

The Ancient Flute of Stone Hill

AGES 3-12 · 46 PAGES · TEPE SANG-E CHAKHMAGH, NEAR SHAHRUD, NORTH-EASTERN IRAN

A silver flute in the school music room sets Aryan wondering who first thought to make music. Homa carries him back eight thousand years to a village of early farmers, where someone has hollowed out the leg bone of a bird and cut holes along it.

THE BIG QUESTION — FOR EVERY STUDENT

How do we know people made music, when music leaves nothing behind?

Ask it of the whole class. The supports below are for students who need a way in — not an easier question.

Words to know

Neolithic flute instrument migratory archaeologist

Before you read

- What is the simplest thing in this room you could make a sound with?

Talk about it

- The oldest flute we know of was made from a bird's leg bone. Why a bone, and not wood or stone?
IF STUCK *A bone would be good because it is already ...*
- Nobody wrote down a single note of the music played on it. So what does the flute itself still tell us?
IF STUCK *Even without the music, the flute tells me they ...*
- Making this took planning, tools and practice. What does that say about a village people sometimes call “primitive”?
IF STUCK *These people must have been good at ...*
- The flute has four holes along it and one at the end. Why is one tube with holes cleverer than five separate tubes?
IF STUCK *One tube is better because ...*

Make it

Five Straws, Five Notes

20-25 MINUTES

Five drinking straws per pair, scissors, and sticky tape.

Step-by-step instructions are on the student sheet overleaf — photocopy one per child.

Check they got it

Ask each pair to blow their **shortest** straw and then their **longest**, and say which is higher. Then ask **why**. Listen for something about the length of the tube. “It just is” or “I blew harder” means the rule has not landed — have them blow the same straw softly and loudly and check whether the note actually changed.

What students often get wrong

- ✗ That blowing harder makes a higher note. It makes a louder one — length changes pitch, effort changes volume.
- ✗ That the oldest instrument found is the oldest instrument made. Wood and reed rot; bone survives. We find what lasts.
- ✗ That early farmers had no spare time for art. Making this took hours of skilled work that somebody chose to spend.

The real archaeology

- The flute was carved from the leg bone of a large migratory bird, using stone tools, more than 8,000 years ago.
- It has four finger holes along its length plus one at the end — several notes from a single tube.
- It comes from Tepe Sang-e Chakhmagh, a village occupied roughly 7200–5200 BCE, and is displayed in the National Museum of Iran in Tehran.

Which straw sings highest?

Eight thousand years ago, somebody took the leg bone of a bird, cut five holes in it, and played it. You are going to find out the rule they already knew.

- 1 Cut five straws to five different lengths. Make the longest about as long as your hand and a half.
- 2 Blow gently **across** the top of each one, like blowing over a bottle.
- 3 Listen hard. Write **high** or **low** next to each straw below.
- 4 Put them in order, shortest to longest. Tape them together side by side.

My five straws are this long:

Shortest straw sounds

Middle straw sounds

Longest straw sounds

So my rule is: the shorter the straw, the

Now think: The ancient flute was ONE tube with holes in it, not five separate tubes. Why was that a better idea?

One thing I would ask the person who made the first flute:

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Finished early? Blow the same straw softly, then hard. Does the note change — or just the loudness?