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25 MINI-PLAYS WORLD HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

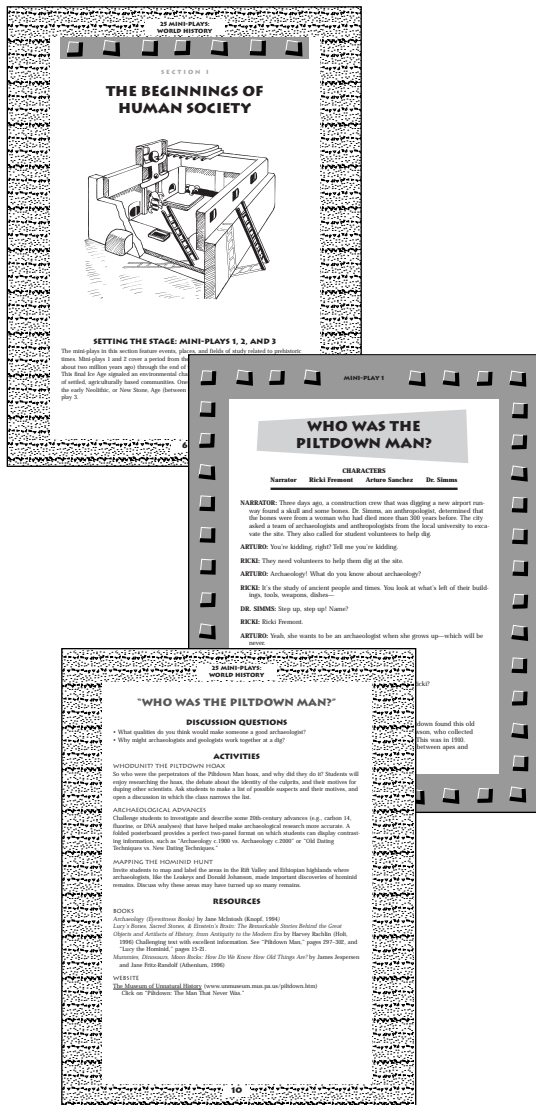
STUDYING ANCIENT HISTORY CAN BE A DAUNTING TASK FOR MANY MIDDLE school students who struggle to comprehend events in distant times and foreign places. How can teachers help students enjoy this history and make connections to their own lives—and still meet curricular objectives?

These teacher-developed mini-plays connect students with the drama of history and provide a focused link to ancient world history lesson objectives. The mini-plays present subject matter in a familiar, exciting format that features historical figures as real people who interacted with one another in very different settings from ours. The scripts are short, so students do not feel overwhelmed by lengthy dialogue or numerous details. They are meant to be used in conjunction with and to expand upon the content and ideas presented in textbooks, trade books, and other curricular materials.

25 Mini-Plays: World History is divided into the following sections:
I. The Beginnings of Human Society;
II. The Cradle of Civilization and Beyond;
III. To the East: India and China;
IV. To the West: The Americas; V. Greece; and VI. Rome. The areas of study and student activities in this book correspond with Eras 1, 2, and 3 of the National World History Standards developed by the National Center for History in the Schools.

Each section opens with historical background that provides details about the featured events and characters. And every mini-play is followed by discussion questions, engaging activities, and literature and Internet links to encourage further investigation with primary and secondary resources. Feel free to adjust the activities to meet the needs and interests of your students.

Also included in this resource are tips on ways to make the most of mini-plays in your classroom. The introduction presents helpful suggestions for lesson and time-management planning with mini-plays. The appendix offers additional student resources on acting and playwriting to be used with the mini-plays.





FITTING MINI-PLAYS INTO YOUR LESSONS

PREFACE TO A LESSON:

When you present a mini-play prior to teaching a lesson, you invite active student participation in a quick overview of the historical material. Whether you allow your student actors time to rehearse or simply conduct a quick read-through, mini-plays offer a more engaging and motivating format than do traditional introductory formats, such as textbook passages or lecture notes.

REVIEW OF A LESSON:

Working with a mini-play after a lesson helps students remember the lesson and connect the mini-play to the larger history curriculum. Students can use note-taking strategies, such as underlining key words and jotting notes in the script margins, to help them remember and respond to important information.

JIGSAW:

To cover a broad span of historical material quickly, you may want to divide your class into groups and assign each group a different script related to the time period or civilization that you are teaching. Each group can then practice and perform its mini-play for the entire class. Presenting a chronological sequence of mini-plays at once offers an overview of different topics you plan to cover in a given unit.

ALLOWING TIME FOR MINI-PLAYS

THE **TEN MINUTE** METHOD:

Simply hand each student a copy of the mini-play, select students for the different parts, and then conduct a read-through without much preparation. Most parts are short, so even struggling readers will find the scripts accessible and volunteer to participate in this activity. Feel free to involve more students in the drama by inviting several students to read the same part chorally. The read-through will help strengthen oral reading skills in a purposeful, nonthreatening group format.

