craft or toy shop
- Quick-drying modelling clay or a selection of suitably sized clean stones
- Clay: If you are modelling your stones, make them as realistic as possible by modelling them with rough edges. You may want to use some real stones
- Stones: If you are using real stones, think about the colour, texture, shape and size, as they did in prehistory.
- Additional activity: an outside space and/or a dark room with a torch

Setting the scene
You could ask participants to estimate the size of the stones needed to build a small prehistoric monument like Stonehenge. Challenge them to design and build a stone circle using the Stone Circle Builders kit. Before you get started, set the scene by explaining to the group.

You can either read out the instructions as the session progresses, or hand out photocopied sheets to each workshop leader.

Optional extension activity
If you have more time, or a more advanced group, you can test the light on your own circle by taking it outside and placing it on the ground with the sun on it. You can then consider: How would it have felt for ancient people visiting their circle? How would it have felt for ancient people visiting your circle? How would it have felt for ancient people visiting your circle?

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