



Suitable for
Ages 8+

Resource pack
& activities

Our Transcapes

Queering British Prehistory





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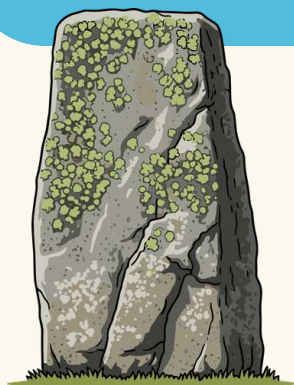
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Please note - whilst the activities in this resource pack are suitable for young people age 8-16, one of the artefact case studies (see page 7) includes discussion of the human body and nudity. We advise discretion when sharing this with young people and activity leaders may wish to make parents/carers aware beforehand.



Exploring Prehistory Through a Queer Lens



Introduction

Hello! I'm S. K. Marley, a trans* non-binary creative facilitator, researcher and writer studying Mesolithic Archaeology at the University of York. For the past couple of years I've been an artist in residence on the [Queer Natures](#) project at the University of Exeter, developing the [Our Transcapes](#) project.



Our Transcapes is a journey through prehistoric Britain. It explores artefacts, landscapes and stories that show how people valued '**non-duality**': a life view that doesn't incorporate binary opposites and allows for fluidity and transformation.



This storytelling is supported by a guided walk through landscapes, featuring replica artefacts from different periods. The Our Transcapes event ends with a creative workshop. The project is primarily aimed at transgender folks in the UK, as it hopes to disprove current day anti-trans narratives in mainstream media and politics. However, it can be delivered to anyone, as we can all find freedom from the boxes society prescribes.



This resource pack includes guidance on how to run a nature walk like those we run as part of the Our Transcapes project, plus three creative indoor activities that can be delivered to groups of young people.

When delivering the activities in this pack to young people at YAC sessions, our goal can be to use creative engagement that inspires open-mindedness and empathy when it comes to difference. This can not only make your young folks more critical investigators of themselves and of the past, but can help them understand people who might look or live differently to them today. All good stuff!

Queering Prehistory

Queering the past isn't about 'proving' trans or queer people existed 'back then'. We have no idea what gender norms were in the Mesolithic, so how

can we call anyone straight or queer/gay/transgender? Instead, **it's about questioning ourselves as archaeologists and how we present that past, trying to avoid or question the assumptions we might make.**



For example, prehistoric people sexed as men and women in a double burial are often assumed to have been romantically involved, despite there being no evidence for it. Meanwhile, same-sexed people buried together are often assumed to not be romantically involved. This is an example of imposing current-day culture onto an unrelated one, where 'straight' is 'the norm'.

A good example of this is the '**Upton Lovell Shaman**', This Bronze Age individual was buried in Wiltshire with a range of objects including bone jewellery, flint axes and hammers and burnishing stones which may have been used for creating jewellery. The buried individual was, therefore, interpreted as an important leader and metal worker.

However, when the burial was discovered in the early 19th century it was assumed that only a man could hold such an important position in a society. This and the fact that they were tall and robustly built led archaeologists to sex their skeleton as male. A secondary grave nearby contained another skeleton which was sexed female and assumed to be the metal-worker's wife. Whilst this second skeleton has sadly been lost, the DNA analysis on the surviving bones of the metal-worker has revealed that this person is actually biologically female.



^ Bone jewellery from the 'Upton Lovell Shaman' burial. Photo credit: [Wiltshire Museum](#)



Find out more about this interesting discovery.

In Our Transcapes, we explore many different examples of non-duality from across prehistoric Europe. These include the artefacts described on the following pages.



If you want to discover more examples of artefacts that 'queer' our current-day assumptions about nature, sex, gender and ecology, you can get in touch with S.K. at s.k.marley.author@gmail.com!



Non-duality through artefacts: Star Carr Headdresses



Star Carr is a Mesolithic site in North Yorkshire which was occupied around 9,300 BCE 11,300 years ago for 800 years. Key discoveries included remains of houses, wooden walkways, animal bones, tools and other everyday objects. Many objects were found deposited in a lake, including 33 fascinating objects made from deer skulls which would have been worn as headdresses.



Image credit: The Yorkshire Museum



^ An example of one of the deer frontlets from Star Carr on display at the Yorkshire Museum. Find out more about these fascinating objects here:

<http://www.starcarr.com/headdress.html>

We believe from contemporary examples that animal bone may have been believed to hold qualities of the deceased animal. If that's true, then maybe these headdresses imbued their wearer with qualities of the stag that died, turning them into half animal, half human beings.



