



How do we find out about the past?

Before people invented ways of writing to record stories, facts and information, we had to rely on archaeological evidence to help us find out what life was like. The period before writing was used is called prehistory.

Archaeologists are historians who find out about the past by looking at what people have left behind. They do this by digging up objects from the ground and by looking at changes made to the ground, like the remains of buildings or city walls.



These archaeologists are excavating a site in Egypt

We can find out a lot through archaeological evidence, such as where people lived, the kind of houses and buildings they built, the food they ate, the animals they kept and the objects they made but there are lots of things archaeology alone can't tell us about the time before writing was invented.



What kind of things can't we find out about the past just from archaeological evidence?



Did you think of these ideas?

People's opinions

People's names

What laws people had to live by

The stories people told

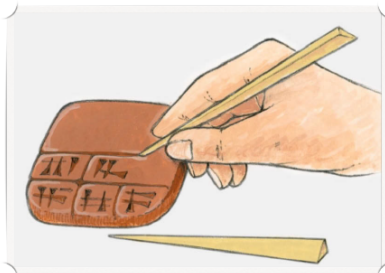
What people looked like

The gods people worshipped

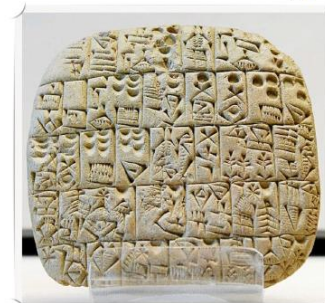
How society was organised

The very first writing system in the world was invented by the Sumerians around 3300 BC. The first writing used pictures as words but over the next 200 years, these pictures became wedge-shaped symbols. This system of writing is known as cuneiform writing.

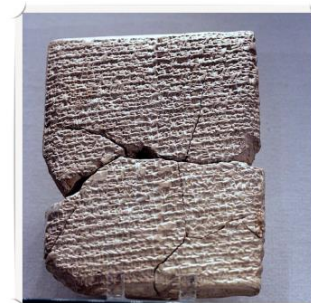
Writing was first used by the Sumerians as a way of keeping track of goods that were traded with other people. Eventually, they used writing to record stories, poems, laws and contracts.



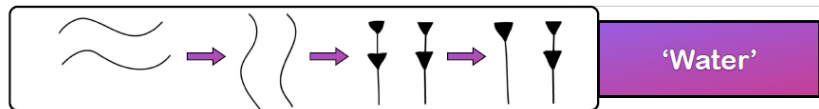
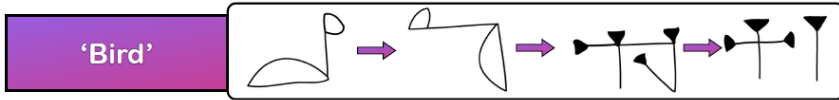
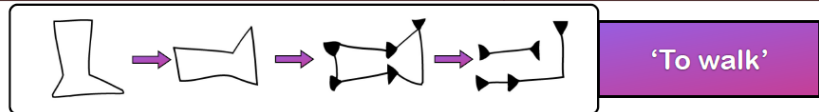
The Sumerians wrote on clay tablets using a reed called a stylus to mark the symbols into the clay. Each symbol represented a word or a sound.



This Sumerian clay tablet is a contract dealing with the sale of a house and a field



This clay tablet is a record of a song about King Ur-Namma



These pictures show how cuneiform writing developed over time from pictures to symbols.

Many other civilisations developed their own writing systems too. Most early writing systems started just like the Sumerian, Egyptian and Shang writing systems did with pictures and symbols representing words and then sounds.

The world's very first alphabet was developed by the Phoenicians. Each letter represented a sound so that words could be made up of several letters.

The Phoenician Alphabet

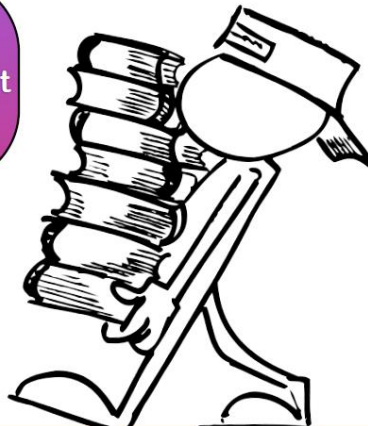
K	'	⊗	T	∩	P	⊠	Ch
∩	B	∩	Y	∩	C	⊠	'
∩	G	∩	K	∩	Q	⊠	S
∩	D	∩	L	∩	R	∩	Th
∩	H	∩	M	∩	Sh	∩	I
∩	W	∩	N				Z



Do you notice anything about the Phoenician alphabet? How is it different to ours?

How do you think the invention of writing has helped us find out about the past?

How do you think it changed the lives of people at the time?



After reading through the information, answer the final questions, then complete the tasks posted below.