Name: **Date:**

Directions: Read the passage on pages 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Then, answer the questions that follow.

Who Came Before Us? Exploring the First Humans

Humans didn't just appear overnight. We are part of a long history of ancient relatives known as **hominins**. A **hominin** is any species that is more closely related to modern humans than to chimpanzees. These include early humans and extinct **ancestors** that walked on two feet, used tools, and showed growing signs of **intelligence**.

The Earliest Evidence

The earliest known **hominin fossils** date back about 6 to 7 million years. One of the oldest discoveries is *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*, found in Chad, Africa. This **fossil** includes part of a skull with features showing it could walk upright. **Fossils** are preserved remains of ancient organisms, like bones or teeth, that help scientists learn about the past.

Who Studies Hominins?

People who study ancient human relatives are usually **paleoanthropologists**—scientists who specialize in studying ancient human **fossils**. A **paleoanthropologist** is a type of **anthropologist**, a person who studies human beings, including their cultures, physical traits, and history. Sometimes **archaeologists** also study **hominins**. **Archaeologists** focus more on ancient tools, homes, and artifacts left behind by humans and their **ancestors**, rather than bones.

Where and When Were They Discovered?

Many early **hominin fossils** have been discovered in Africa, often called the "Cradle of Humankind." Some important discoveries were made in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa. In 1974, **paleoanthropologist** Donald Johanson discovered

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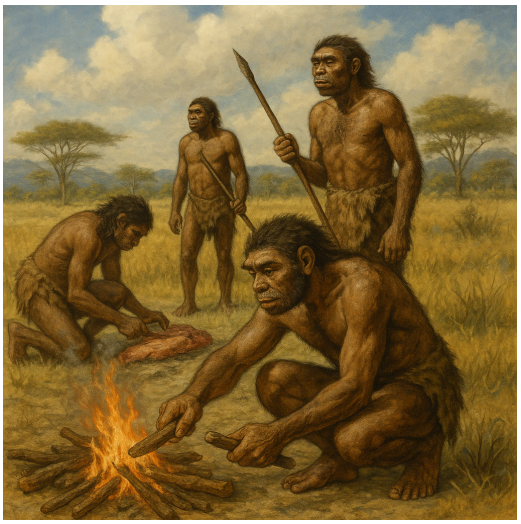
one of the most famous early **hominins**: Lucy, an *Australopithecus afarensis* **fossil** over 3 million years old.

Why Was Lucy Important?

Lucy's skeleton was about 40% complete, which is rare for **fossils** that old. She had both ape-like and human-like features. Her pelvis and leg bones showed that she walked on two legs—an important **trait** that scientists look for in **hominins**. Lucy helped prove that walking upright came before large brains in human evolution. Her discovery was a turning point that reshaped how scientists understand the timeline of early human **ancestors**.

Why *Homo erectus* Was a Game Changer



Another extremely important **hominin** group is *Homo erectus*. This group lived from about 1.9 million to 143,000 years ago and showed many new **capabilities**:

- **First Travelers:** *Homo erectus* was the first **hominin** known to **migrate** out of Africa. **Fossils** have been found in Asia and Europe, showing they spread far and adapted to many places.
- **Fire Users:** They were likely the first to use fire regularly. Fire gave warmth, safety, and allowed them to cook food, which made eating easier and helped support their growing brains.
- **Toolmakers:** *Homo erectus* created more advanced stone tools than earlier groups. These tools show planning and problem-solving—evidence of rising **intelligence**.
- **Modern Body Shape:** Their bodies looked more like ours—taller, leaner, and built for long-distance walking and running. They had larger brains than earlier **hominins**.
- **They Lived a Long Time:** *Homo erectus* existed for nearly 2 million years, longer than any other **hominin** group, which shows they were able to **survive** in many different environments.

Homo erectus represents a major step in human development. They were not yet like us, but they were getting much closer.