Non-duality through artefacts: Iron Age 'god dollies'

Discretion is advised when discussing nudity and genitalia with young people.

Across Europe we have found examples of anthropomorphic wooden dolls. They were often placed in lakes, bogs or marshes so we believe they were made to protect people crossing difficult terrains. Some god dollies found in Britain and Ireland have interchangeable genitalia, such as removable phalluses, or - like the Somerset God Dolly - attached breasts and an attached phallus. This suggests there might have been some powerful aspect to having a 'non-dual' sex or gender.



< The Roos Carr god dollies, currently on display at the Hull and East Riding Museum. Find out more about these fascinating objects here: <https://www.hullmuseums.co.uk/homepage/110/the-roos-carr-figures>

The Roos Carr figurines are five god dollies discovered near Withernsea in East Yorkshire. They have been radiocarbon-dated to the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age. All five have removable phalluses and when removed they show female genitalia. They seem to depict warriors in a serpent-like boat. Two figures carry round shields and some were likely carrying spears originally. It has been suggested that they might be linked to the Norse god Odin, who is a gender-fluid figure in Norse myths and depicted in both male and female dress.



Glossary

Here's a very short glossary to explain some of the terms used in this pack. For a full glossary of LGBTQ+ terms we recommend this resource from Stonewall:

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/list-lgbtq-terms>



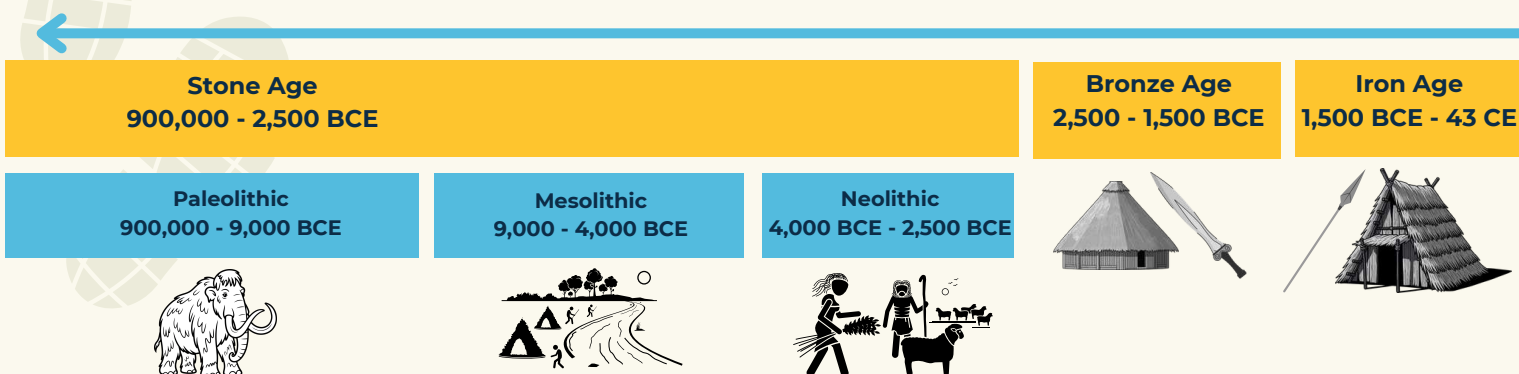
Non-duality: a perspective that allows for fluidity and transformation rather than relying on binary opposites (duality). Binary opposites often used in archaeology include male/female, human/animal, water/land and life/death. A non-dualistic approach acknowledges that people in the past might not have made these clear-cut distinctions.

Queering: the process of challenging and deconstructing the idea that heterosexual and cisgender identities are 'the norm'. This perspective can be applied beyond topics of gender, sexuality and identity and help us as archaeologists challenge assumptions.

Votive: an object or group of objects deliberately placed in a specific place believed to have sacred importance with no intention of recovery. Examples from prehistory include precious human-made objects placed in lakes, bogs or buried in the ground.

Prehistory timeline

This resource is focused on prehistory. The timeline below summarises the main periods of British prehistory.





Using Nature to Lead a History Walk



Using natural spaces to tell stories of the past can make storytelling stronger while benefiting participant mental and physical wellbeing. It's also a great way for neurodivergent young people to learn as they move. The world around us can help bring the past to life, whether they are sites of prehistory or not.

Choosing a location for your walk

Pick a site that will help your group experience the sorts of landscapes people lived in in prehistory. For example, Mesolithic Britain was heavily wooded and had large, post-glacial lakes. You could take participants to woodlands with ponds and lakes when discussing this period. While speaking about the Bronze Age you could visit uplands and moors.



