



Be a Paleoanthropologist for a Day!



Paleo - anthropo - logy:

Greek: palaeos "ancient" - anthropos "man" - logia "study"

Instructor Curriculum – Biology I

2015

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Foreword

The idea for a hands-on lab on human origins was born out of a 2004 "discovery" made by Chris Bayer at the National Museum of Kenya in Nairobi, where a visitor was welcomed to inspect and prod an array of fossil replicas, native originals which were unearthed from Kenyan soil. "Why would one have to come all the way to Nairobi to come face-to-face with humanity's forefathers and mothers?" he wondered.

With early guidance from Tulane anthropology professor Dr. Trenton Holliday, the '*Be a Paleoanthropologist for a Day*' lab began to take conceptual shape in 2011. A serendipitous encounter at a New Orleans bike shop between recent Tulane graduate Michael Lubberda and Chris Bayer produced the dialectic that is now *AncientAncestors*, which seeks to bridge cutting edge Paleoanthropology with high school biology instruction. As co-founder, and at its helm, Michael operationalized and optimized this curriculum, fine-tuning the nuances of pedagogy and content into an engaging lab.

After assembling the major components of this program – the eleven skulls, protractors, calipers, and an earlier form of this curriculum – we delivered this lab free of charge to all interested teachers in the greater New Orleans area. Throughout the 2013-2014 school year, co-founder Michael Lubberda administered the curriculum as a guest lecturer to 8 different schools, reaching over 300 students. Post-lab survey data and exit interviews with the teachers allowed us to hone our curriculum to what it has become today.

We believe in this tactile, hands-on approach to the tougher questions of our distant past, and this curriculum will place your students in the driver seat of discovery. Our initial observations substantiate our belief that when young minds are confronted by the evidence, and given the tools to measure and interpret their data, they are effectively empowered to themselves draw scientifically accurate conclusions.

In the beginning, students gain an appreciation for the morphological diversity of our hominin ancestors, and by the conclusion of this lab they will be able to reflect and comprehend empirically the major adaptations of human evolution. The question is timeless, 'Where do we come from?', but the answers are more available than ever before, right in front of your classroom. We'd like to thank our experts in the field, Trenton Holliday, Grant McCall, and Barbara Forrest for their input and support. And to you, dear instructor, thank you for offering your students the best opportunities! Good luck with this adaptation!

- Michael Lubberda and Chris Bayer

I. Course Specs

Objectives: The objective of this lab-based course is to enhance the biology student's understanding of the discipline of paleoanthropology – i.e. the multidisciplinary study of human evolution – deepen his/her knowledge about the hominin fossil record, and awaken an interest in the subject of human origins.

Purpose: Granting high school students hands-on exposure to anthropological facts – in the form of cranium replicas of our early biological ancestors and relatives – has a profound effect on their understanding of evolution and the prehistory of humankind. Having survived for millions of years until they were found, hominin skulls provide irrefutable evidence for human evolution. Through lab-based analysis, high school biology students are challenged to become the paleoanthropologists and discover facts about human evolution from guided observations and measurements of skull replicas. In doing so, this course will help the student answer the questions: “Where do we come from?” and “What methods are used to generate knowledge about human evolution?” This learning experience on the essential subject of human evolution will place the young mind in the driver’s seat of discovery and knowledge.

Timeframe: The course may be completed between 2 and 5 hours of lab time, depending on the school’s time parameters.

Learning format: This course emphasizes scientific inquiry in the lab setting. While the subject will be briefly introduced through a mini lecture, the principal pedagogical method employed by the workshop is inquiry-based learning – data collection, interpretation and discussion. This course thus moves away from the lecture-and-demonstration model and textbook-based treatments of the subject. Through hands-on analyses of replicas of hominin crania and participative discussion to interpret the findings, students' inductive reasoning skills are tested and rewarded, enabling first-hand learning.

Prerequisite Knowledge: Students should have a prior knowledge with regard to: (1) the concept of ratio, (2) concept of index, (3) taxonomical groupings (genus, species), and (4) evolutionary principles (common ancestry, descent with modification, survival of the best adapted, natural selection). No prerequisite knowledge of paleoanthropology is needed. Pertinent terms will be taught and no prior knowledge on the subject is presumed.

Learning Objectives:

A. Knowledge

Clearly articulated knowledge that the student will be able to acquire from this lab-based course are the following:

- Paleoanthropology is the multidisciplinary study of human evolution



- A fossilized skull of a hominin is harder to find than a diamond
- A skull replica is a copy of the original skull
- The origins of principal hominin fossil finds and the importance of Africa
- Foramen magnum progressively moves to the center of the cranium as hominins increasingly walk upright
- The variation/increase of cranial capacity and the emergence of a pronounced frontal lobe over time indicates the flowering of intelligence
- Face becomes generally less prognathic (orthognathic) over time – linked to the improved diet (less fibrous food) consumed by hominins
- The chronology of the three milestones of hominin evolution are bipedalism, orthognathism, and encephalization
- The smart, social, versatile, bipedal human is the sole surviving hominin species

B. Skills

Students will have the opportunity to hone the following skills:

- conduct angle and length measurements with specialized tools
- analyze a complex dataset and apply inductive reasoning to come to conclusions

Materials: 11 hominin skull replicas (as listed in **Handout #2**), a selection which comprises some of the best preserved examples of hominin species, 11 protractors (custom, bevel angle gauge) and 11 calipers (long jaw) and a few handouts are employed.

Target Audience: This short course has been tailored for high school biology students.

Procedures:

1. Place a caliper and a protractor at each station (11);
2. Divide into groups and assign station;
3. Introduce paleoanthropology and the skull replicas and provide **Handouts #1 – #5** to students;
4. Demo measurement with *Homo sapiens*;
5. Students measure skull replicas, record the measurement data, and perform the calculations on the worksheet. Each student is to participate fully by undertaking a specific task at the station;
6. Students are to rotate until they have visited each station or until the time limit has been reached;
7. Upon completing the assigned measurements, students share data and analyze trends;
8. Discuss findings as a class and conclude by revealing the hominin phylogenetic tree (pass out **Handout #6**).

Quiz: In order to discern to what extent the students retained and appreciated the delivered content, at the discretion of the biology teacher a short quiz may be administered to the students. Quiz questions relate to the learning objectives, focusing on the concepts presented in the short course as well as gauge the broader effect this human origins course had on the individual student.

II. Course Contents

A. Brief introductory lecture

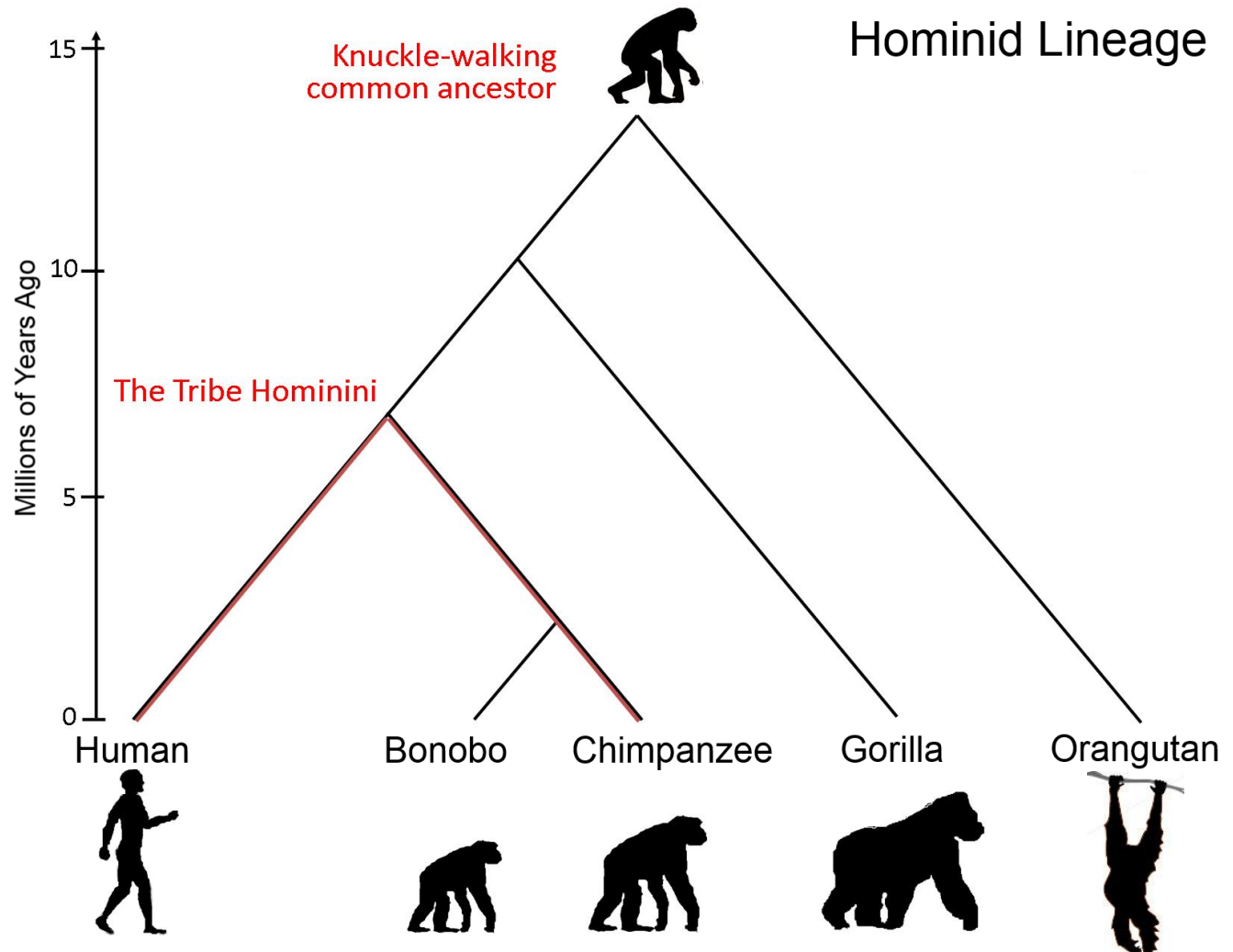
Learning objectives

Students will be able to answer the following questions:

- What is the field of paleoanthropology?
- What is a skull replica?
- What are fossils and how did they come into being?
- What is the distinction between a hominin and a hominid?
- What is the significance of skull locations and the Great Rift Valley?

