Prehistory 1: The Stone Age
Paleolithic (Old Stone Age)

900,000 BC—10,000 BC

Flint tools found in 2010 near Happisburgh in Norfolk have been dated to about 900,000 years ago, pushing back the earliest identified human occupation of Britain by up to 100,000 years. Their users were among the hominids (early humans) who periodically visited Britain (which was then not an island, but joined to mainland Europe), sometimes over long periods, in warmer eras between successive Ice Ages.

The earliest footprints found outside of Africa, on the beach at Happisburgh.

Facial reconstruction of Neanderthal man

The oldest human remains so far found in England, at Boxgrove in Sussex, date from about 500,000 years ago, and belonged to a six-foot tall man of the species Homo heidelbergensis. Shorter, stockier ‘Neanderthals’ visited Britain between 300,000 and 35,000 years ago, followed by the direct ancestors of modern humans.
Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age)

10,000 BC—4000 BC

Around 10,000 years ago, the latest ice age came to an end. Sea levels rose as the ice sheets melted, and Britain became separated from the European mainland shortly before 6000 BC. The people living on the new islands of Britain were descendants of the first modern humans, or *Homo sapiens*, who arrived in northern Europe around 30,000 - 40,000 years ago. Like their early ancestors they lived by hunting and gathering.

Mesolithic people were hunters and gatherers, hunting wild animals and harvesting wild plants. They used flint, stone or bone tools.

**Star Carr** is an important Mesolithic site in Yorkshire dating to around 9000 BC. Rare finds have been preserved in the peat including headdresses made from red deer skulls and barbed harpoons (above). Other finds include flint tools, animal bones and waterlogged work with the earliest evidence of carpentry in Britain.
Neolithic (New Stone Age)

4000 BC—2500 BC

The introduction of farming, when people learned how to produce rather than acquire their food, is widely regarded as one of the biggest changes in human history. The transition from hunter-gatherer to farmer was relatively gradual. People still relied on wild food and resources, apparently remaining fairly mobile within territories, which were focused on great communal monuments.

The introduction of pottery, domesticated animals such as cattle, sheep and goats and seed grains of wheat and barley came from the continent but recent DNA research estimates that the influx of new people to Britain was around 20% of the population.

The Neolithic settlement at Skara Brae on the island of Orkney in Scotland, complete with stone bed, dresser and central fireplace.

Newgrange
World Heritage Site in Ireland, a 5200 year old passage tomb.
From around 3800 BC Neolithic people began to construct large ceremonial monuments. The earliest of these were *causewayed enclosures* (right) and *long barrows* such as West Kennet.

Henge monuments developed by around 3000 BC most famously at Stonehenge *(left)*. Many of these henges and barrows were aligned to the winter and summer solstice.

Neolithic houses are rare to discover and very little remains are excavated. Houses tended to be rectangular in floor plan with *wattle* and *daub* walls and thatched roofs (reconstructed house, right). By around 3000 BC circular houses become more common.

Polished flint axe head measuring 150mm in length, 77mm in width, 34mm in thickness, and weighs 469g.
Further study
A selection of sites across the British Isles to explore and to gain a deeper understanding of the Stone Age.

Stonehenge
World Heritage Site
http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/stonehenge/

Orkney
World Heritage Site including, Skara Brae, Maeshowe, Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar.

Star Carr
Mesolithic site in Yorkshire
http://starcarr.com/index.html

The Neolithic flint mines at Grime’s Graves in Norfolk.
http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/grimes-graves-prehistoric-flint-mine/
Activities
Stone Age themed ideas to try out in the classroom or at home.

Make some Stone Age art, from hand stencils to hunting scenes as depicted on the cave paintings at Lascaux in France.

Make some Stone Age paint
Stone Age people crushed rocks containing red and yellow ochre and charcoal from burnt wood mixed with animal fat and water. You can make some using different coloured soil, sieved to remove stones, twigs etc then mix with water or fat or PVA and water to make it more permanent or simply use paint from the art store.

Hand Stencils
Use an artists atomizer to blow paint onto a vertically mounted piece of card or paper with your hand held firmly in place. Be careful not to suck! Or place your hand and paper on a flat surface and use a sponge to dab the paint around your hand.

Arrange a trip to Hands on Heritage to try out ancient crafts and skills.
Visit: http://handsonheritage.weebly.com/