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Major Hominin Groups and Their Traits

Over time, different groups of hominins developed new capabilities, or special skills. Here are some of the main groups:

Hominin Group	Dates (Approx.)	Key Capabilities	Traits
Australopithecus	4 – 2 million years ago	Walked upright	Small brain, simple tools
Homo habilis	2.4 – 1.4 million years ago	Made stone tools	Larger brain, scavenger
Homo erectus	1.9 million – 143,000 years ago	Used fire, **migrated** out of Africa	Taller, **hunter gatherer**
Neanderthals (*Homo neanderthalensis*)	400,000 – 40,000 years ago	Complex tools, lived in **communities**	Strong build, cared for each other
Homo sapiens	300,000 years ago – present	Art, language, advanced tools	High **intelligence**, traveled widely

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Community, Ceremony, and Cooperation

As **hominins** continued to evolve, they didn't just get smarter—they started forming stronger social bonds. Two **hominin** groups in particular—**Neanderthals** and **Homo sapiens**—show clear signs of living in **communities**, helping each other, and even practicing **ceremony**.

Neanderthals often lived in small groups where they cared for injured members and likely shared food. **Archaeologists** have found **skeletons** with broken bones that healed over time—suggesting that others helped them **survive**. In some caves, scientists have discovered what may be burial sites, showing the possibility of **ceremony** or respect for the dead.

Homo sapiens, our own species, took these ideas even further. Early humans created **art**, wore **jewelry**, painted cave walls, and buried their dead with tools or special objects. These behaviors suggest that they had a sense of **identity**, memory, and shared meaning.

Both **Neanderthals** and **Homo sapiens** also show evidence of **cooperative hunting**. They worked together to track, chase, or trap large animals. **Fossils** and ancient tools found at hunting sites reveal that teamwork was an important **capability**—one that required **communication** and planning.

This growing cooperation helped early **Homo sapiens** become highly adaptable. As they formed close-knit **communities** and passed down knowledge through generations, they were able to **migrate** great distances and **survive** in new places. During the Ice Age, they crossed into a new **continent**, North America, from Asia using a natural land connection called the **Bering Land Bridge**. This **migration** was possible because of their ability to plan, cooperate, and respond to changing environments.

Together, these discoveries show that advanced **hominins** were not only smart—they were also connected to each other in powerful ways, building the foundation for modern human society.

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Vocabulary List

Term	Definition
Ancestor	A family member from the past; someone you descended from
Anthropologist	A person who studies human history and culture
Archaeologist	A scientist who studies human history by examining artifacts
Bering Land Bridge	An ancient land connection between Asia and North America
Capability	A skill or ability to do something
Ceremony	A meaningful event or action done for a special purpose or tradition
Community	A group of people who live or work together
Fossil	Preserved remains of a once-living organism
Hominin	An early human or a close relative that walked on two feet
Hunter Gatherer	A person who gets food by hunting and gathering plants
Migrate	To move from one place to another to live or survive
Paleoanthropologist	A scientist who studies ancient human fossils
Trait	A characteristic or quality of a person or species

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Multiple Choice Questions

Directions: Circle the letter of the correct answer.

1. What is a hominin?
a) A person who studies fossils
b) A close human relative that walked upright
c) A type of early tool
d) An ancient land bridge

2. Which fossil was discovered in Chad, Africa, and is one of the oldest known hominins?
a) Homo habilis
b) Lucy
c) Sahelanthropus tchadensis
d) Homo sapiens

3. What skill is most closely linked to Homo habilis?
a) Creating fire
b) Walking upright
c) Using complex language
d) Making stone tools

4. What made Lucy's discovery important?
a) She had a large brain
b) She used fire
c) She showed that upright walking came before big brains
d) She lived in Europe

5. What is one major trait of Homo erectus?
a) Painted cave walls
b) Buried their dead with jewelry
c) Cared for injured community members
d) Used fire and migrated out of Africa