- *Paleoanthropology*: The multidisciplinary study of human origins, of which the two main branches are human paleontology and paleolithic archaeology.
- Humans, chimpanzees, and the other great apes are **hominids**. **Hominins** are hominids that belong to the taxonomic tribe **Hominini** that are probable ancestors to humans. *Homo sapiens* is the only surviving **hominin** species, while extant great apes are present day examples of other **hominid** lineages.
- *Figure 1* below is a helpful resource for showing the difference between Hominid and Hominin, but also is helpful for noting the shared common ancestors. 13-15 million years ago, we have the origin of all great apes, and 5-7 million years ago the split between chimpanzees and humans occurs. These findings are based on genetic data, not archaeology data.
- Fossilization processes proceed differently for different kinds of tissues and under different kinds of conditions. The most common process is permineralization or petrification, in which rock-like minerals seep in slowly and replace the original organic tissues with silica, calcite or pyrite, forming a rock-like fossil – it can preserve hard and soft parts, and discoloration is a result of specific minerals in the soil.
- A fossilized skull of a hominin is harder to find than a diamond: simply put, the environmental conditions under which fossilization takes place are quite rare – and it is highly unlikely that any given organism will leave behind a fossil.
- Paleoanthropology fieldwork is hard work – it often takes place in unforgiving terrain where you are exposed to the elements.

Figure 1: Hominid cladogram



- Paleoanthropologists look in certain geographical strata, caves, gorges, quarries, and on the ground. Early discoveries relied on chance encounters at well preserved areas, while modern technology and satellite imagery expedite the survey process
 - Richard Leakey's lucky walk
 - One hot day in mid-1969 near Koobi Fora, not far from the Kenya-Ethiopian border, Richard pretended to feel unwell, and then had a good excuse to head back to the camels for a cool drink. As they returned, Richard spotted an *Australopithecus* skull gazing at him in the sand. It turned out to be an *Australopithecus boisei*, almost perfectly intact, save for the teeth¹.
 - Use of satellite imagery to locate promising exposed strata / promising terrain with Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
 - In 2008 paleoanthropologist Lee Berger and his nine-year-old son, Matthew, were scouting for fossils in an area Berger had identified as

promising through Google Earth. Matthew stumbled upon a fossilized bone which led to the *Australopithecus sediba* find in South Africa.

- Skull finds are the real thing! One “find” – “Pitdown man” – was exposed as forgery in 1953, consisting of a human skull and orangutan jaw.²
- A skull replica is a copy of the original skull: skull replicas are made either through:
 - careful casting techniques in which a mold is made from the original skull, and then a cast is made from the mold, or
 - utilizing 3D printing technology (3D computer model & a printer).

This is the end of the introductory lecture. Following this phase is the lab demo where students will learn to accurately measure the crania. Lab group sizes are flexible to class size, but certain measurements are best conducted with one or two partners. Briefly review the hominin species, discoverer/anthropologist, year of discovery as well as the location of the skull finds using **Handout #2**. Below are a few intriguing anecdotes related to some species that can be mentioned as skulls are being announced and distributed to groups. Also mentioned in each classification are notable skull finds not included in this lab analysis at the high school level.

Ancient Genus

Species	Nickname	Unique Description
<i>Ardipithecus ramidus</i>	“Ardi”	Particularly small with pronounced canine teeth and opposable big toes
<i>Sahelanthropus tchadensis</i>	“Tchad”	Our most recent find (2001), small football shaped cranium, large brow ridge, pronounced canine(s), small face

Notable mentions: *Kenyanthropus platyops*, *Orrorin tugenensis*

Australopithecus

<i>Australopithecus aethiopicus</i>	“Black Skull”	Robust, very prognathic, or protruding face, note the sagittal crest (<i>food for thought to students</i> : How would this adaptation be advantageous?). Discovered in 1985 by Dr. Alan Walker near Lake Turkana in Kenya.
<i>Australopithecus afarensis</i>	“Lucy”	A major find with a relatively intact skeleton, this small female, expanded interest and awareness of Paleoanthropology
<i>Australopithecus africanus</i>	“Africanus”	Early known species first discovered in South Africa in the 1940s, prognathic face
<i>Australopithecus boisei</i>	“Nutcracker Man”	Very robust jaw, huge flat molars, prognathic face and pronounced sagittal crest. Found by Mary Leakey, affectionately referred to as ‘Ole Bois’, originally given the genus <i>Zinjanthropus</i> .

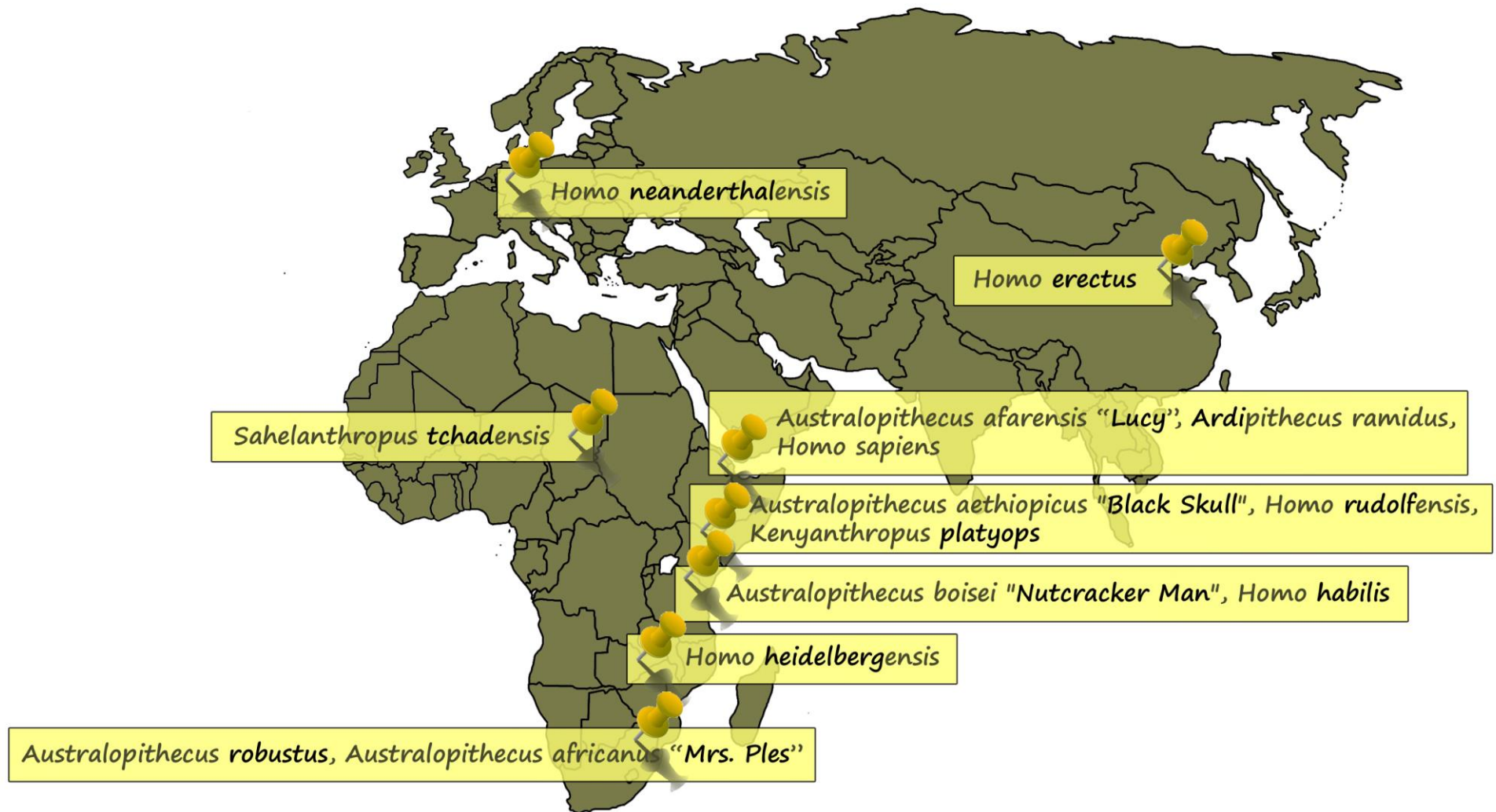
Notable mentions: *Australopithecus robustus*, *Australopithecus sediba*

Homo

<i>Homo erectus</i>	<i>"Erectus"</i>	Traveled all over the world (with the exception of the Americas) with upright posture, first discovered in China in the early 1900s
<i>Homo habilis</i>	<i>"The Handy Man"</i>	Our first tool maker, basic chip stone tools
<i>Homo heidelbergensis</i>	<i>"Heidelberg"</i>	Human-like Homo, sloping forehead, wide brain base, crack in skull – possible spear to the head
<i>Homo neanderthalensis</i>	<i>"Neanderthal"</i> (pr: ..derTaal)	Our closest cousin, dies out 30,000 years ago (the only dating mentioned, the rest must be deduced by lab), a very effective tool maker of Europe and Western Asia, known to bury dead and make art, language capabilities
<i>Homo sapiens</i>	<i>Humans</i>	Us! This skull should be dispersed during the lab phase, but will be used by instructor for the demo.

