Through the Ages

Prehistory in Britain started c750,000 BC, when several species of humans arrived from Europe. Prehistory is divided into three main periods, the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. Each period is named after the main material used to make tools at that time.

Stone Age			Bronze Age	Iron Age
Palaeolithic c750,000–c10,000 BC Duration: 740,000 years	**Mesolithic** c10,000–c4000 BC Duration: 6000 years	**Neolithic** c4000–c2500 BC Duration: 1500 years	c2500–c800 BC Duration: 1700 years	c800 BC–AD 43 Duration: 843 years

Stone Age

Tools and weapons – Tools were made from stone, wood and bone. They were used for digging, hunting and chopping.

Everyday life – Stone Age people were hunter-gatherers. They followed and killed animals and gathered seasonal food. They made clothes from animal skins and created cave art.

Settlements – People lived in temporary shelters or caves in the Palaeolithic. People lived in more permanent settlements in the Neolithic.

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Beliefs – People built monuments, including stone circles, henges and earthworks. Historians believe that they used these monuments for gatherings and worship.

End of the Stone Age – The Beaker folk arrived from Europe and brought their knowledge of metalworking to Britain.

Bronze Age

Tools and weapons – Bronze tools were sharper, stronger and more efficient than stone tools. Bronze tools were owned by the wealthy.

Everyday life – The Beaker folk brought their knowledge of metalworking and pottery making to Britain. Bronze tools made farming more efficient, so there was more food and the population grew.

Settlements – People lived in permanent settlements, in roundhouses. They used walls and fences to protect their homes.

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Beliefs – People were buried with objects, including Bell Beaker pottery, to use in the afterlife. They threw weapons and objects into rivers as offerings to the gods.

End of the Bronze Age – People stopped using metal during a time called the Bronze Age collapse.

Iron Age

Tools and weapons – Iron tools and weapons were sharp and strong. Everyone could own iron tools and weapons, not just the wealthy.

Everyday life – Iron tools made farming more efficient and iron weapons were available to everyone. Tribes attacked each other to steal their land, food and possessions. People created art, music and poetry.

Settlements – People lived in hillforts surrounded by ditches and fences to stop attacks from enemy tribes. People lived in roundhouses inside the hillfort and farmed the land outside.

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Beliefs – Priests called druids led worship. Humans were sacrificed as offerings to the gods. People threw votive offerings into rivers and lakes.

End of the Iron Age – The Romans invaded and conquered Britain in AD 43. They created written records, so this event ended prehistory in Britain.

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Definitions of time

There are many words that are used to describe time.

BC and AD	The birth of Jesus Christ separates time into two eras, BC, before Christ, and AD, after Christ was born.
BCE and CE	Sometimes, BC and AD are replaced by BCE and CE. BCE stands for 'before common era 'and CE stands for 'common era'. Therefore, 1 BC is the same as 1 BCE and AD 1 is the same as 1 CE.
era	An era is a period of history that begins with a significant event. The birth of Jesus Christ was a significant event that started a new era.
century	A century is 100 years. The first century AD was AD 1–AD 100. The first century BC was 100 BC–1 BC.
millennium	A millennium is 1000 years. The first millennium AD was AD 1–AD 1000. The first millennium BC was 1000 BC–1 BC.
prehistory	Prehistory is the time before written records were created. In Britain, prehistory ended in AD 43, when the Romans invaded.
prehistoric	The word prehistoric relates to any object, animal, person or place that existed before written records began.

Archaeological evidence

Archaeologists find out about prehistoric life by studying the artefacts and settlements left behind by prehistoric people.

Skara Brae is a Neolithic settlement in the Orkney Islands, Scotland. It has well preserved, interconnected houses made of stone.

Stonehenge is a stone circle in Wiltshire, England. It is made of stones from the local area and Wales. The stones line up with the Sun during midsummer and midwinter.

The **Amesbury Archer** was buried near Stonehenge with his tools, including arrowheads, a metalworking stone and some Bell Beaker pottery.

The **Mold cape** was made from one piece of gold the size of a golf ball. It is finely made and archaeologists believe that it was worn by a wealthy tribe leader.

The **Snettisham Great torc** was made during the Iron Age. It was worn around the neck and is crafted from twisted gold stands.

The **Battersea shield** was found in the river Thames. Archaeologists believe that it was put in the river as a votive offering to the gods in the Iron Age.

Glossary

archaeologist	Someone who studies artefacts from the past.
artefact	An object made by a person that is of historical interest.
Beaker folk	A group of people who travelled from Europe at the beginning of the Bronze Age and brought metalworking and pottery making skills to Britain.
bronze	A metal alloy made by mixing copper and tin.
Bronze Age collapse	A period at the end of the Bronze Age, when society collapsed in Britain and Europe.
Celts	A group of people who travelled from Europe and brought their ironworking skills to Britain.
circa	Abbreviated to 'c' and used before a date to show that the date is approximate. For example c2500 BC.
hillfort	A settlement built on a hill that is protected by ditches and fences.
stone circle	A circular arrangement of standing stones.
sacrifice	An animal or person that has been killed and offered to a god or gods.
torc	A rigid neck ring made from metal.
votive offering	An object placed in water or the ground as a gift to a god or gods.

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