

15-Minute Activity:

Build a Compare-and-Contrast Chart.

Having the ability to find differences and/or similarities helps strengthen your memory, increase comprehension and develop higher-level thinking so you can apply what you've learned to practical situations. In this activity, you will read about how early 20th-century anthropologists stereotyped Neanderthals as "less than human" and how archeologists today believe these distant relatives may have been much closer to modern humans than people thought.

1. Meet as a class or in small groups.
2. Read the brief passage below on how the stereotype of the Neanderthal developed at the beginning of the 20th century.
3. In your group, discuss the differences between the "Old Man of La Chapelle" and the traits archeologists believe were possessed by the "Shanidar Neanderthals" featured in the *AramcoWorld* passage. Write these differences in the chart below under "Differences between the Old Man of La Chapelle and the Shanidar Neanderthals."
4. Discuss ways archeologists believe the Shanidar Neanderthal is similar to people today. Write these similarities in the chart under "Similarities between the Shanidar Neanderthal and people today."
5. Individually, write a short essay using your compare-and-contrast analysis to answer the following question: Do you think Neanderthals were stereotypical cavemen or more like us and why?

The Stereotype of the Neanderthal

The idea that Neanderthals were less than human began in the early 20th century in Europe. In 1908, anthropologists in France had uncovered skeleton bones they suspected were thousands of years old and dubbed them the “Old Man of La Chapelle.” All told, they had unearthed the skull, jaw, most of the vertebrae and several ribs, along with long bones of arms and legs, and smaller bones in the hands and feet. They took the artifacts to the highly respected paleoanthropologist of the period, Marcellin Boule. Boule spent nearly two years analyzing the skeleton. He observed the skull had a large nose, a low, receding forehead and a pronounced brow above the eyes. The midface around the mouth protruded forward. Boule reconstructed the skeleton with a severely curved spine, bent knees and a forward jutting head, giving the skeleton an ape-like stature.

From this one specimen, Boule generalized all Neanderthals were like this one example. Boule believed the sloped forehead indicated less brain mass and thus less intelligence. He deduced that the creature could not have been a direct descendent of modern man, but rather something more primitive. He allowed his early assumptions about prehistoric humans being less advanced than modern man to influence his conclusions. Because of this report, by such a distinguished scholar, it was believed by the masses that Neanderthals were not advanced enough to do much more than hunt and gather to find food. They possessed only the most-rudimentary skills, so their tools were nothing more than clubs and sharp rocks. They possessed neither tribal rituals nor the capability of developing raw materials into the most primitive tools. They lacked emotions beyond anger and fear, a language limited to grunts and squeals and were incapable of expressing feelings and emotions.

Compare and Contrast
Similarities and Differences

Differences between the “Old Man of La Chapelle” and the “Shanidar Neanderthal”

Answers:

Similarities between the “Shanidar Neanderthal” and people today.

Answers:

Common Core Standard(s) Met:

CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCRA.R.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.