Notable mentions: *Homo rudolfensis*, *Homo floresiensis*

Figure 2: Map of featured fossil finds



The cluster of the sites in East Africa is known as the Great Rift Valley, where much of hominin evolution occurred.



B. Measurement demo

Learning objectives

Students will be able to answer the following questions:

- What are the 3 important milestones of human evolution?
 - How do you identify the *cranium*, *nasion*, *maxilla*, and *foramen magnum*?
 - How do you correctly use measurement tools to conduct measurements?
-
- There are number of milestones in hominin evolution, 3 very important ones are:
 - bipedalism – walking on two legs
 - orthognathism – a less protruding jaw resulting in a more vertical face
 - encephalization – an increasing cranial capacity

Using *Homo sapiens* as the demo skull, students are introduced to the morphological feature, then shown how to conduct the measurements featured in each of the 3 modules (which will be further explained in successive sections as well as the video resources available online). They will conduct their first skull measurement alongside the demo, and any measurement questions will be answered at this time. The 'Analyze' questions may be posed to the students during the lab demo to keep them focused on the purpose, but the discussion will go deeper into these concepts. For any further questions pertaining to particular teaching methods and techniques, the AA training videos provide further instructions.

C. Open lab

Learning objectives

Students will be able to answer the following questions:

- How does one measure and calculate the size of the *cranium*, *maxillary angle*, and the position of the *foramen magnum*?
- How does one analyze and interpret the data?

The open lab consists of 3 modules. Students have a few minutes at each station to measure, record in their data sheet (shown below), calculate and analyze, until switching to the next skull. Student measurements will vary, below are the expert measurements.

Measurements with answers Name	Bipedalism			Prognathism	Cranial Capacity (CC)			
	Opisthocranion- opisthion distance (cm) (A)	Opisthocranion- orale distance (cm) (B)	Opisthion index (A/B)x100	Maxillary angle (°)	Height (H)	Width (W)	Length (L)	CC (cm ³) (LxWxH)* .5236
<i>Ardipithecus ramidus</i>	3.4	14.5	23	33	7.5	8.7	10.3	352
<i>Australopithecus aethiopicus</i>	4.5	21.6	21	20	6.9	10.4	13.7	514
<i>Australopithecus afarensis</i>	3.2	16	20	37	8.5	9.4	12.6	527
<i>Australopithecus africanus</i>	3	16.8	18	30	9.4	8.8	12.5	541
<i>Australopithecus boisei</i>	4	19.8	20	35	9	11.3	15	799
<i>Homo erectus</i>	5.2	20	23	51	10.5	13.2	17.4	1263
<i>Homo habilis</i>	3.3	15.4	24	44	10	10.2	12.8	683
<i>Homo heidelbergensis</i>	4.8	19.5	23	44	11	13.2	16	1216
<i>Homo neanderthalensis</i>	5.8	22.2	23	48	14	14.5	17.8	1892
<i>Homo sapiens</i>	5.5	18.6	30	54	14.5	14	16.9	1796
<i>Sahelanthropus tchadensis</i>	2.5	17.2	15	46	8.2	8.8	12.7	480

Measurement 1: Foramen Magnum

Introduction: Bipedalism is a unique trait to hominins and clearly sets us apart from the modern day animal kingdom. It is certain that early hominins were walking as evidenced at the Laetoli site, a well preserved series of footprints covered in volcanic ash that's well dated to 3.6 million years ago³ (see *Figure 3* to the right).

Figure 3:



To compare skulls, scientists use measurements of certain features to calculate indexes. An *index* is a ratio of one measurement to another. In this case, we will be measuring the distance from the foramen magnum to the opisthocranium, then compare it to the total skull length. Students will see the trend of the foramen magnum centering on the skull – a clear adaptation for bipedalism. *Figure 4* below shows how two quadrupeds (dog & chimp) compare to the human concerning spinal entrance to the cranium.

Figure 4: Spine and foramen magnum position



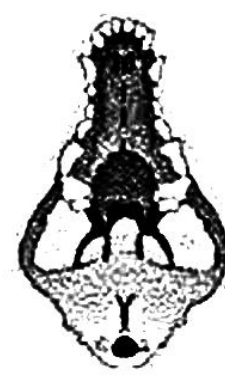
Human



Chimpanzee

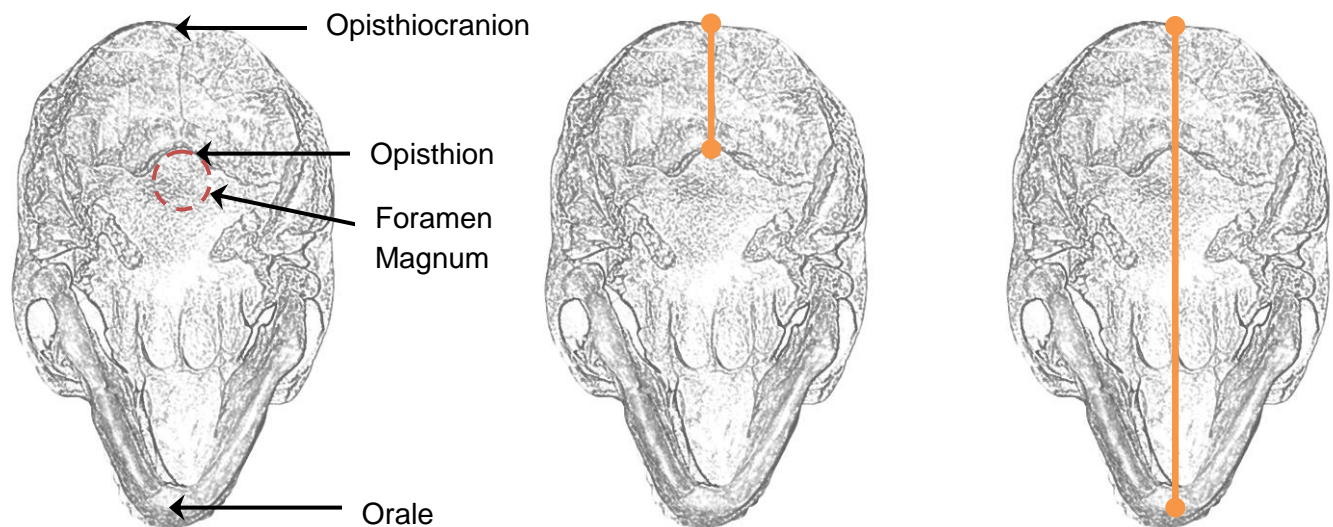


Dog



The index for measuring hominin skulls' bipedality is known as the *opisthion index*. The opisthion is the rear most point of the foramen magnum. This index indicates the distance of the foramen magnum from the rearmost point of the cranium relative to the total length of the cranium.

An *opisthion index* value greater than 15 means that the *foramen magnum* is situated close to the center of the *cranium*. This position is found in species that stand upright and demonstrates bipedalism. An *opisthion index* less than 15 means the *foramen magnum* is situated more in the rear of the *cranium*. This position is found in species that walk on their knuckles or on all four legs⁴.



Guiding question: How does one determine whether a species was bipedal?

A. Measure: To determine the *opisthion index*, follow the steps below and record the value in **Handout #3**.

- Position the skull so the underside is facing up and the upper jaw line is parallel to the lab desk
- Using the caliper, measure the distance from the opisthocranium to the opisthion, as shown at top right. Record the opisthocranium-opisthion distance in **Handout #3**.
- Measure from the opisthocranium to the orale, as shown at bottom right. Record the opisthocranium-orale distance in **Handout #3**.
- To calculate the opisthion index, divide your first measurement by your second measurement. Multiply this number by 100. The answer should be between 0 and 50.

$$(A / B) \times 100 = \text{opisthion index}$$

B. Potential Measurement Issues:

Issue:		Solution:
Foramen Magnum		
1.	Skull is too small for the long-jaw caliper	Use the ruler attached to the protractor arm
2.	Angled skull	Situate skull such that teeth (upper jaw) are parallel to table
3.	Lower jaw is in the way of measurement	Remove mandible from cranium
4.	Back face of cranium is angled / the Opisthocranium is lower than the opisthion	Situate ruler such that it is parallel to the table measuring the distance between the opisthion and the plane of the opisthocranium

C. Analyze: Examine the opisthion indexes you calculated.

Q. Which of these hominins was potentially not bipedal?

A. With an opisthion index of 15, *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* was a species representing the ancestral quadropedal state, probably occupying an arboreal niche.

Q. Based on the opisthion indexes, which hominin skulls are most similar to the *Homo sapiens* skull?

A. The *Neanderthal* is closest, but the genus *Homo* has a significantly larger opisthion index than the australopiths.

Q. Did the genus *Australopithecus* walk upright?

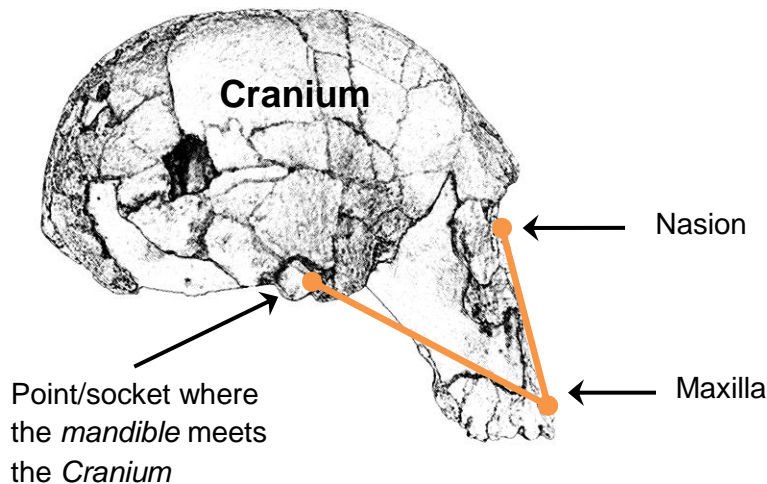
A. The four australopiths were bipedal, but their stature was more hunched. This is also supported by their larger torso length and shorter leg length.