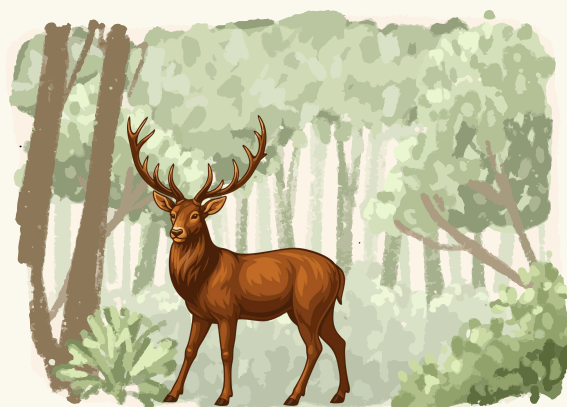
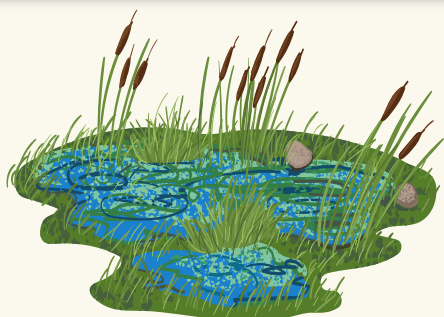
Top tips for your walk:

1. Remember to think about participant access needs when designing this kind of activity and, if needed, organise transport to reach the site.
2. Ensure there's time for wandering and noticing the natural world around you during the walk. Shorter routes can help with this.
3. Showing photographs, illustrations or replica artefacts can help participants 'place' artefacts and stories into the landscape.





In summer 2026 a group of YAC leaders participated in this activity at Ecclesall Woods near Sheffield, which is mainly a forested area with some grassy clearings and ponds. They explored different natural features to link to different aspects of prehistory, such as a large pond (top-left) when discussing Star Carr and a woodland clearing with carved rocks (middle-right) when discussing the Neolithic and Bronze Age.





Star Carr Headdress- inspired 'Exquisite Corpse' Game

Despite the horrifying name for this game, it's a good one! It's inspired by the Star Carr antler headdresses from Mesolithic Yorkshire, where people could find power in becoming a human-animal hybrid being - showing Mesolithic values of non-duality. This activity works best in groups of 3 or more people in an inside venue.

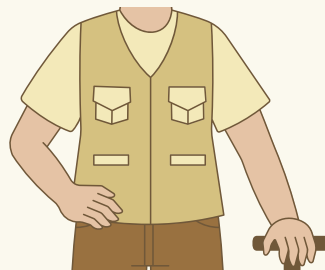
You will need:

- A group of three or more people
- Pencils and colouring pencils
- 1 sheet of A4 paper or thin card per person



Creating a character

1. Each participant folds their piece of paper into thirds and then unfolds it.
2. In the top third of the paper, **draw the head of your favourite animal**. Fold that third in half to hide the head, and pass the paper to the person to your left.
3. You should have a new piece of paper with the head hidden. In the middle third of the page, **draw a human torso**. It's fun if you draw an outfit that suggests a hobby or a job, like a ballet dancer or footballer. Fold the paper over to hide the torso and pass the paper to your left.
4. In the final third, **draw the legs, tail or fins of another animal** - your choice! Fold it over for the final time and pass the page to your left.
5. Everyone should have a page they haven't drawn themselves. Open the page and meet your non-dual character!



Developing your character

6. Now it's time to develop your character! Give your character a name and age, writing them onto the page.

7. Now, think about your character's likes and dislikes;

- their hobbies;
- what's their favourite subject at school, or dream job?
- What are their dreams for the future?
- What scares them?
- Does having their kind of body make anything particularly easy or difficult?

8. Write these insights onto your page.



Writing a Diary Entry for Your Character



In this creative writing activity, participants can delve into the everyday lives of the character they created in the previous activity and think about how they are impacted by their differences. For example, if their character has a fish head, maybe their character gets to work by swimming upriver in the morning; their cat-legged character might enjoy a roast chicken dinner or parkour, given their nine lives. The aim of this activity is to encourage open-mindedness and imagination by thinking about an individual different to themselves.



Activity:

1. Look at your character's body and personality traits, age and likes and dislikes.
2. Write a diary entry for your character's typical day.

The activity leader can ask participants to keep these things in mind:

- A diary entry can be split into three 'acts': the first act is the character's morning; the second is their afternoon; their third is their evening. This will help give the diary entry structure.
- Remind participants that they must write in the first-person perspective, using 'I', 'me' and 'we'. This will remind participants to really put themselves in the shoes of their character.
- Diaries are typically written in the past tense when discussing their day. Older participants might move between the past and present tenses when adding character feelings and thoughts while their character is writing the entry.
- If any participants are struggling, the activity leader can ask them questions: e.g., 'your character has octopus legs. How long does it take them to put their shoes on in the morning?'



