

Avebury



Comprehension

Avebury

Avebury stone circle, and its outer ring of ditch and bank, known as a henge, was built around 4,800 years ago. The henge is made up of a 13m deep ditch, and a 9m tall bank around it. Inside are circles of standing stones. There are ninety-six stones in the Outer Circle. People in Stone Age times may have gathered at places like Avebury for religious ceremonies, and we can imagine what one might have been like:

"Thousands of people from miles around had come together at Avebury for the ceremony. They stood on the bank as dusk on midsummer's eve finally began to close in. It was an important evening because after midsummer the days would get shorter and shorter, until the darkness of winter was upon them again.

"Only the priests were allowed inside the sacred circles of stone. The setting sun cast long shadows behind them. Fires had been lit on the ground, and burning torches had been set up all around in preparation for when night fell. The whole place was alive with movement, light and shadows.

"The main priest was dressed in thick animal skins, and had a huge deer skull with antlers on his head. He brandished ceremonial staffs as he strode around the stone circle in front of the expectant crowd.

"Nearer the Inner Circle of stones, a group of women chanted, and danced in time to a drumbeat. As they whirled their arms around, the animal hair bracelets tied to their elbows moved up and down, and around and around.

"The people inside and outside the stone circles felt how sacred Avebury was. The ceremony helped them sense the spirits who roamed among the sacred stones."

Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'dusk'.

b From that sentence, suggest what 'dusk' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'dusk'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'dusk'.

e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'dusk' means.

Try this for other words, too. 

Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: staff	stick

Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

A group of women chanted, and danced to a drumbeat.

They had gathered at midsummer because it was an important time of the year.

Thousands of people had travelled for miles to come to the ceremony at Avebury.

The ceremony helped the people there to sense the spirits among the sacred stones.

The main priest brandished ceremonial staffs as he strode around in front of the crowd.

Fires had been lit inside the henge.

Get to the facts

1 How long ago was Avebury built?

2 How many stones are there in the Outer Circle?

3 Where were the people standing who were watching the ceremony?

4 What did the main priest have on his head?

5 What did the women do in time to a drumbeat?

Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.

Back at home

Imagine you were watching the ceremony at Avebury henge. When you go home, you describe what it was like to someone who couldn't travel to the ceremony himself or herself... (now complete the story)

Below is a plain text version for printing:

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For example:

Key word – staff Synonym – stick

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