Measurement 2: Maxillary Prognathism

Introduction: In this module the degree of maxillary prognathism will be measured using a protractor. The teeth and the bones around the mouth provide a great deal of information about both a species' diet and how it eats. This exercise concerns the maxilla, a two-bone fusion that forms the upper jaw. Take a moment to identify the maxilla and where the zygomatic process (cheekbone) meets the cranium. The *Australopithecus* genus are noted for having protruding faces as in *A. aethiopicus* and can be clearly contrasted with the flat faced *H. sapiens*.

Facial prognathism is the extent to which the face and jaws protrude forward when looking at the skull from the side. Orthognathic skulls protrude less while prognathic skulls protrude more. Prognathic skulls are marked by larger mandibles, and consequentially larger teeth. *Australopithecus Boisei* is an excellent example with molars the size of cow's teeth (an appropriate hint when discussing the diet of Australopiths versus Homo).

Guiding Question: How do the upper jaws/mouths of hominins compare?



A. Measure: As shown above, hold the skull sideways, align the upper end of the extension block with the nasion, the nasal depression between the orbital sockets, and the lower end with tip of the maxilla, right before the teeth emerge. The extension should be situated below the brow ridge and above the teeth.

Then, identify the socket point of the mandible and the cranium located right below the meeting point of the zygomatic process and the cranium. Rotate the protractor's arm such that it hovers over this point - the resulting angle (vertex) is the *maxillary angle*. Be sure to record the acute angle for each skull and complete **Handout #3**.

B. Potential Measurement Issues

Issue:		Solution:
Prognathism		
1.	I can't find the socket below the point where the Zygomatic process meets the cranium	Follow the jaw bone around the side of the face until it meets the cranium, observe or feel for a socket/indentation/groove below
2.	The protractor angle does not sit on the face / improper application of protractor	Double check that the protractor extender properly sits above the teeth and on the nasion
3.	My protractor is backwards	The skull is facing the wrong way
4.	The mandible socket is larger than the protractor arm	Place the top edge of the protractor arm in the center of the measuring point

C. Analyze: Examine the maxillary prognathism you calculated.

Q. Which species had the largest maxillary prognathism?

A. *Australopithecus aethiopicus* had the most acute angle implying it protruded the most. The Australopiths are defined by their smaller brains but larger faces, and it should be noted that the genus has more gracile (smaller) species, such as *A. afarensis* and *A. africanus*, and more robust (larger) species, such as *A. boisei* and *A. aethiopicus*. This division is argued as warranting a new genus name (*Paranthropus*), but the jury is still out.

Q. Which species had the smallest maxillary prognathism?

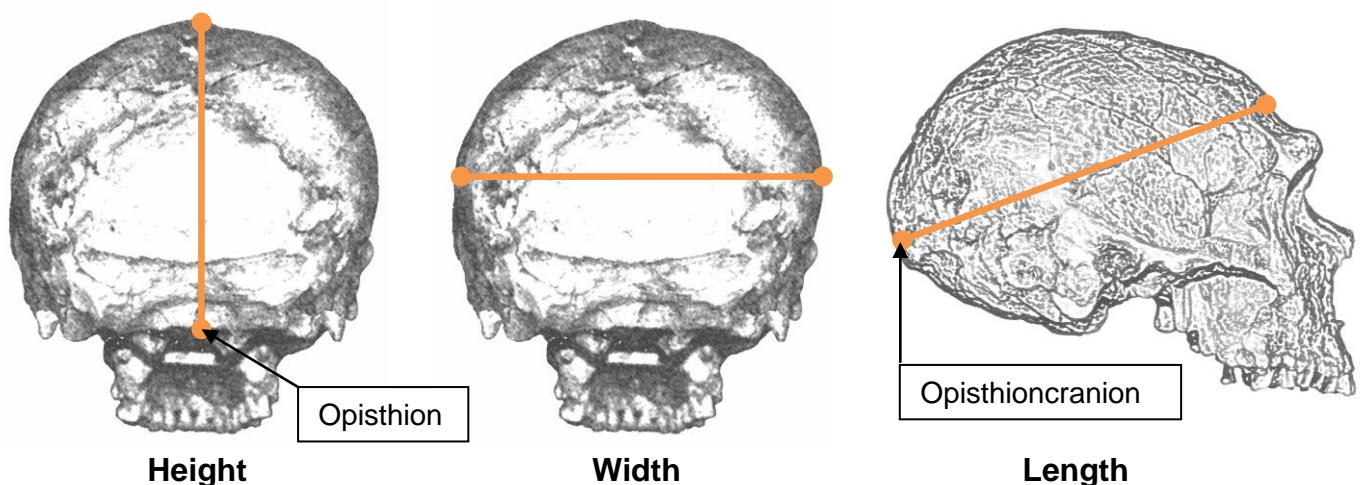
A. *Homo sapiens* had the largest angle implying the flattest face. Although *A. Boisei* and *Homo sapiens* are roughly the same physical size, it is very clear that humans have a much smaller jaw and a larger brain.

Measurement 3: Cranial Capacity

Introduction: The brain is housed inside the *cranium*. The interior volume of the cranium is called the *cranial capacity*. This module facilitates the measurement of the cranial capacity.

Brain size has a long history of analysis and measurement, sometimes washed with racism and sexism. Within hominin lineage, brain expansion almost quadruples, from *S. tchadensis* to *H. neanderthalensis*, and this represents a very significant change. Students should be reminded that within *Homo sapiens*, cranial capacity varies widely from 1200cc (cubic centimeters) to 2000cc with each level of intelligence on either end. The skull that the students will measure roughly represents the average skull; around 1400cc.

Guiding Question: How does the cranial capacity compare amongst hominins?



A. Measure: To estimate the cranial capacity of each skull, using the caliper measure the space of the part of the cranium that houses the brain, i.e. the neurocranium. Calculating the cranial capacity provides a rough numerical value for the size of the brain. Measure the maximum **length** by placing one end of a caliper on the most forward projecting point of the forehead (above the brow ridge) and the other end on the most posterior point at the back of the skull, i.e. the opisthiocranium. The maximum **width** is determined with the calipers on the sides (temples) of the skull at the widest point (above the zygomatic process). The maximum **height** is measured by holding one arm of the caliper on the underside flush with the foramen magnum and the other arm at the top most point of the skull. Multiply these three measures and then multiply by 0.5236.¹

$$(L \times W \times H) * 0.5236$$

B. Potential Measurement Issues

Issue:		Solution:
Cranial Capacity		
1.	While measuring height the sagittal crest is in the way	Place caliper arm directly adjacent to it
2.	My zygomatics are flaring/protruding	Place caliper arm of inside of the zygomatics/cheek bones
3.	Where does the caliper go to measure the length	Place one caliper arm above and behind brow ridge and the second arm extends back to create the longest diagonal with the Opisthiocranium

C. Analyze: Examine the estimated cranial capacities you calculated.

Q. Which species had the largest cranial capacity?

¹ We are determining the volume of a sphere within a cube. First, we use the spherical volume $[\frac{4}{3} \pi (1/2 \text{ length})^3]$ and the cubic volume $[\text{cubic length } (2 \times \text{radius})^3]$, and then divide the two formulas as follows:

$$\frac{\frac{4}{3} \pi r^3}{(2r)^3}$$

Thus, the ratio of sphere volume to cube volume is 0.5236.

A. *Homo Neanderthalensis* had the largest brain. Although it should be noted where his brain is larger compared to *Homo sapiens*, he has much less of a forehead, and a wider cranium towards the back, in a similar fashion as *Homo heidelbergensis*.

Q. Of what is cranial capacity a good indicator, at least across genus?

A. The larger brain size of *Homo* has a bigger potential for higher brain functions, increased tool use, and group complexity. *Homo habilis* – as the handy man – overcame his gracile stature to compete and outlive his competitors, the robust *Australopithicines*.

