

## Take One... Bronze Age Cauldron

# ASHMOLEAN

These guidance notes are designed to help you use one object from our collection as a focus for cross-curricular teaching and learning. A visit to the Ashmolean Museum to see your chosen object offers your class the perfect 'learning outside the classroom' opportunity.



This cauldron is on display in Gallery 17, European Prehistory.

A zoomable image of the cauldron is available on our website.

Visit [www.ashmolean.org/learning-resources](http://www.ashmolean.org/learning-resources)

## Starting Questions

The following questions may be useful as a starting point for developing speaking and listening skills with your class.

- What do you think this object is made from?
- Where might the object come from?
- What kind of person do you think would have owned this?
- Who could have made it?
- How could you use it?
- Look carefully at the object. It looks like it has been mended many times. Why do you think people didn't just throw it away?
- This object was found in a river. How do you think it got there?



Inspired by the National Gallery's  
Take One Picture programme

## Background Information

### The Object

Bronze Age Cauldron from Shipton-on-Cherwell.

This large bronze cauldron was found by swimmers in 1928 in the River Cherwell at Shipton-on-Cherwell, Oxfordshire. It is one of the earliest Late Bronze Age cauldrons known in Britain, and dates from about 1100-1000 BC.

It is of a type known as 'Atlantic cauldrons' that are found in areas along the Atlantic coasts of Europe: Britain, Ireland, France and Iberia. This cauldron was probably made in England, but most later examples were made in Ireland and traded along the sea coasts.

The cauldron is made by a highly skilled metalworker. It is made from three sheets of bronze: two rectangular pieces have been joined together in a ring to form the body, with a bowl-shaped circular piece riveted to one side to form the base and the other side reinforced to form the rim and neck. The two handles would make it easier to carry or to hang the cauldron over a fire.

The cauldron has been mended by adding another sheet of bronze. The repair doesn't seem to have been made by such a skilled craftsman. Cauldrons are often found repaired in this way and their bases must have been vulnerable to damage - perhaps due to the way they were used or heated. There are quite a few more patched-up areas on the cauldron suggesting that the people who owned it wanted to make it last as long as possible.

Large cauldrons like this are assumed to have been ceremonial cooking vessels, probably used for communal feasting. These events would have been really important for unifying communities and for providing prestige to the people holding the feast. It is likely that people who controlled the making and distributing of such large and impressive sheet-metal objects would have been powerful and important.

### The historical context

Bronze Age (2300 BC-800 BC)

Metals appear in Europe about 3500 BC, reaching Britain in about 2300 BC. Copper and gold were the first metals to be used, followed by bronze (a mixture of copper and tin). Tools and ornaments could now be made easily in a variety of shapes, but flint and stone were still used for many objects. Metals were traded over long distances across Europe, as were other materials such as jet, amber, salt and glass.

Many Bronze Age settlements were very long-lived, so that by the end of the period some of these villages were very large (housing hundreds of people). In Britain, houses were round and were set in small farms or groups of buildings, with fields and trackways around. By this time many areas in southern Britain were cleared of forests, though the Chilterns were not cleared until the Iron Age.

During the Bronze Age it seems that people were becoming more interested in ownership. People were marking out territory by creating long landscape divisions. Objects found in graves show evidence of status in the community. There was also perhaps division between communities, as archaeologists also find objects used specifically for fighting, such as swords and shields. Before this period tools were primarily designed for hunting or construction.

In Bronze Age Britain, people continued to build communal ritual sites. Stone circles, such as Stonehenge and Avebury and cemeteries of round burial mounds (barrows) were all completed in the Bronze Age. Bronze Age people were also starting to deposit special items in bogs and rivers, especially objects made of bronze. Perhaps this is why this cauldron was found in the River Cherwell.

## Ideas for creative planning across the KS1 and KS2 curriculum

You can use this object as the starting point for developing pupils' critical and creative thinking as well as their learning across the curriculum. You may want to consider possible 'lines of enquiry' as a first step in your cross-curricular planning. Choosing a line of enquiry area may help you to build strong links between curriculum areas. After using strategies to help children engage with the object and using questions to facilitate dialogue about the object, you can work with the children to develop lines of enquiry that will interest them.

Here are a few suggestions of possible 'lines of enquiry' using this object:

