

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Passage: History

Grade 6

SOURCE: The Story of Mankind by Hendrik Van Loon

PREHISTORIC MAN

PREHISTORIC MAN BEGINS TO MAKE THINGS FOR HIMSELF.

EARLY man did not know what time meant. He kept no records of birthdays or wedding anniversaries or the hour of death. He had no idea of days or weeks or even years. But in a general way he kept track of the seasons for he had noticed that the cold winter was **invariably** followed by the mild spring—that spring grew into the hot summer when fruits ripened and the wild ears of corn were ready to be eaten and that summer ended when sudden gusts of wind swept the leaves from the trees and a number of animals were getting ready for the long **hibernal** sleep.

But now, something unusual and rather frightening had happened. Something was the matter with the weather. The warm days of summer had come very late. The fruits had not ripened. The tops of the mountains which used to be covered with grass now lay deeply hidden underneath a heavy burden of snow.

Then, one morning, a number of wild people, different from the other creatures who lived in that neighbourhood, came wandering down from the region of the high peaks. They looked lean and appeared to be starving. They uttered sounds which no one could understand. They seemed to say that they were hungry. There was not food enough for both the old **inhabitants** and the newcomers. When they tried to stay more than a few days there was a terrible battle with claw-like hands and feet and whole families were killed. The others fled back to their mountain slopes and died in the next **blizzard**.

But the people in the forest were greatly frightened. All the time the days grew shorter and the nights grew colder than they ought to have been.

Finally, in a gap between two high hills, there appeared a tiny speck of greenish ice. Rapidly it increased in size. A gigantic glacier came sliding downhill. Huge stones were being pushed into the valley. With the noise of a dozen thunderstorms torrents of ice and mud and blocks of **granite** suddenly tumbled among the people of the forest and killed them while they slept. Century old trees were crushed into kindling wood. And then it began to snow.

It snowed for months and months. All the plants died and the animals fled in search of the southern sun. Man **hoisted** his young upon his back and followed them. But he

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could not travel as fast as the wilder creatures and he was forced to choose between quick thinking or quick dying. He seems to have preferred the former for he has managed to survive the terrible glacial periods which upon four different occasions threatened to kill every human being on the face of the earth.

In the first place it was necessary that man clothe himself lest he freeze to death. He learned how to dig holes and cover them with branches and leaves and in these traps he caught bears and hyenas, which he then killed with heavy stones and whose skins he used as coats for himself and his family.

Next came the housing problem. This was simple. Many animals were in the habit of sleeping in dark caves. Man now followed their example, drove the animals out of their warm homes and claimed them for his own.

Even so, the climate was too severe for most people and the old and the young died at a terrible rate. Then a genius bethought himself of the use of fire. Once, while out hunting, he had been caught in a forest-fire. He remembered that he had been almost roasted to death by the flames. Thus far fire had been an enemy. Now it became a friend. A dead tree was dragged into the cave and lighted by means of **smouldering** branches from a burning wood. This turned the cave into a cozy little room.

And then one evening a dead chicken fell into the fire. It was not rescued until it had been well roasted. Man discovered that meat tasted better when cooked and he then and there **discarded** one of the old habits which he had shared with the other animals and began to prepare his food.

In this way thousands of years passed. Only the people with the cleverest brains survived. They had to struggle day and night against cold and hunger. They were forced to invent tools. They learned how to sharpen stones into axes and how to make hammers. They were obliged to put up large stores of food for the endless days of the winter and they found that clay could be made into bowls and jars and hardened in the rays of the sun. And so the glacial period, which had threatened to destroy the human race, became its greatest teacher because it forced man to use his brain.

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Discussion Questions

Record the answers for these questions in your journal notebook.

A. READ TO UNDERSTAND.

Complete the following summary of the passage with suitable words from the help box.

cleverest glacial nourished survive

It was during the _____ period that the _____ of mankind _____. This period was a trying time and meant that man had to find a safe place to keep warm and be _____.

B. FIND THE MEANING OF THE FOLLOWING WORDS:

Invariably, hibernal, inhabitants, blizzard, granite, hoisted, discarded, smouldering

C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How do you start a fire without a lighter?
2. When was the glacial period?
3. Name three animals that did not survive the glacial period?

D. ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS.

1. What was being referred to as unusual and frightening?
2. Why did the old inhabitants and the newcomers fight?
3. How did the people in the forest die?
4. How long did it snow?
5. What was the two solution man thought that would ensure his survival during the winter?
6. How did early man survive the cold winter?
7. How did early man make weapons?

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E. DISCUSS

1. How important was fire to early man?
2. How did fire change the way mankind do things?
3. How did man discover fire?
4. How does the cold affect people?
5. What was man's challenge in the early times?
6. What did the glacial period teach early mankind?