D. Discussion of results and interpretation

Learning objectives

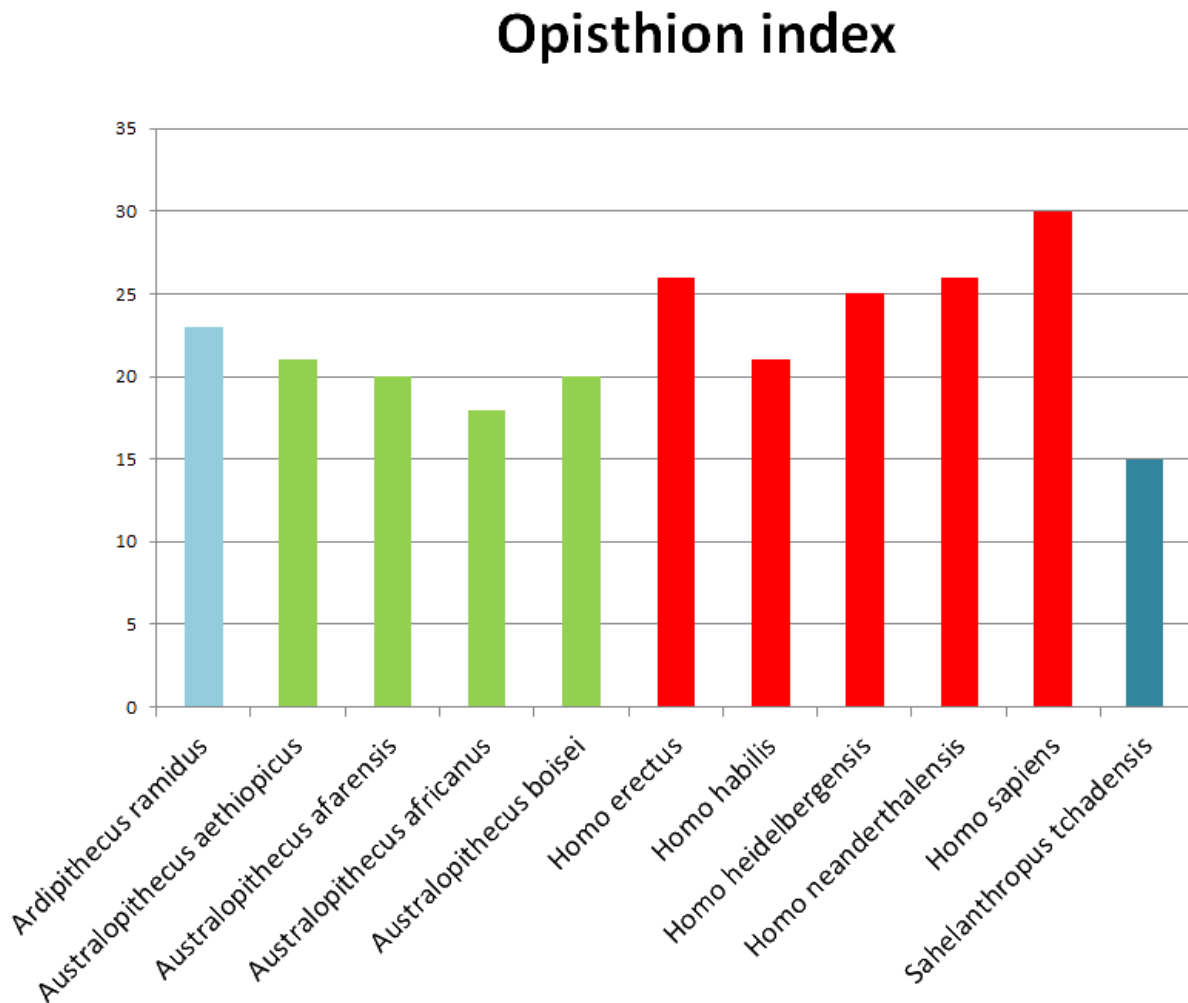
Students should understand the following questions:

- What are the morphological changes and trends evident from the data?
- Which dating methods are used due to their accuracy and reliability?
- What are the continuity and dead ends of evolutionary features?
- What is the chronology of evolutionary features and inter-species competition?

1. Review of measurements

Review the observed values in plenary with **Handout #3** in hand, and present the graphs below of the summarized results. Questions follow each graph that guide some of the important observations to be had.

Figure 5: Opisthion Index



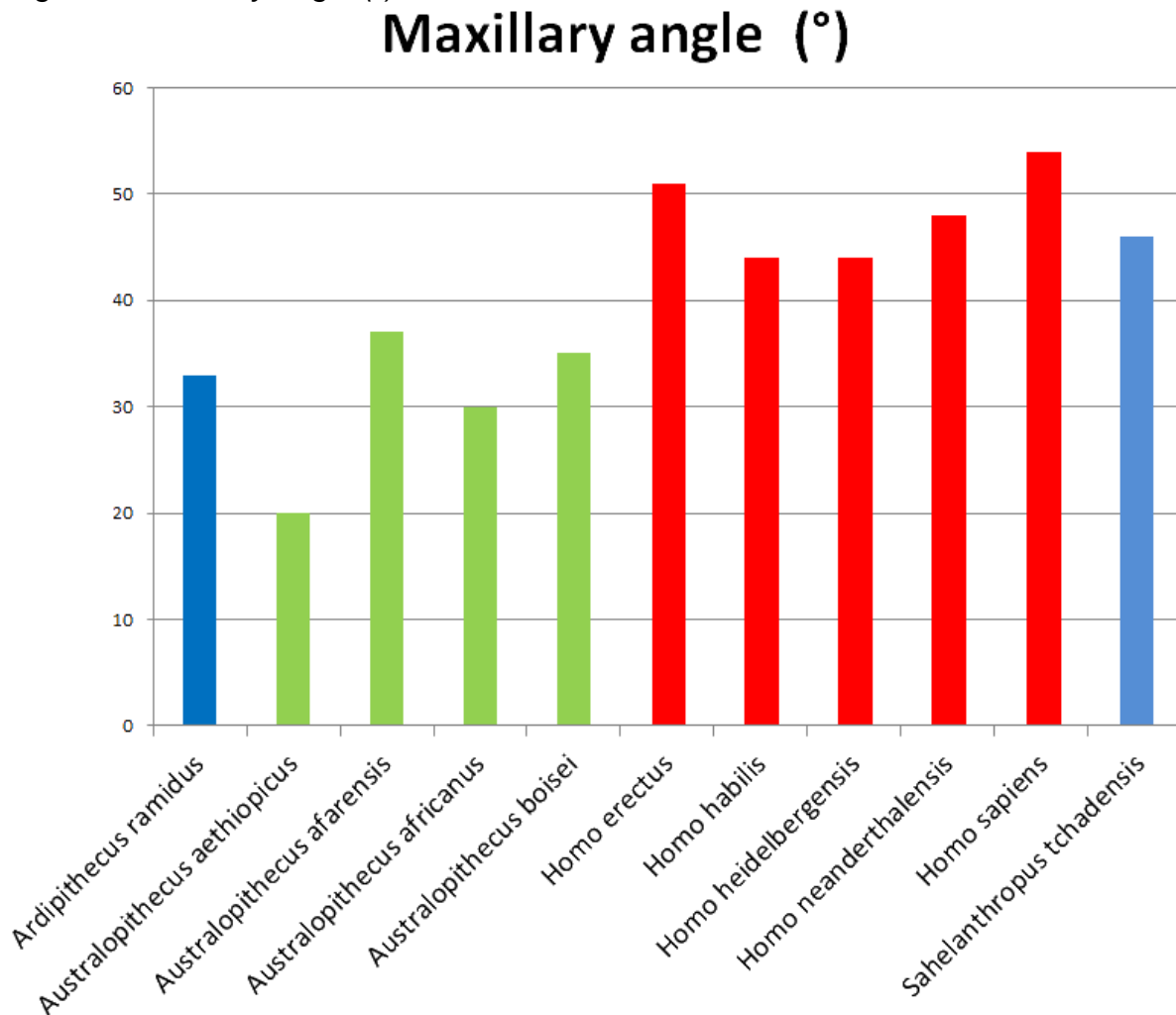
Q. Which of these hominins was potentially not bipedal? Where did he live?

A. *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* was likely a quadruped. Due to his gracile size, it is suggested that he lived in an arboreal niche.

Q. Based on opisthion indexes, which hominin skulls are most similar to the human skull?

A. Members of the genus *Homo* have the most upright posture, with the Neanderthal and *H. Erectus* representing the closest resemblance to human stature. The *Australopithecus* genus were bipeds, but would have had a more hunkered over stature. A visual example of hunkered over walking is helpful.

Figure 6: Maxillary angle (°)



Q. Which genus had the largest maxillary prognathism?

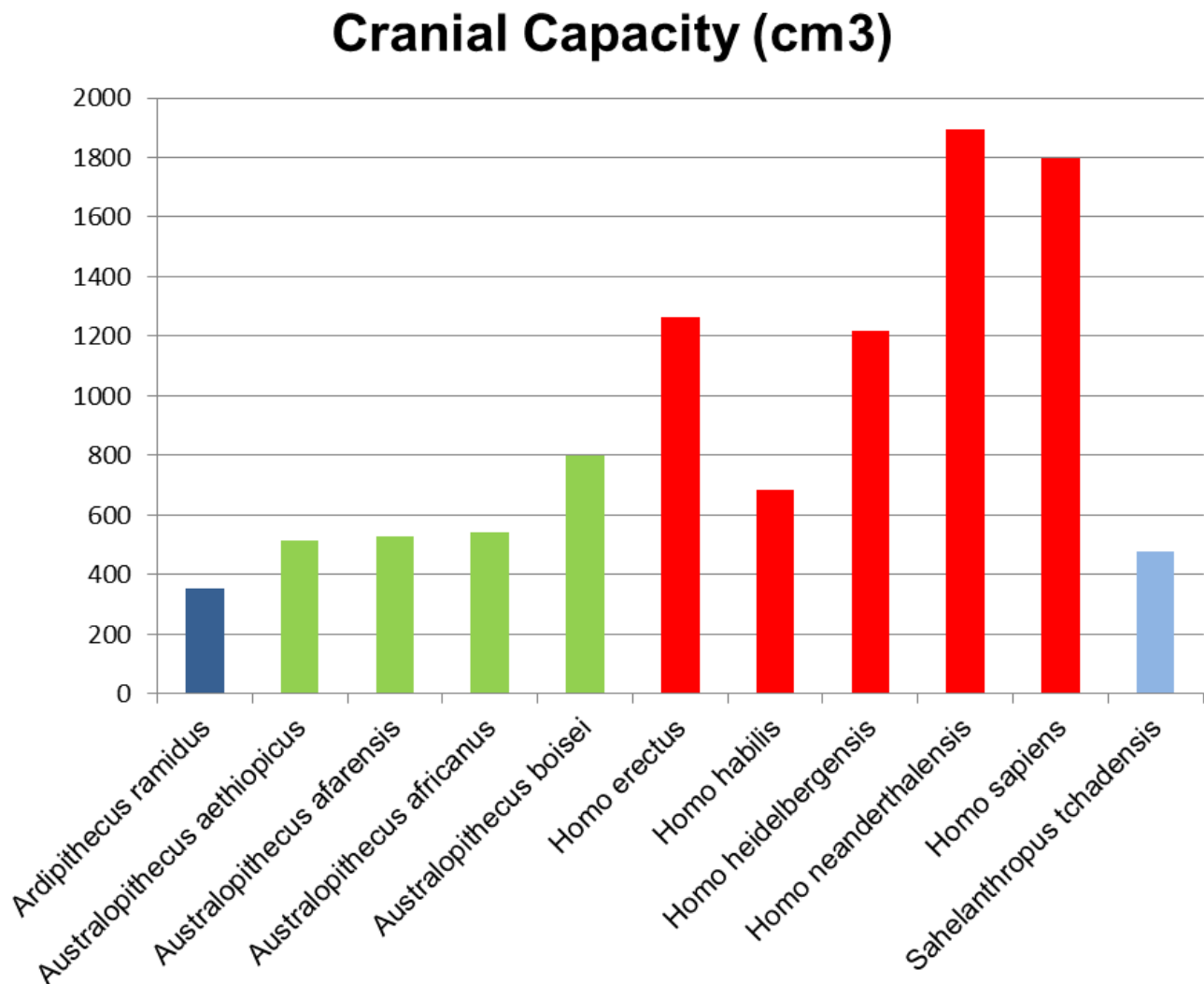
A. *Australopithecus aethiopicus* had the most protruding jaw because its angle was the least.

