

Stone Age settlements

History lesson (Year 3 ~ 1 hour)

Lesson brief

Use the [Stone Age settlements map](#) to show the children the location of significant Stone Age sites around the United Kingdom and explain that the settlements were either temporary or permanent settlements. Invite the children to describe their location and any geographical patterns. Use [Google Maps](#) to look in more detail at the prehistoric village of Skara Brae. Encourage the children to describe its location and size and suggest reasons for its position. Share the [Skara Brae presentation](#) and discuss the information collectively. Ask the children to consider what else they would like to find out about the site and model how to compose a historically valid question for further independent investigation. Challenge the children to use the internet and the [Skara Brae information pack](#) to answer their research question. Display the children's research questions and answers on an investigation board for shared reflection.

School adaptations [Add notes](#)

No adaptation notes


Materials

Concept/Aspect [View progression](#)

Artefacts and sources

Skills

In this lesson children will:

- **Y3** Make deductions and draw conclusions about the reliability of a historical source or artefact.
- **Y4**  Explain how the design, decoration and materials used to make an artefact can provide evidence of the wealth, power and status of the object's owner.

Core knowledge

By the end of this lesson children should know:

- Skara Brae is a settlement in Scotland whose well preserved dwellings and artefacts have helped historians and archaeologists to understand more about life in the Neolithic.

Resources

Stone Age settlements map

Stone Age settlements

Key

- Palaeolithic or Mesolithic sites
- Neolithic sites

Skara Brae

Carnoustie

Kilmartin Glen

Howick

Thornhill, beside the River Foyle

Thornborough henges

Pontnewydd cave

Star Carr

Clegyr Boia

Creswell Crags

Aveline's Hole

Kingsmead quarry

Carn Brea

Gough's cave

Durrington Walls

Avebury

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Skara Brae



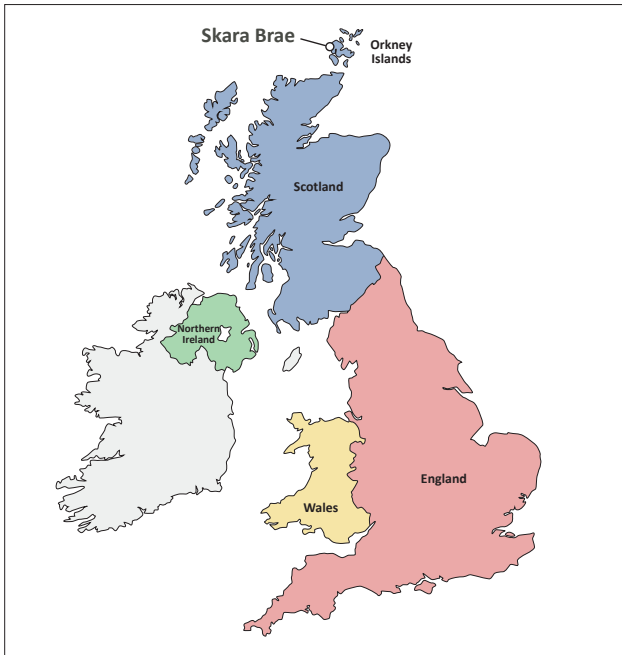
What is Skara Brae?



Skara Brae is a Neolithic settlement in the Orkney Islands, Scotland.
It is now on the coast, but in Neolithic times it was further inland.



Where is Skara Brae?



Skara Brae is on the shore of the Bay of Skail, which is on the west coast of the Orkney Islands. The Orkney Islands are 50 miles north of the Scottish mainland.



What is the weather like on the Orkney Islands?



Image: Shutterstock.com/Crafts for Nausea

The weather on the Orkney Islands is wet and windy. In winter, it is dark for much of the day. Neolithic people would have needed to keep warm and sheltered from the gales and rain.



How was Skara Brae discovered?



Image from: Openly, Library and Archives

Excavation of Skara Brae in 1929

The settlement at Skara Brae had become buried in sand and soil over the years. A storm in 1850 blew some of the sand and soil away, so some parts were visible. Local landowner, William Watt, started to excavate the site. It was later fully excavated by archaeologists between 1928 and 1930.



Why is Skara Brae important?



The settlement at Skara Brae was extremely well protected by the sand and soil. When it was completely excavated, it was found to be the best preserved Neolithic village in western Europe. It contained many clues about how Neolithic people lived.



How do archaeologists know it was a Neolithic settlement?



Archaeologists first thought that Skara Brae might be an Iron Age settlement, so they used a scientific technique called radiocarbon dating to find out when it was built. They found out that the settlement was Neolithic and people lived there from c3200–c2200 BC.



