

Great Lesson 3

ESSORI RY

The Coming of Humans



Addla Montessori

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The Long Black Strip

This a Key Lesson that should be given before the Coming of Humans.

Materials:

A long black strip rolled round a handle measuring 100 feet long with a white piece at the end the width of a child's hand.

Presentation:

Give this lesson outside so that you have enough space to unroll the material. You may say nothing as you unroll the piece and end with saying:

“This little white part represents the entire time that human beings have been on Earth. Compare it to the black strip, which represents the age of the Earth.”

There are other versions which we will consider in the next module.

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This lesson does not require you to read it word for word. You may give a shorter or simpler version but you must make the following Key Points:

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Materials: There are none. You can come up with pictures or props that you may want to use though as you can see has been done in the 2nd version of this great lesson.

The Coming of Humans

Have you ever wondered what may have caused the emergence of human beings? This is a lesson that may answer some of those questions.

(You need to make a map of Africa that shows where the apes live now and a map that shows where human fossils have been found)

Thirty-five million years ago in the Miocene Era the great apes flourished in the warm forested areas of Africa, Europe and Asia. This was their period of greatness, but it was not to last. During the next 15 million years the Earth entered a long period of cooling. The North and South Pole ice packs expanded causing the rest of the Earth to become drier. The forests shrank and the deserts grew. The apes became isolated in small forested areas of Africa and Southeast Asia. They competed with the monkeys for food and habitation and the monkeys were winning. Perhaps the monkeys succeeded because they could eat unripe fruit which left less choice for the apes who had to wait until the fruit ripened.

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By 10 million years ago, there were only 4 species of apes left: the gorilla, orangutan, chimpanzee and bonobo. Paleontologists have recently uncovered fossils of a new extinct species that lived 4.5 million years ago, *Ardipithecus ramidus*, ground man who may be the root of all humans, in Aramis, Ethiopia. The fossils are human-like in that the eye teeth are smaller and the base of the skull is small which means that this ape was bipedal, walking on two legs. Animals that walk with four legs or on their knuckles need a large base of the skull to accommodate the large muscles that hold up the head. The fossils were also ape-like though, in that the molars were small and had a light covering of enamel which shows that it ate mostly fruit. It lived at the forest's edge.

Why would apes have left the forest? Perhaps the answers can be found in Earth itself. The continent of Africa lies on two plates which are slowly pulling apart. A giant rift running from Ethiopia, through Kenya, Tanzania and into Mozambique is the result of this endless pressure. Mountains also formed along the edges as magma rose from the Earth's mantle. These mountains changed the climate slowly but steadily. The area west of the rift remained moist and the forests flourished while the area east of the rift became drier and the forest slowly disappeared, replaced by savannas or grasslands. It was on this side of the rift that a new species of apes made its home.

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This new ape flourished and evolved, and over the next 2 million years, several species lived in Africa each in a particular habitat, along the lakes, at the forest's edge or in the grassland itself and each developing different skills and life styles. They became tool users and ate a diet particular to their habitat. Paleontologists call this era the Lower Paleolithic or Early Stone Age.

Then around 2 million years ago, the Earth became even drier. Most species of humans died off, unable to sustain themselves on the dwindling food. One, however, found a way to survive. Homo Erectus was an important turning point in human evolution. They lived mainly around the watering holes of animals. Here they could use tools that they manipulated into shapes that served their needs to either kill animals or scavenge from those killed by others.

They copied the strengths they observed in other animals - using sticks like the claws of lions to dig and axes and spears to hunt and rip open their prey. They ate a variety of food, but a good quantity of their food was meat. This new diet allowed them to eat less and receive more energy; their brain grew and their bodies became taller, even reaching 6 feet. Their hips became more like ours so that walking long distances became possible and walk they did. By 1 million years ago Homo Erectus had populated all the warmer areas of Earth.

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While isolated in different areas Homo Erectus developed different characteristics and life styles related to their habitat, but their tools remained virtually unchanged for about 500,000 years. The Earth was again cooling and many societies did not survive as the ice moved down into Europe. In Europe one group successfully evolved into a hardy species known as Neanderthal. They had wide nasal passages to warm the cold air before it entered their lungs and stocky, strong bodies that conserved energy. They would live on until 35,000 years ago when their numbers finally dwindled to extinction. Homo Erectus did not survive the Earth's challenge.

In Africa however, the humans had been isolated. The Sahara had spread until North Africa was cut off and the Kalahari Desert had separated north Africa. The forests again shrank, but humans living between the great deserts were again evolving. New tools were being developed and their brain size was close to that of modern humans. When the ice age ended, they again walked out of Africa into the Middle East and Asia, One more geological event was to challenge the survival of this new species. 74,000 years ago Mount Toba in Sumatra exploded in the largest volcanic eruption known to date. The Earth again cooled as the sun was blocked by huge clouds of ash. Many animals died, but this new species named Homo Sapiens did survive and 30,000 years ago the Earth supported about 300,000 people. These new people moved into all habitable areas of Earth and slowly evolved into the many kinds of people that we see today.