Q. What other traits correspond with those species which have protruding upper jaws?

A. The robust Australopiths have the most pronounced upper jaws and consequentially have large lower jaws. *A. boisei* is a prime example to note the thick mandible, huge cow-like molars, and large space for the temporalis muscle. This muscle passes through the zygomatic processes which are significantly larger than humans, and then attaches at the sagittal crest (bone protrusion on top of the head).

A helpful activity to show the function of the temporalis muscle is having students put the fingers on their temples, move their jaw up and down, and it becomes apparent that the jaw (temporalis) muscle attaches on the side of the head.

Figure 7: Cranial capacity (cm^3)



Q. Compare the size of the cranial vault in the Australopithecus species with that of the Homo species. How are they different?

A. The Australopithecus genus maintains a relatively consistent cranial capacity (despite a variety of overall skull sizes) while the genus Homo is marked by major expansion.

Q. Which species had the largest cranial capacity?

A. *Homo neanderthalensis*.

Q. How does the cranial vault in *Homo sapiens* compare to other members of Homo?

A. The neanderthal has a sloping forehead behind the pronounced brow ridge as opposed to the large vertical forehead of the *Homo sapiens*. The Neanderthal brain is longer and wider in the back, while the *Homo sapiens* brain has a more pronounced frontal lobe region.

2. Morphological function

Depending on class size and table groupings, small groups of 3-5 are valuable for facilitating peer discussion. Students first discuss the following questions in groups, and afterwards they are discussed in plenary:

a. What are the evolutionary advantages and disadvantages of upright posture (centering of the Foramen Magnum)?

As hominins walk more erect, the head is more centrally balanced over the spine. If the spine were centrally located in quadrupeds or knuckle walkers, their head angle would be slanted towards the ground instead of looking forward. Most importantly, the liberation of the hands adds potential for experimentation with tools and dietary habits.

An upright posture is more biomechanically efficient for long-distance marching and running. The disadvantages of bipedalism include having a slower sprint and having less mobility in trees. Even among contemporary hunting gathering societies (e.g. the San bushmen in Botswana), the endurance factor allows hunter-gatherers to track their prey until they are too exhausted to continue – a practice known as persistence hunting. Also, in tall grass, visibility improves.

In the case of *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*, with its opisthion index of 15, we observe a species representing the ancestral quadropedal state, probably occupying an arboreal niche. *Homo erectus*, named for its upright stature, was the first species able to cover vast distances, and its occupational range covered all corners of the old world, from Spain to East Asia.⁵ Thanks to recent discoveries in Dmanisi, Georgia, it is evident that *H. erectus* had reached the “Gates of Europe” by at least 1.8 million years ago.⁶

b. What are the evolutionary advantages and disadvantages of expressed maxillary prognathism (a bigger jaw)?

A larger jaw opened up hominins to a specialized variety of nutrition. Foods such as grasses and tubers could be processed with specialized stronger jaws and larger teeth, best highlighted by the nutcracker man, *A. boisei*. Intimidation of predators is theorized in addition to a more formidable defense from physical attack. The protective buttressing hypothesis postulates that less damage occurred from blows to the face in prognathic species compared to orthognathic species.⁷

Maxillary prognathism and mandibular expansion was more costly in terms of energy efficiency

during gestation and development. Nutcracker is a misnomer, recent research has shown that *A. boisei* subsisted on grasses and sedges and could thus digest cellulose.⁸

Modern humans occasionally mimic the grazing habits of the Australopiths when eating celery, but we in fact do not obtain a net caloric gain from celery as our bodies can no longer break down the cellulose. The energy required to chew it and the energy needed to break it down in our stomachs is less than the energy it provides. Orthognathism reflects a trend towards efficient tissue development, and metabolic efficiency during active mastication.

The larger the organism, the greater the metabolic cost of maintaining and utilizing its bone, muscle, brain and other tissues. There is thus a metabolic equilibrium that must be attained. The evolution of an orthognathic face (a jaw that does not protrude) in hominins is likely related to a reduction in the size of teeth, chewing muscles and jaw size, reflecting a reduced need for production of powerful grinding force. These changes reflect dietary shifts in human evolution away from tough skinned fruits and fibrous plant matter and towards greater consumption of meat and cooked foods. Students should be guided to consider what technological adaptations reduced the need for these large grinding jaws – fire and hunting in groups.

c. What are the evolutionary advantages and disadvantages of bigger brain (cranial capacity)?

A larger brain meant a greater behavioral flexibility that led to a number of evolutionary advantages. The retention of complex tool traditions was an early distinction, followed by the investigation of fire, language, and shelters.

Higher logical, social cognition is rooted in the frontal lobe, in which hominins have a distinctly larger proportional capacity than other mammals and more distant hominin ancestors. Endocasts can be made of some skulls by molding the interior impression the brain makes, revealing further details of the complexity. One of *Homo sapiens* clear distinctions is the pronounced forehead, which accounts for the expansion of the frontal lobe. The difference can be clearly seen even in our closest relative, the Neanderthal.

The tool tradition is clearly correlated with increased brain size in the genus *Homo*, and *H. erectus* highlights hominins' adaptive ability, as it thrived in a number of environments. Students should be posed with the question of what thought processes occur in the frontal lobe – logical reasoning, memory, and language – all integral parts of human culture. These adaptations enabled population expansion around the world and eventually lead to the rise of civilization marking the end of the Pleistocene and beginning of the Holocene, around 10,000 BCE.

As the measurements showed, the *Neanderthal* has a bigger brain, on average, than that of a modern human. Yet, a bigger brain does not automatically mean a better brain, and overall body

mass is relevant as well. To help account for that variable, the encephalization quotient (EQ) is used, which, in the case of hominids, calculates a ratio of brain-mass to body-mass relative to the average of 27 other primates. The postcranial skeletal evidence showed that Neanderthals had larger bodies than early humans. So large, that even though their brain mass was larger, their EQ was smaller.⁹ Neanderthals were still a complex species that interacted with early Homo sapiens, adapting burials, art, and most likely language, and also innovating the atlatl, a very effective spear throwing device (see *Figure 8*).

Figure 8: An Atlatl



A cost of a larger brain is an extended gestation period followed by a longer phase of dependence of the offspring. These demands on the mother required a high level of energy intake during and after the pregnancy. It is also metabolically expensive, estimated at 20-25% of metabolic consumption during rest. This is a common explanation for the increase of meat and quality of diet for the genus Homo.¹⁰

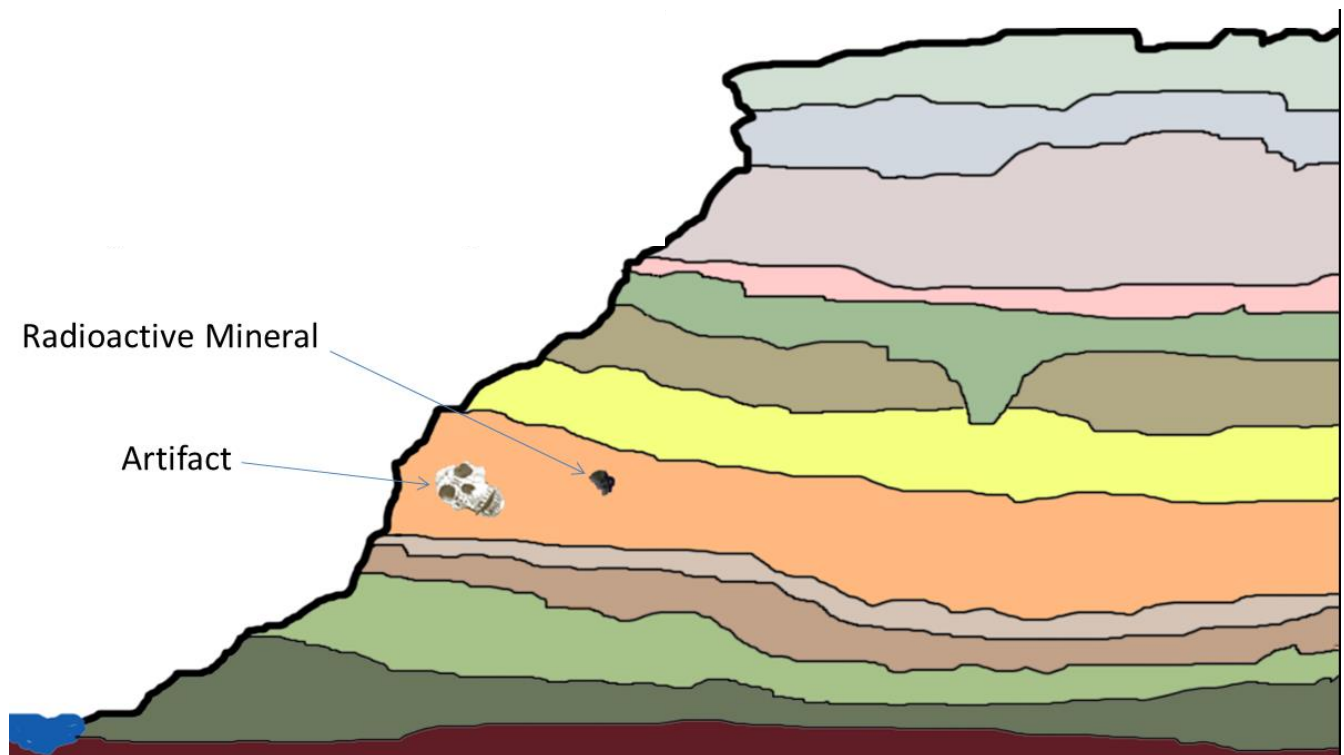
3. Fossil dating methods and DNA evidence