THE **PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT** METHOD:

You may sometimes want to offer the scripts to a handful of selected students in advance, assign roles, and encourage them to practice their parts at home or as a small group while the rest of the class works on another task. This strategy works especially well for readers who need extra time to feel comfortable with material that they will read aloud. It also allows students time to act out their lines, something that takes practice to do well. Students may especially enjoy getting into the act if you encourage them to ad-lib lines and create costumes and props.

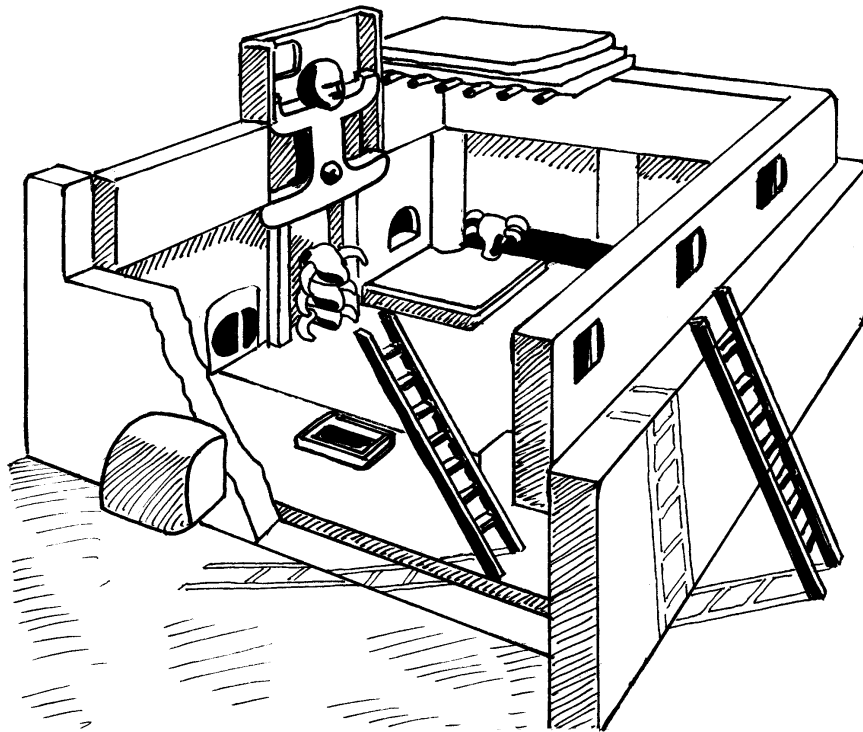
THE **LET'S ALL TRY IT** METHOD:

Occasionally, you and your students may enjoy preparing contrasting versions of the same scene in history. In this case, provide each member of the class with a copy of the same script, divide the class into groups (according to the cast size), and let each group rehearse the script. Then schedule each group to take its turn performing the skit in front of the class. The class should note differences and similarities among the presentations. In this way, everyone participates in the mini-plays. Furthermore, students become well versed with and entertain different perspectives on the featured material.



SECTION I

THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMAN SOCIETY



SETTING THE STAGE: MINI-PLAYS 1, 2, AND 3

The mini-plays in this section feature events, places, and fields of study related to prehistoric times. Mini-plays 1 and 2 cover a period from the Paleolithic, or Old Stone, Age (beginning about two million years ago) through the end of the last Ice Age (ending about 11,000 BC). This final Ice Age signaled an environmental change that encouraged the growth and spread of settled, agriculturally based communities. One of the first known cities to develop during the early Neolithic, or New Stone, Age (between c. 8000 BC and 3000 BC) is the topic of mini-play 3.



BACKGROUND

“Who was the Piltdown Man?” opens this unit with an introduction to archaeology. The characters refer to a sensational 1908 “discovery” in which skull, jaw, and teeth fragments from a site in Piltdown, England, were falsely attributed to the Pleistocene era. However, a half century later, scientists proved that the Piltdown remains were no more than a miscellaneous collection of human, ape, and other animal fossils doctored to look authentic. This mini-play highlights the growth of scientific methods involved in archaeology, and how experts from a variety of fields can work together to solve problems.

Many anthropologists believe that our species evolved from earlier hominids between 400,000 and 300,000 BC. *Homo sapiens* (“thinking man”) left behind evidence of his toolmaking abilities, such as flint for making stone tools, stone foundations from temporary shelters, and contemporary animal bones. Archaeologists have studied such artifacts discovered at a temporary settlement at Terra Amata in southern France dating to 250,000 BC. **“Around the Fire at Terra Amata”** re-creates a scene from this era.

In the 1950s, at the bottom of a hill built up over 800 years of urban growth, one of the first cities of the Neolithic Age was discovered. The original inhabitants of this site in present-day Turkey built an impressive network of rectangular, adjoining houses; courtyards; and shrines that formed a solid, impenetrable wall of defense around the city. The protagonists in **“Adventure in Çatal Hüyük”** discover the unique way these city dwellers moved from one building to the next—by climbing through hatches on rooftops, walking across roofs, and scaling ladders to reach different levels. People in this settled community not only refined toolmaking but also advanced agriculture and social organization. Notably, women played a major role in all aspects of society at Çatal Hüyük—social, economic, political, and religious.