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Our history on Earth is very short. 200,000 years is a blink of an eye in the history of all life on Earth. Many species, including some of our own, have tried to find a life here on Earth only finding the challenge too great. Remember that life on Earth began its journey over 3 billion years ago with small microorganisms too small to detect. They have led us to our present diversity. All life is interconnected with each other and with the Earth itself. It is up to each one of us to protect the Earth and the species that have evolved over so many millions of billions of years ago.

Another Version – Montessori Kiwi

A long time ago there were plants and animals all over the earth. Some had skeletons in their body and some had skeletons outside their body. Some lived in the water and some lived on the land. The **plants and animals lived in harmony** because the plants helped provide food for the animals and the animals helped provide food for the plants. By this time Earth had most of the life that still is around today.



One tremendous creature was not yet on earth. It was a type of mammal. This mammal had two legs, two arms and hands with fingers and a thumb. It had a space in its body where it carried its babies. It also had a really large brain. It was a **human**.

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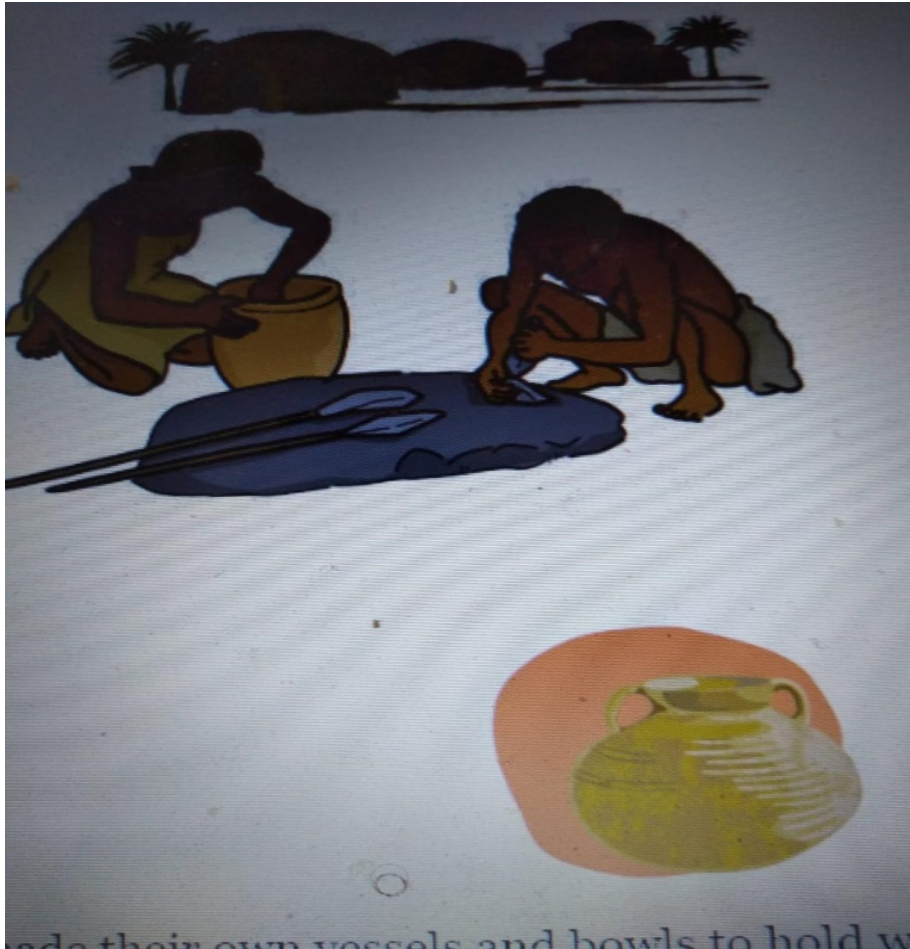
No one really knows the date or time the first humans appeared on earth. There were no televisions or phones to record it but we do know that it was many million years ago. The world of the first humans was really different from what we have today. Sometimes it was **very, very hot** and sometimes it was the opposite. There also some very big animals roaming about.

Humans found they needed things to help them survive and they spent a lot of time making sure they could get those things. Oxygen was easy enough to find but food and water was a bit harder. People couldn't go to a supermarket or shop so they had to hunt for **food** and safe water. People also needed shelter and clothes but there wasn't anyone available to sell any of these items yet. That meant they had to use things around them.

When people wanted to go and get food or shelter they had to move long distances to do so. Today we move from place to place with things like cars and bicycles but back then people used their **feet** to get around.

Can you picture yourself in the world of the early humans?

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Early humans were good survivors. They quickly worked out ways to meet their needs. One thing they worked out with their large brains was that they needed to work together to help each other get things they needed. One thing they needed was food. They worked together to look for plants and then animals. When they were getting animals for food they ran after them and grabbed them with their hands. Look at your hand. Your hand has a **thumb** which moves or rotates in a circle and helps you grab things and hold onto them tightly. This is a very special skill other animals don't have. They don't have a thumb like ours.