a. How do scientists determine the age of a fossil?

- Archeology analysis is based on stratigraphy and the law of superposition, which dictates that older layers lie below younger layers (see *Figure 9* below)
- Modern dating techniques are sophisticated estimations of the age of the fossil
 - Absolute methods (radiocarbon dating) date the specific age of the fossil, whereas relative dating methods (argon-argon) date a radioactive material (stone, obsidian) within the same strata as the fossil
 - Relative dating estimates are triangulated with geographical (earth strata) data to corroborate the estimated age
- Radiocarbon dating was invented in 1949, which measures the decay of the unstable isotope Carbon-14 in the material being studied. Carbon-14 dating is reliable from 1945 (nuclear explosions disrupted carbon levels) to roughly 40,000-50,000 years ago.
 - The concept of the half-life isotope deterioration is a separate lecture and we strongly encourage teaching as thoroughly as possible given the time constraints

- Argon-argon (Ar/Ar) dating is another radiometric dating method, however a relative dating method. Relative dating methods rely on a radioactive mineral sample of the same layer as the fossil (see *Figure 9*), thus the age range is wider. It utilizes the half-life of argon isotopes, which is 1.248 Billion Years Ago (BYA). It thus superseded potassium-argon (K/Ar) dating because (1) of its superior accuracy and (2) of its increased range. For archeological material older than 50,000 years, argon-argon is used, and is technically accurate beyond billions of years.
- Although Ar/Ar can also reliably date more recent material, due to its higher cost, Carbon-14 dating is used in its stead wherever possible
- In sum, dating techniques have become increasingly accurate and reliable (see [Handout #6](#) for the estimated ages of the skulls)

Figure 9: Stratigraphy



How does DNA evidence help paleoanthropologists assess hominin lineage?

- Studies of mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) and Y-chromosome DNA have made recent advancements in analyzing the question: 'When did humans become anatomically modern?' A study searching for the oldest coalescent group of *Homo sapiens* has postulated that humans originated and emerged from East Africa roughly 150,000 years ago based on the variety of mtDNA mutations.¹¹ While there were other "Out-of-Africa" movements, notably with the expansion of *Homo erectus* throughout Asia¹², this most recent 'Out-of-Africa' movement saw *Homo sapiens* populating, bit by bit, the entire world, displacing and sometimes interbreeding with local ancient humans.
- The notion of interbreeding among regional archaic groups and *Homo sapiens* has recently been reinforced with the sequencing of mtDNA of *Homo neanderthalensis*.¹³ A 0.3 gram sample of 38,000 year old Neanderthal mtDNA from Croatia has shown that Neanderthals contributed approximately 1% to 4% of non-African modern humans' genome. This has refuted claims that there was a strict replacement of regional groups after the most recent Out-of-Africa movement.
- Recent genetic sequencing of bone fragments and teeth found in southern Russia also revealed the existence of another "archaic population" – the Denisovans – who, once numerous, inhabited central and eastern Asia. In sum, in light of the genomic data, most geneticists now hold a middle-of-the-road view that modern humans arose in and spread out of Africa, then interbred with local archaic peoples to a limited degree.

4. The hominin family tree

Ask the students to look at the collected data (**Handout #3**) and use the Opisthion index, cranial capacity, and the degree of maxillary prognathism, to deduce the phylogenetic position and order of each fossil.

A successful activity to conclude the lab involves the students working as a group around a central table. Presented with all of the skulls, they can be tasked to piece the tree together with a helpful suggestion or question posed at the right time. It is important to guide them through the ages of the Australopithecines, then moving to *Homo habilis* and note that he is co-existing with *A. boisei* and *A. africanus*. This is a prime moment to reiterate some of the key pitfalls of *Australopithecus* such as a specialized diet that is less resilient and the inefficiency of robusticity. The final point to hammer home is that human evolution is not a linear process, but that there were often multiple hominin species competing in the same region, driving our ancestors to what we've become today.

As students see the greater picture of the last 7 million years of human evolution, they can connect the data to our evolutionary history. Afterwards, students are provided the phylogenetic tree ([Handout #6](#)).

5. Chronology discussion

a. Which evolved first in hominins: bipedalism or large brains?

- Bipedalism. The development of a "thinking machine," as Alan Walker put it, was a significantly later trend that followed the development of bipedality. Bipedalism freed hands, allowing hominins the potential to fashion tools expanding dietary options.

b. Which evolved first in hominins: encephalization (big brains) or orthognathism (flat faces)?

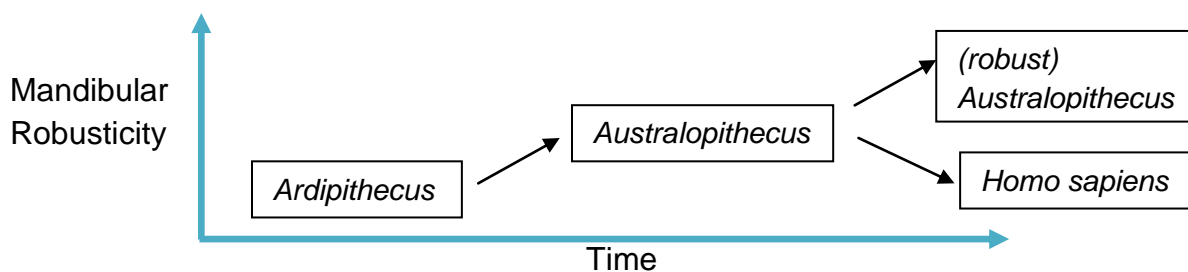
- Orthognathism. Initially, australopiths increased mastication potential with larger jaws. Other features such as a large sagittal crest and temporalis muscle size support this. *Homo habilis* begins the trend of receding prognathism and *Homo erectus* exhibits a leap of cranial capacity as prognathism further declines.

c. Why may the brain case be getting larger in more recent species?

- Larger brains do not automatically mean greater intelligence. Beyond a certain point, it is the surface area (represented by convolutions) and configuration, rather than the volume that is important. While neurological functions are determined more by the organization of the brain rather than the volume, it is used to as a proxy indicator of intelligence. The general demarcation between australopiths to the genus *Homo* is encephalization – a marked increase in cranial capacity.¹⁴

d. Why might a more pronounced facial prognathism give way to species with less prognathism?

- A change in diet of the species – less fibrous foods and the harnessing of fire. But also important is the idea that because the species were allocating metabolic energy to jaw strength and robusticity, there wasn't space or energy for expanding brain power.



Source: Holliday¹⁵

e. Which features distinguish *Homo*?

- As cranial capacity increased, the use of sophisticated stone tools became more widespread and the necessity for calorically expensive mastication diminished. Larger brains became more useful than a more specialized ability to process food. Approaching modern times, the more robust groups of *Homo*, such as *Neanderthalensis*, were less adaptive requiring more calories due to their larger size, and ultimately became extinct during the final Out-of-Africa movement.

f. Who won the evolutionary competition?

- A general trend is observed from gracile to robust features, and finally back to gracile with intelligence. One way to look at evolution is Mother Nature experimenting with different types of organisms to see which one is the most adaptable and best suited for long term survival. With regard to our own origins, it turns out that a more versatile and smarter hominin did better than a more specialized and robust one.

6. Conclusion

- The chronology of the three milestones of hominin evolution is bipedalism, receding prognathism (orthognathism), and finally, encephalization.
- The smart, social, bipedal hominin won Mother Nature's survival contest – us. The final parable of this conflict was the *Neanderthal's* fight for survival as *Homo sapiens* expanded into Europe. There is clear evidence for interbreeding. There is also evidence for conflict, where *H. sapiens* and *Neanderthals* were killing and eating each other. The *Neanderthals* were pushed further North over time as humans populations increased at a greater rate. The last of them died only 30,000 years ago during the second to last major glacial period.
- The debate in paleoanthropology is not about whether evolution took place, but to which hominins we owe direct lineage, and the precise location of the hominin finds on the phylogenetic tree. There are debates as to whether there are branches on our evolutionary tree, or if it is a giant bush resulting in *Homo sapiens*. There are holes to fill in, new fossils to be discovered, and many classifications still to be argued over. More research and understanding is needed. Bright and industrious minds may answer these questions in the future.

