

## Subject: History – Prehistory

### An Iron Age house

(DO NOT TELL THE PUPILS WHAT THEY WILL BE FINDING OUT ABOUT IN ADVANCE)

**Cross-curricular links:** English: factual writing.

Key Learning Objectives	Pupil Activities	Resources	Assessment for learning
To reason from evidence	<p>1–4. Progressive excavation reveal.</p> <p>Pupils to write a <b>Dig Diary</b>.</p> <p>Day 1: random post holes. Ideas, discuss, draw. Then write up diary for day</p> <p>Day 2: more postholes revealed. As above.</p> <p>Day 3: full circuit now. As above</p> <p>Days 4–7: Ash at centre found + quern stones and loom weights. As above discuss then write up diary.</p> <p>5–6. Show archaeological reconstructions.</p> <p>‘Did anybody get them right? How close were you?’</p> <p>7. How old is this site? Use <b>Archaeologist’s Fact File</b> to match up the evidence and work out the date.</p> <p>The sickle is made of iron. Have we come across this material before?</p>	PowerPoint (numbers refer to slides).	<p>I can make deductions from archaeological evidence.</p> <p>I can write a factual record.</p>
To understand change over time	<p>Iron ore is easier to find than copper and tin, so more ordinary tools could be made from it.</p> <p>8–10. Explain that this is the remains of an <b>Iron Age house</b>.</p>		
To reconstruct from evidence	<p>Rebuilding an <b>Iron Age house</b> – a possible school outdoor project.</p> <p>Draw the inside of the house as you think it would have looked when it was in use.</p>		
To compare written and archaeological evidence	<p><b>Bricrui’s Feast</b> (see page 2) Read to class.</p> <p>What can be learned from a story?</p> <p>Teacher reads the story and explains how old it is (see separate sheet).</p> <p>‘Does it sound like the sort of house you have been ‘excavating’?’</p> <p>‘Does it change your idea about what the inside of a roundhouse may have been like?’</p>		<p>I can compare a story and archaeological evidence.</p>

## National Curriculum: Prehistory Units

	<p>'Do you think the writer was exaggerating or do you think a roundhouse could have looked grand inside?' 11–12. Reconstructions of a grand <b>Iron Age roundhouse</b>. 'Does it look like the one in the Bricriu story?'</p>		
--	--	--	--

### BRICRIU'S FEAST

A chieftain named Bricriu (pronounced *brick roo*) planned a great feast for the king of Ulster and his followers. To impress them he set about building a house that would be better than any other house in the country. The roof was held up with beautifully carved and decorated pillars and roof beams. There was gold everywhere. Twelve tall apartments were built around a great fireplace in the centre. The king's apartment was decorated with precious stones and shone like gold. When all the apartments had been furnished with fine covers, quilts and pillows Bricriu went to Conchubar, the king, to invite him and his followers to the great feast.

At first the Conchubar said "No." He knew that Bricriu loved making trouble and would be sure to set them arguing if they went to his feast. But Bricriu kept on asking and in the end Conchubar agreed on one condition – that Bricriu was not to be there at his own feast!

Surprisingly he agreed. Then he set about planning how he could make them all argue even though he wasn't going to be there. First he went to Loegure (Leary), a great warrior, and said "At my feast send your charioteer to collect the champion's portion when the roast pig is being carved because you are without doubt the greatest warrior in Ulster and the protector of the king and the people." Now the champion's portion was the first, and the best, piece of roasted pig given out by carvers at the beginning of a feast. Warriors fought each other for the honour of having it because it showed they were the best. So when Bricriu went and said the same thing to Conall, and then to Cu Cullen, he knew they would argue and fight without him even being there. Back at his great house he had a special room built attached to the outside. It had a small window into the great house. He could sit in there and see what happened at the feast.

At the agreed time a great host of warriors arrived at Bricriu's great house along with chiefs, princes and the king, each in their own chariot. As they settled into their apartments, musicians played and the feast was set out. Bricriu welcomed them, then he left as he had agreed. Going to his special room he peered through the window to see what would happen. Sure enough as the servers started to carve the great roast pig, Loegure, Conall and Cu Cullen's charioteers each got up and called out that their lord should have the hero's portion. Instantly three great roars went up from Loegure, Conall and Cu Cullen. Grabbing their weapons they flew at each other with spears, swords and shields. The house was afire with swords and glittering spear edges. Nobody dared to try to stop them as they crashed around the house. Weapons fell from their racks on the walls and the walls themselves were broken through. The roof tipped and fell to one side, and with it down came Bricriu's secret room with him inside it! Only when Conchobar, the high king bellowed a command did the fighting stop. Then in the wreck of the house a strange figure covered in ash and straw emerged. Everyone thought it was monster until they heard Bricriu's voice. Then they fell about laughing, because they saw that his scheming had brought his house crashing down around him.

*This is a shortened version of an early Irish story. It was not written down until the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD but seems to be much older than that. It had probably been told for centuries by story tellers and gives a good idea of what the grandest Iron Age roundhouses may have been like. The central event – fighting over the hero's portion – is recorded by factual Roman writers as happening amongst the Celts in Gaul (France).*

## National Curriculum: Prehistory Units

### Additional Resources

Pope, R. 2008. Roundhouses: 3,000 years of design. *Current Archaeology* 222, 14–21

Reynolds, P. 1976. *Farming in the Iron Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Reynolds, P. 1979. *Iron Age Farm: The Butser Experiment*. London: Colonnade Books

Reconstructing an Iron Age roundhouse animation:

[www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/british\\_prehistory/launch\\_animated\\_roundhouse.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/british_prehistory/launch_animated_roundhouse.shtml)

Visiting reconstructed roundhouses:

<http://www.schoolsprehistory.co.uk/2014/05/12/feel-prehistory-come-alive-in-reconstructed-houses/>



The Prehistoric Society is a registered charity (no. 1000567) and company limited by guarantee (no. 2532446). Registered Office: University College London, Institute of Archaeology, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY. Date updated: 9/2017.

