

Nature's Gifts: The Materials of the Earth

It is early morning. The first rays of the sun slip into the mouth of the cave. The family group that is sleeping inside begins to wake up. The women stir up the fire. The children gather wood. The men check their weapons, which are stout wooden spears. Each spear has a stone point at the tip. The men will hunt today. Food supplies are low. There isn't much to eat for breakfast, only scraps of meat left over from the evening meal.

The women and children will also go in search of food. They take rough baskets made of bark and reeds. While the men wander the grassland looking for game (animals that are hunted for meat), the women and children hunt for food in the forest. They gather berries in the baskets.

They use sharpened sticks to dig up tasty roots. If they are lucky, there will be a feast for the whole group this night!



People have always used the materials offered by nature to make the things they need. These things make life better and easier. Even the earliest humans found ways to make useful tools. They chipped hard stone into sharp spear points. They used flexible bark to make baskets. They sharpened strong sticks to make

digging tools. They used the skins of animals to make clothing and blankets.

It has been thousands of years since these early humans roamed the Earth. Our way of life has changed a great deal. Humans have learned much more about the Earth's natural materials. We have learned how to use these materials in better ways.

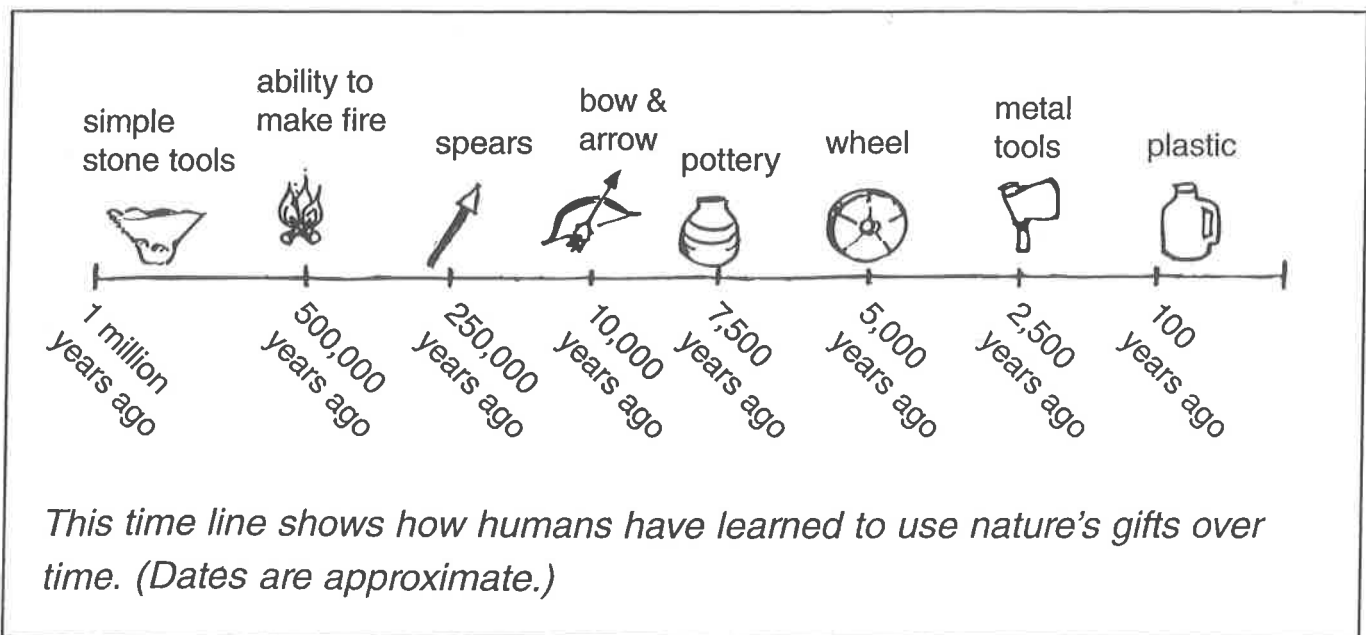
For instance, we have learned to take fiber from plants, like cotton, and make it into cloth. We have learned to use plants for other purposes, too. Today many products are made from plants. Oils, paint, soap, and medicines are a few of these products.

We have learned to use metals like copper, iron, gold, and silver. We use these metals to make many useful things. Metals are used to make machinery, automobiles, and airplanes. Metals are also used to make coins and jewelry. We have even learned how to mix metals to make new materials. Two or more metals mixed together form an alloy. Some alloys are very useful because they are lightweight but very strong.

Brand new materials have been developed, too. Plastics, for example,

are not found in nature. They are made by mixing chemicals that are found in natural materials such as petroleum (oil), coal, and certain kinds of plants. Many different kinds of plastics can be made from these chemicals. Plastics are used to make a wide variety of objects. Ketchup bottles, trash cans, football helmets, and even parts for the space shuttles are made of plastic!

We are constantly learning more about the materials that make up our world. Every day inventors try to find new uses for nature's gifts. Every day scientists try to combine these materials in new ways. It is hard to imagine what the future holds. There will probably be many exciting discoveries in your lifetime. The materials of the Earth are truly gifts to treasure.



Name _____



Questions about *Nature's Gifts:* *The Materials of the Earth*

1. Next to each material, write the name of an object made by early humans.

stone _____

bark _____

animal skins _____

wood _____

2. List four products that are made today from each material.

plants

metals

plastics

3. From what are plastics made?

4. Do you think the author chose a good title for this article? Explain your thinking.

Name _____



Vocabulary

We can often learn the meaning of a word by the way it is used in the sentence. This is called the "context." Use context clues to complete the exercises below.

1. The soldier cleaned his **weapon** before the battle began.

Circle the name of the object that is **not** usually used as a weapon.

gun bowl spear arrow

2. My sister likes to **wander** through the hills on her horse.

Circle the word that means the same as "wander."

fall sneak sit roam

3. The **flexible** gymnast did a backbend with ease.

Circle the word that means the opposite of "flexible."

rough old stiff tiny

4. The old man uses a **stout** cane when he walks down the street.

Circle the word that means the same as "stout."

strong thin short yellow

5. Ralph used a very strong **alloy** to make the parts for his airplane.

Circle the best answer. An alloy is a mixture of:

plastics metals chemicals plants

6. Sam is very good at tracking **game**.

Circle the word that does **not** name a kind of game.

deer rabbit corn squirrel

7. We bought the building **materials** we needed at the lumberyard.

Circle the items that might have been purchased.

clothing nails boards potato chips hammer

Name _____



Favorite Things

Everyone has a few favorite objects. Think of one object that you treasure a great deal. What is it?

What is it made of?

What is the object used for?

Where did it come from?

Why is this object so special to you?

Draw a picture of the object in the box below.