What can the work of archaeologists tell us about life at Skara Brae?



Settlements like Skara Brae provide clues about how the houses were built, what food was grown and eaten and the tools that were used. Archaeologists put these clues together to understand more about the ways that people lived over 4000 years ago.



Skara Brae



Name _____

Class _____

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Introduction



Think about Skara Brae. Think of the place, its location and the Neolithic people who lived there. Write a question about Skara Brae to which you would like to know the answer.

My question is:

Archaeologists and historians use different types of evidence to learn about the past. They use **primary sources**, which are things that were around at that time, such as jewellery and tools. They also use **secondary sources**, which are things that tell us about the past but are not from the past, such as text books and television programmes.

Work through the evidence about Skara Brae and try to find the answer to your question.

Evidence 1

Artefacts (primary source)

Artefacts are objects that have been made by people. They might be tools or jewellery. They can tell us about how people used to live.

Look at these three artefacts found at Skara Brae, then answer the questions about them.



necklace



pins



comb

1. What do you think the necklace is made from?

2. What clues does the necklace give us about Neolithic people?

3. Look at the comb. What does it tell us about what was important to the people who lived there?

4. What do you think the pins might have been used for?

5. Why might these artefacts have survived, while others have not?

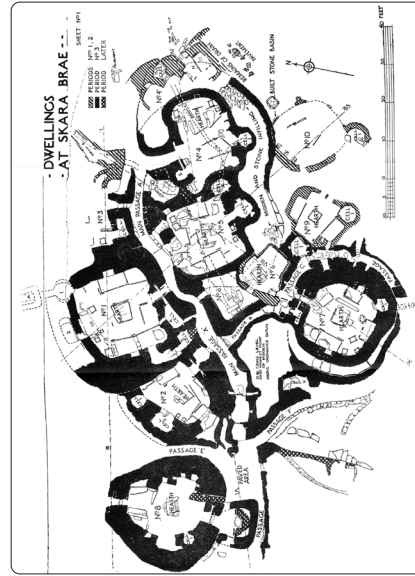
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Evidence 2

Plan (secondary source)

This plan of Skara Brae was drawn in 1950. It shows the excavated settlement.



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1. Think about the weather at Skara Brae. Why do you think the walls of the houses are thick?

2. The houses are all similar sizes and had the same layout and furniture. Do you think one person ruled the whole village?

3. How many people do you think lived in this village?

4. Look at the plan. How do you think people would have moved between the buildings?

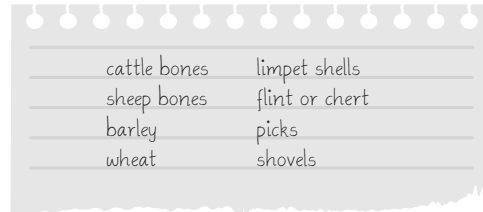
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Evidence 3

Archaeological finds (primary source)

Archaeologists found many things at Skara Brae that provided clues about how Neolithic people lived. These are some things that were found on the site.



1. What do the cattle and sheep bones tell us?

2. What does the presence of barley and wheat tell us?

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3. What might the picks and shovels have been used for?

4. Flint and chert are similar rocks. Both are hard and sharp. Why might they be around a Neolithic village?

5. Limpets are snails that live in the sea. Why do you think limpet shells were found?

6. No weapons were found at Skara Brae. What might that tell us about how these people lived?

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Evidence 4

House remains (primary source)

This photograph shows the remains of one of the houses at Skara Brae.



1. What material was used to build the house?

2. Why do you think this building material was used?

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3. What do you think the square in the middle of the floor might have been and how was it used?

4. What furniture can you see in the house?

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Evidence 5

Photographs (primary source)

This photograph shows some of the houses and passageways at Skara Brae.



1. Think about the weather and location of Skara Brae. Why do you think the houses and passageways were built under ground level?

2. The settlement was built near to the sea. Why might this have been important to the Neolithic people?

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Evidence 6

Reconstruction (secondary source)

This is a reconstruction of what archaeologists think a house at Skara Brae might have looked like in Neolithic times.



1. What does the presence of animal furs tell us?

2. Archaeologists think that the roofs might have been made from driftwood and peat or animal skins. The houses found at Skara Brae did not have roofs. What do you think happened to the roofs of the houses at Skara Brae?

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Drawing conclusions

Can you answer your question using the evidence about Skara Brae?

Yes No

The answer to my question is:

If you couldn't answer your question, what further evidence do you think you would need? Use other sources, such as books and the internet to collect this evidence.

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