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As humans had amazing hands and brains they worked out that they could use the things around them like **sticks** and stones as tools. Maybe someone picked up a large branch and shook it to scare an animal that was chasing a person. Maybe someone threw a stone into the water to help catch a fish. I wonder what else they used their early tools for.

With their brains early humans learned that they could combine the tools to make better tools, for example, putting a stone and stick together could make a club. **A stone could be sharpened and attached to a stick to make a type of axe**, this could have been very helpful when hunting for animal meat.

Early humans made another important discovery as they went around hunting and gathering food with their tools. Some of the plants they found could be used as a type of **medicine**. Maybe someone chewed a leaf one day when they had a sore tooth and found it helpful, maybe someone rubbed some juice from a fruit on their leg when it was sore and found it helped. These were the first types of medicines known to man.

We have already talked about how life was very different for early humans and how they had to work for long distances to find food. I wonder how you feel after a long walk. Tired? The first humans got tired after walking around looking for food to eat. Often they would have fallen asleep under **the stars**, sometimes they may have slept in a cave which would have been a little warmer.

It may have gotten quite cold at night times and at some times of the year and even the caves may not have kept people warm. The early humans though thought about the items around them and used the **skins of the animals** they had killed for food to keep them warm.

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Once they started sleeping in caves early humans started **decorating the inside** of the caves with crushed berries and stones. They drew pictures and left messages for others.



(If you are doing this story in multiple sittings you may stop here.)

As time went by, thousands of years actually, humans worked out new ways of doing things. One thing they worked out was how to make their **homes cooler/warmer** than the caves. They used wood from the trees, and learned how to make bricks from mud and clay.

Early humans made **fire** through rubbing dry sticks together and then carrying the coals with them so they could start fires as they moved around. The fires were also useful for cooking food and giving light at night time. It was also used to keep warm when needed. Maybe they even used the fire to scare away some big scary animals.



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On the subject of animals, humans soon learned that not all animals were scary, some could be very helpful as friends and helpers. Dogs were good pets, sheep could be very useful for wool, and **horses** gave a quicker way of getting to places and helping with carrying things around.

In order to carry things around humans soon learned how to **weave baskets**. They used them to carry things in. They also learned how to weave mats. At this time humans made another discovery maybe it happened while they were weaving and they dropped some seeds to the ground. Their discovery was that plants grew from seeds. The early humans planted the seeds and began to grow plants.



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Some of these plants made **kernels** or seeds. The kernels and seeds were hard. Through experimenting early humans learned they could soak or grind the kernels to make them good to eat. They even made a tool called a mortar and pestle to make it easier. In one of their experiments they found they could mix the ground up kernels with water and cook it over the fire to make a type of bread.

Speaking of fire humans found that a certain brown-red rock could be useful if it was heated up in a fire. It could be turned into tools or jewelry. Today we call this metal **copper**. Humans now had both stone and copper to make things from.

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Copper wasn't the only useful metal humans found. Early humans found that combining copper and tin made a harder metal than copper and started making material out of that. This metal is called **bronze**. We now call that time the **Bronze Age**. A little later, humans found an even stronger metal called **iron** and we call that time the **Iron Age**.

At some point humans stopped walking around and settled down to live in one place, they got their food through **farming**. Farming came in useful for trading.



Finally, someone had the idea of **trading**. Trading is when you swap one thing for another thing, for example, some people may have had a whole lot of cows but they needed some grain. They might have swapped ten cows to get enough grain to feed their village. Today people and countries still trade things.

In our class we have certain ways of doing things The same happened to the early humans. People who lived together for a while started doing things the same way, they developed what we call a **culture** for example they may have dressed in a similar way, eaten similar foods, sung certain songs together that became special to them.

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Each culture had foods, clothing and shelter that became important to them and their needs for example people in our part of the world Africa - Nigeria eat yam, maize and cassava, and fans and air conditioners to keep cool. People in other parts of the world may do things a bit differently than we do and have different things that are important to them.

Each culture had other things that were important to them such as their beliefs or their ways of **decorating themselves** or looking after their sick.

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One of the most important parts of each culture was **its language**. Just like how each culture was a little different languages around the world were a little different too. People used words to speak to each other and then something amazing happened people worked out how to write down messages to each other, but that is a story for another day!

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Follow up topics for this Lesson

1. Fundamental Needs of Man
2. Fundamental Needs of People across Cultures - Food, clothes, shelter, health, money, shelter, communication, defence, transportation, Social Acceptance, Culture, Legal system and Religion
3. Life of humans through the passage of time: Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Indigenous Culture, Industrial Age, Modern Age (Usually Upper Primary)
4. Study the History of Tools, Religion, Communication, Transportation, of your Country and of another Country etc.
5. Connect to the issues that currently plague our planet and mankind, displaced people and refugees. Who are they? What are their needs?
6. Human and Civil Right issues
7. Family Tree, Making a book about their family.

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