6. Who studies ancient human fossils specifically?
a) Geologist
b) Archaeologist
c) Historian
d) Paleoanthropologist

7. Which group likely showed early signs of ceremony and respect for the dead?
a) Homo habilis
b) Australopithecus
c) Neanderthals
d) Homo erectus

8. Why was the Bering Land Bridge important?
a) It helped early humans migrate to North America
b) It allowed Homo habilis to use fire
c) It connected Africa to Asia
d) It was where Lucy was discovered

9. What is one reason Homo sapiens were highly adaptable?
a) They lived alone
b) They only ate plants
c) They passed down knowledge through generations
d) They never left Africa

10. What does the word "capability" mean as used in the passage?
a) A piece of stone
b) A preserved bone
c) A type of ancestor
d) A skill or ability

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Open-Ended Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions using complete sentences.

11. Why do scientists think Neanderthals cared for one another? What evidence supports this?

12. Describe at least two ways Homo erectus was different from earlier hominins.

13. What can the discovery of art and jewelry made by Homo sapiens tell us about their way of life?

14. Why do scientists consider the discovery of Lucy to be a turning point in our understanding of human evolution?

15. If Homo sapiens and Neanderthals lived during the same time, what advantages might have helped Homo sapiens survive and continue while Neanderthals disappeared?

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Matching Questions

Directions: Draw a line to match the hominin with its capabilities or traits.

Hominin Group	Capabilities or Traits
16. Australopithecus	Used fire and migrated far from Africa
17. Homo habilis	Created art, language, and advanced tools
18. Homo erectus	Walked upright, had a small brain
19. Neanderthals	Made simple stone tools, scavenged
20. Homo sapiens	Cared for the injured, used complex tools

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Answer Sheet for Teachers: LFL17 – Hominins

Multiple Choice Questions

1. b) A close human relative that walked upright **2. c)** Sahelanthropus tchadensis **3. d)** Making stone tools **4. c)** She showed that upright walking came before big brains **5. d)** Used fire and migrated out of Africa	**6. d)** Paleoanthropologist **7. c)** Neanderthals **8. a)** It helped early humans migrate to North America **9. c)** They passed down knowledge through generations **10. d)** A skill or ability

Open-Ended Questions

11. Why do scientists think Neanderthals cared for one another? What evidence supports this?
→ Scientists believe Neanderthals cared for one another because fossils show healed injuries. This suggests that others helped them survive while they recovered.
12. Describe at least two ways Homo erectus was different from earlier hominins.
→ Homo erectus used fire and migrated out of Africa. They also had a more modern body shape and made more advanced tools.
13. What can the discovery of art and jewelry made by Homo sapiens tell us about their way of life?
→ These discoveries suggest Homo sapiens had symbolic thinking, identity, and shared meaning. It shows they had culture and strong social bonds.
14. Why do scientists consider the discovery of Lucy to be a turning point in our understanding of human evolution?
→ Lucy's nearly 40% complete skeleton showed she walked upright, proving that walking came before large brains in evolution. This changed how scientists viewed human ancestry,
15. If Homo sapiens and Neanderthals lived during the same time, what advantages might have helped Homo sapiens survive and continue while Neanderthals disappeared?
→ Homo sapiens may have had stronger communication, symbolic thinking (like art and ceremony), and the ability to adapt and cooperate in large communities. These traits likely helped them outlast Neanderthals.

Teacher Guidance for Q15 (Higher-Order Thinking): This question requires inference. Look for: – Reference to art, jewelry, and symbolic behavior – Evidence of knowledge-sharing and migration – Emphasis on adaptability, communication, and cooperation – Encourage students to use both **textual evidence** and **reasoning**.	**Note:** Scientists **don't know exactly why Neanderthals disappeared**, and there is **no single proven cause**. Students should understand that while Homo sapiens had certain advantages (like stronger communication, symbolic thinking, and cooperation), the reasons Neanderthals went extinct are still debated.

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Matching Questions

Hominin Group	Capabilities or Traits
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