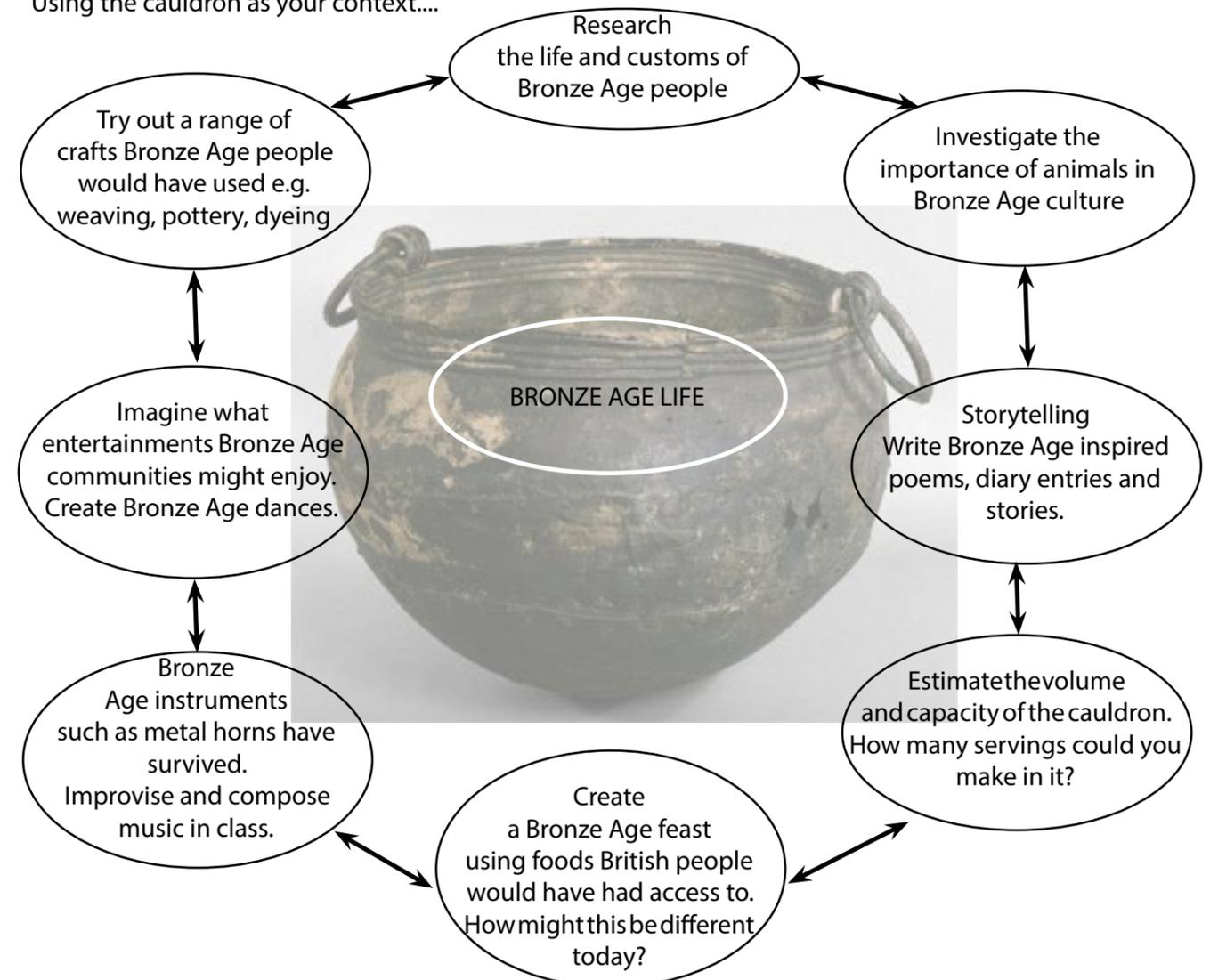
- Bronze Age life
- Community life, feasting and festivals
- Magic
- Materials and their properties

Using one or more line of enquiry as your starting point, consider how you can work in a number of curriculum areas to build strong and effective cross-curricular links.

### Using Bronze Age Life as a line of enquiry

Here are a few ideas of how you can develop a range of learning opportunities to engage pupils with this line of enquiry. Each activity can link with the others to build on pupils' learning across the chosen theme.

Using the cauldron as your context...





These gold ear or hair ornaments date from the earliest part of the British Bronze Age. They were found in 1944 near the head of the skeleton of a 25-35 year old man buried near Radley, Oxfordshire. The burial also contained a decorated European beaker placed near the feet, and three flint arrowheads.

## Tips for introducing objects to a class

- Display an image of the object in the classroom for a number of days with a tape recorder or 'graffiti wall' for children to add comments or questions about the object. Once the pupils' comments and questions have been gathered a class discussion can follow on.
- Cover an object and allow the children to feel it. Can they work out what it is without seeing it?
- Show the object to the class for a minute or two. Remove the object and see what they can remember.
- Introduce the object to the whole class in a question and answer session designed to develop the pupils' speaking and listening skills as outlined on page one.
- Work in pairs sitting back to back. One child describes the object and the other draws.
- Collect as many pictures or examples of similar objects from different time periods and explore the similarities and differences. Then try to sort the objects according to age.



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Take One Picture programme

## Take One...Inspires

Take One... encourages teachers to use an object, painting or other resource, imaginatively in the classroom, both as a stimulus for artwork, and for work in more unexpected curriculum areas. Work in many curriculum areas can be inspired by using a single object as a starting point.

The challenge is for teachers to use objects to develop culturally enriching, relevant and practical learning opportunities across the curriculum.



The Wittenham Shield dates from the Later Bronze Age (c.1200-700 BC). Like the cauldron this shield was found in the River Thames to the north of Long Wittenham village.

*"Thank you for a wonderful and stimulating day at the Ashmolean. I came away buzzing, full of ideas."*

Feedback after a recent  
Take One...INSET

Please contact us or visit our website for more information about our programmes including training opportunities

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