Creative Reflection on 'Non-dual' Prehistories



After exploring some of these examples of 'non-dual' prehistory, like the Star Carr headdresses or Iron Age god dollies, participants can creatively engage with the history they've learned with one or both of these activities:

Draw a scene from the period of prehistory that excited you the most.

Write a poem about the period of prehistory that excited you the most.

Participants can imagine the historical landscape, artefacts and communities they've learned about and bring them to life in whatever way feels best to them. Their exploration of real landscapes on a nature walk can really help them in this exercise.

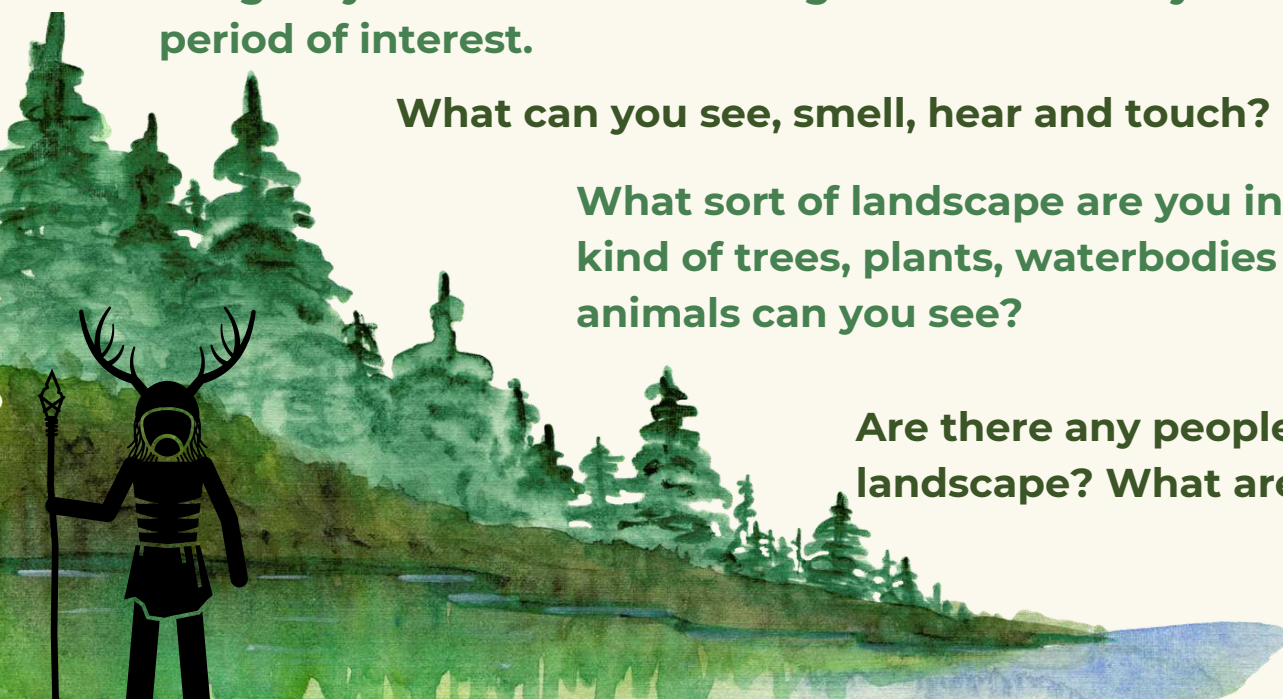
Activity leaders can ask participants to:

Imagine yourself time travelling back in time to your period of interest.

What can you see, smell, hear and touch?

What sort of landscape are you in? What kind of trees, plants, waterbodies and animals can you see?

Are there any people in your landscape? What are they doing?





Depending on your participants' ages and abilities, you can share some poem forms that they can use to express their reflections:

A haiku: this is 5/7/5 syllables. They are often used in Japanese poetry to celebrate nature. If participants finish a haiku quickly, challenge them to create new haiku like verses to one long poem.

A sonnet: the rhyming scheme is what matters in a sonnet. There are 14 lines which all have 10 syllables. It ends with a rhyming couplet. The rhyming scheme is like this: A/B/A/B, C/D/C/D, E/F/E/F, G/G.

Free verse: most contemporary poets don't follow a form at all! If you have a confident writer or a writer who prefers fewer rules, this might be the poetry form for them. No rhymes needed, and it doesn't matter how many syllables.

