

EASTER ISLAND MYSTERY

Preparation

- Download “What Happened on Easter Island?”

Purpose

Good critical thinkers need to be able to look at things from multiple perspectives. In this activity, you’ll look at a single event—the collapse of the population on an island—from different points of view. You should know right off the bat that the true reason for the collapse remains a total mystery! That said, historians and scientists have lots of hypotheses about why this island’s population fell so drastically. You’re going to try to make sense of what happened there, and you’ll do this using multiple perspectives, or as some may say, an interdisciplinary approach.

Practices

Interdisciplinarity

This activity may be the first time you encounter the idea of using multiple disciplines—rather than only history—to help make sense of the past. This is a great place to discuss how differing viewpoints can help us change or refine our perspective on events.

Process

Look at the picture of Easter Island your teacher has displayed. In 1722, explorers happened upon this island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. When they arrived, they discovered more than 800 giant statues and almost no people. This was strange, since the small number of people on the island couldn’t possibly have built these statues—it would have taken a much larger civilization. Think about Easter Island and consider the following questions: What kinds of events might have befallen the people of Easter Island?

Take out the Easter Island Mystery Worksheet and the article, “What Happened on Easter Island?” and look carefully at the images and charts included in the article. Ignore the text for now. You are going to see what information you can gather before you even start to read. It may not seem like these images and charts provide a lot of information, but if you put them together, you can make some informed guesses about this place. Working in groups, answer the following questions on the worksheet (be prepared to share your answers with the class):

1. Describe what pattern the population graph shows for this time period.
2. Brainstorm as many explanations as you can that would explain this pattern.

Now, read the text of “What Happened on Easter Island?” In a group, complete the table on the Easter Island Mystery Worksheet and be prepared to share your answers with the class. Did the article change your perspective on what happened?



Moais, Isla de Pascua, by Horacio_Fernandez, CC BY 3.0

EASTER ISLAND MYSTERY

Group Name:

Date:

Part I

Directions: Examine the images and charts in the article, “What Happened on Easter Island?” and then respond to the prompts.

1. Describe what pattern the population graph shows for this time period.

2. Brainstorm as many explanations as you can that would explain this pattern.

Part II

Directions: Read the article “What Happened on Easter Island?” Then, use the article and its images and charts to help you fill out the table. The images will provide one perspective of the island, while the charts will provide others. Compare the information provided to help develop your group’s perspective of what might have happened.



Question	Information from Pictures	Information from Article	Key Differences
Why did people settle here in the first place?			
What might have been some of the challenges they faced?			
What could have contributed to population growth?			
How do you think these people lived?			
What might have contributed to population decline?			