WHO WAS THE PILTDOWN MAN?

CHARACTERS

Narrator **Ricki Fremont** **Arturo Sanchez** **Dr. Simms**

NARRATOR: Three days ago, a construction crew that was digging a new airport runway found a skull and some bones. Dr. Simms, an anthropologist, determined that the bones were from a woman who had died more than 300 years before. The city asked a team of archaeologists and anthropologists from the local university to excavate the site. They also called for student volunteers to help dig.

ARTURO: You're kidding, right? Tell me you're kidding.

RICKI: They need volunteers to help them dig at the site.

ARTURO: Archaeology! What do you know about archaeology?

RICKI: It's the study of ancient people and times. You look at what's left of their buildings, tools, weapons, dishes—

DR. SIMMS: Step up, step up! Name?

RICKI: Ricki Fremont.

ARTURO: Yeah, she wants to be an archaeologist when she grows up—which will be never.

DR. SIMMS: Really? Why?

ARTURO: Well, she has these dreams that'll never come true.

DR. SIMMS: Why do you want to become an archaeologist, Ricki?

RICKI: The Piltdown Man.

ARTURO: Hey, is that like the Pillsbury Dough—

RICKI: No. Some workers near a village in England called Piltdown found this old brown skull one day. They took it to a man named Mr. Dawson, who collected fossils. He dug around some more and found more bones. This was in 1910. Some scientists decided the bones were the "missing link" between apes and humans, and they named him *Eoanthropus dawsoni*.

DR. SIMMS: Excellent, Ricki.

ARTURO: *Dawsoni?* Hey, if I dig around and find something, can I name it after me? *Sanchezi?* That sounds pretty good.

RICKI: The scientists were wrong. The Piltdown Man wasn't even a man at all! Everybody found out later that the skull was from an orangutan. The bones weren't even that old.

DR. SIMMS: That's right. It wasn't until 1950, after the fluorine dating technique had been invented, that the hoax was discovered.

ARTURO: "The fluorine dating technique"? That sounds like something my sister uses on Saturday night.

DR. SIMMS: The bones had been stained and doctored to make them look older, and the test was able to show that.

ARTURO: So somebody messed with some bones and made up a story about them. What's the big deal?

RICKI: Because real bones were being found in other places, like Africa, and nobody could make them fit in with the Piltdown Man. The Piltdown Man threw everybody off the track for a while. That's why I want to be an archaeologist. I want to make sure we don't get thrown off the track again.

ARTURO: I'm good at that, getting thrown off the track.

DR. SIMMS: How are you at digging carefully and patiently?

ARTURO: Can I keep any cool-looking rocks I find? I like to collect rocks.

DR. SIMMS: Afraid not. Our geologists are using the rocks to tell us about what the environment was like more than 300 years ago.

ARTURO: You can tell all that from rocks? Hey, maybe I'm geologist material.

DR. SIMMS: You're both hired. Here are your tools. Remember—

RICKI AND ARTURO: Dig carefully and patiently.

ARTURO: And don't slip any rocks into your backpack.

“WHO WAS THE PILTDOWN MAN?”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What qualities do you think would make someone a good archaeologist?
- Why might archaeologists and geologists work together at a dig?

ACTIVITIES

WHODUNIT? THE PILTDOWN HOAX

So who were the perpetrators of the Piltdown Man hoax, and why did they do it? Students will enjoy researching the hoax, the debate about the identity of the culprits, and their motives for duping other scientists. Ask students to make a list of possible suspects and their motives, and open a discussion in which the class narrows the list.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVANCES

Challenge students to investigate and describe some 20th-century advances (e.g., carbon 14, fluorine, or DNA analyses) that have helped make archaeological research more accurate. A folded posterboard provides a perfect two-panel format on which students can display contrasting information, such as “Archaeology c.1900 vs. Archaeology c.2000” or “Old Dating Techniques vs. New Dating Techniques.”

MAPPING THE HOMINID HUNT

Invite students to map and label the areas in the Rift Valley and Ethiopian highlands where archaeologists, like the Leakeys and Donald Johanson, made important discoveries of hominid remains. Discuss why these areas may have turned up so many remains.

RESOURCES

BOOKS

Archaeology (Eyewitness Books) by Jane McIntosh (Knopf, 1994)

Lucy's Bones, Sacred Stones, & Einstein's Brain: The Remarkable Stories Behind the Great Objects and Artifacts of History, from Antiquity to the Modern Era by Harvey Rachlin (Holt, 1996) Challenging text with excellent information. See “Piltdown Man,” pages 297–302, and “Lucy the Hominid,” pages 15–21.

Mummies, Dinosaurs, Moon Rocks: How Do We Know How Old Things Are? by James Jespersen and Jane Fritz-Randolf (Athenium, 1996)

WEBSITE

The Museum of Unnatural History (www.unmuseum.mus.pa.us/piltdown.htm)

Click on “Piltdown: The Man That Never Was.”