III. Questionnaire – NOT graded

Name:

Age:

Date:

For the following items, please indicate your agreement/disagreement with the following statements:

1. Organisms existing today are the result of evolutionary processes that have occurred over millions of years.

1 agree strongly	2 agree	3 undecided	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree
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2. Modern humans are the product of evolutionary processes that have occurred over millions of years.

1 agree strongly	2 agree	3 undecided	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree
---------------------	------------	----------------	---------------	------------------------

3. The theory of evolution is based on speculation and not valid scientific observation and testing.

1 agree strongly	2 agree	3 undecided	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree
---------------------	------------	----------------	---------------	------------------------

4. The available data are ambiguous (unclear) as to whether evolution actually occurs.

1 agree strongly	2 agree	3 undecided	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree
---------------------	------------	----------------	---------------	------------------------

5. Evolution is not a scientifically valid theory.

1 agree strongly	2 agree	3 undecided	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree
---------------------	------------	----------------	---------------	------------------------

6. Humans exist today in essentially the same form in which they always have.

1 agree strongly	2 agree	3 undecided	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree
---------------------	------------	----------------	---------------	------------------------

7. With few exceptions, organisms on earth came into existence at about the same time.

1 agree strongly	2 agree	3 undecided	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree
---------------------	------------	----------------	---------------	------------------------

IV. Quiz

Name:

1. What is the most significant thing you learned about the origins of humans?

(1 sentence answer)

.....

2. Where on the planet did *Homo sapiens* first live?

3. Place in chronological order the three milestones of hominin evolution:

() encephalization () bipedalism () prognathism

4. What are some characteristics that make the genus *Australopithecus* different from *Homo*?

.....

.....

5. For approximately how many years have *Homo sapiens* inhabited our planet?

..... years

6. The theory of evolution is supported by the human fossil record.

☐ True

☐ False

7. What kind of work does a paleoanthropologist perform? (1 sentence answer)

.....

8. Modern humans are the product of evolutionary processes that have occurred over millions of years.

☐ True

☐ False

V. Handouts

Handout #1:

BE A PALEOANTHROPOLOGIST FOR A DAY!

Introduction Notes

Name: _____

- What is Paleoanthropology?
- What is the difference between a fossil and a skull replica?
- How long ago did humans and chimpanzees share a common ancestor?
- On what continent do the majority of Hominin fossils originate?

Measurement Notes

Milestone	How do you measure it?	How is it physically apparent in the species?	<i>Reflection:</i> What advantage did this trait provide?
1. _____			
2. _____ _____			
3. _____ _____			

[Print such that this pages is the reverse of the data sheet (*Handout #3*)]

Discussion Notes

Graph 1- Bipedalism

- Which of these hominins was potentially not bipedal? Where did he live?
- Based on the opisthion indexes, which hominin skulls are most similar to the human skull?

Graph 2- Maxillary Prognathism

- Which genus had the largest maxillary prognathism?
- What other traits correspond with those species which have protruding upper jaws?

Graph 3- Cranial Capacity

- Compare the size and shape of the cranial vault in the Australopithecus species with that of the Homo species. How are they different?
- Which species had the largest cranial capacity?
- How does the cranial vault vary in *Homo sapiens* compared to other members of Homo?

Group Discussion

- What are the advantages of bipedalism?
- What dietary adaptations led to the transition from robust Australopithecus to gracile Homo?
- What brain processes occur in the frontal lobe, the largest area of the modern human brain?

Handout #2:

<i>Hominin Species</i>	<i>Discoverer / Anthropologist</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Discovery Year</i>
<i>Ardipithecus ramidus</i>	Tim White and associates	Afar region of Ethiopia	1994
<i>Australopithecus aethiopicus</i> *	Camille Arambourg and Yves Coppens	southern Ethiopia, west of the Omo River	1967
<i>Australopithecus afarensis</i> "Lucy"	Donald Johanson	Hadar, Ethiopia	1974
<i>Australopithecus africanus</i> "Mrs. Ples"	Robert Broom and John Robinson	Sterkfontein, South Africa	1947
<i>Australopithecus boisei</i> * "Nutcracker Man"	Mary Leakey	Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania	1959
<i>Homo erectus</i> "Peking Man"	various	Zhoukoudian (Chou K'ou-tien) near Beijing, China	1923-27
<i>Homo habilis</i>	discovered by Kamoya Kimeu, described by Richard Leakey	Koobi Fora, Kenya	1973
<i>Homo heidelbergensis</i> "Rhodesian Man"	discovered by Tom Zwigelaar (miner), described by Arthur Woodward	Kabwe, Zambia (formerly Rhodesia)	1921
<i>Homo neanderthalensis</i> (La Ferrassie 1)	described by Louis Capitan and Denis Peyrony	France	1909
<i>Homo sapiens</i> (earliest)	Tim White	Herto Bouri, Ethiopia	1997
<i>Sahelanthropus tchadensis</i>	Michael Brunet	Chad	2001

Source: PBS¹⁶

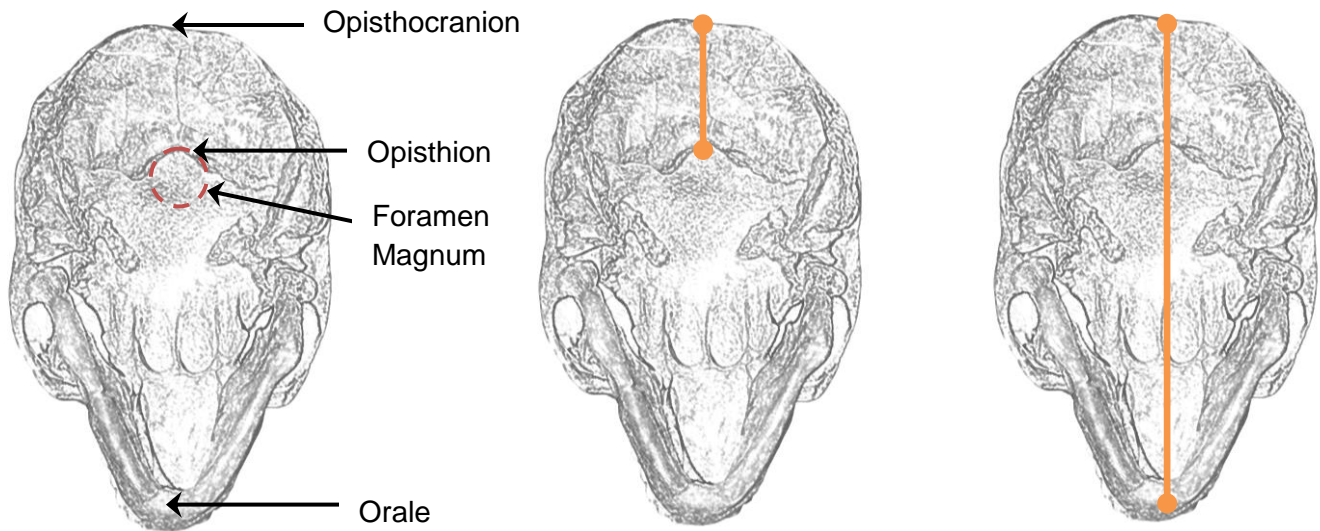
* Some academics use the genus "Paranthropus" instead of "Australopithecus" to describe these skulls

Handout #3:

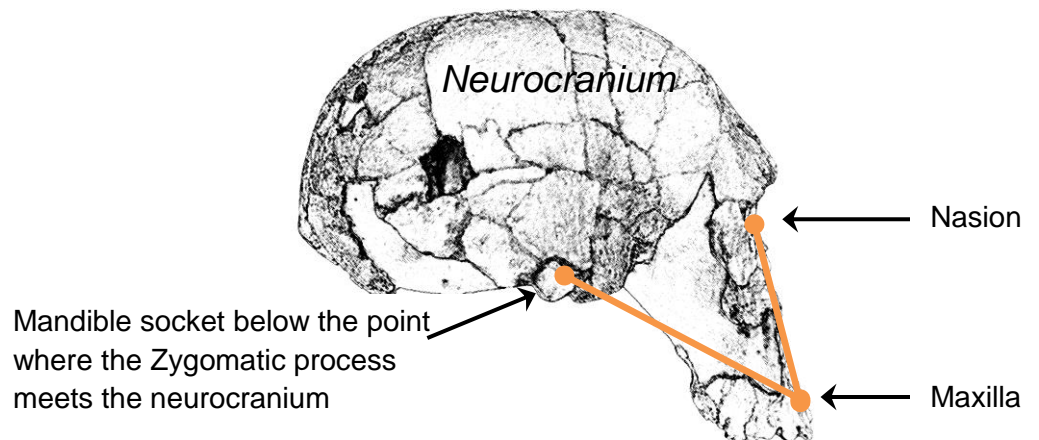
Name	Bipedalism			Prognathism	Cranial capacity (CC)			
	Opisthocranion-opisthion distance (cm) (A)	Opisthocranion-orale distance (cm) (B)	Opisthion index (A/B)x100	Maxillary angle (°)	Height (H)	Width (W)	Length (L)	CC (cm ³) (LxWxH)* .5236
<i>Ardipithecus ramidus</i>								
<i>Australopithecus aethiopicus</i>								
<i>Australopithecus afarensis</i>								
<i>Australopithecus africanus</i>								
<i>Australopithecus boisei</i>								
<i>Homo erectus</i>								
<i>Homo habilis</i>								
<i>Homo heidelbergensis</i>								
<i>Homo neanderthalensis</i>								
<i>Homo sapiens</i>								
<i>Sahelanthropus tchadensis</i>								

Handout #4

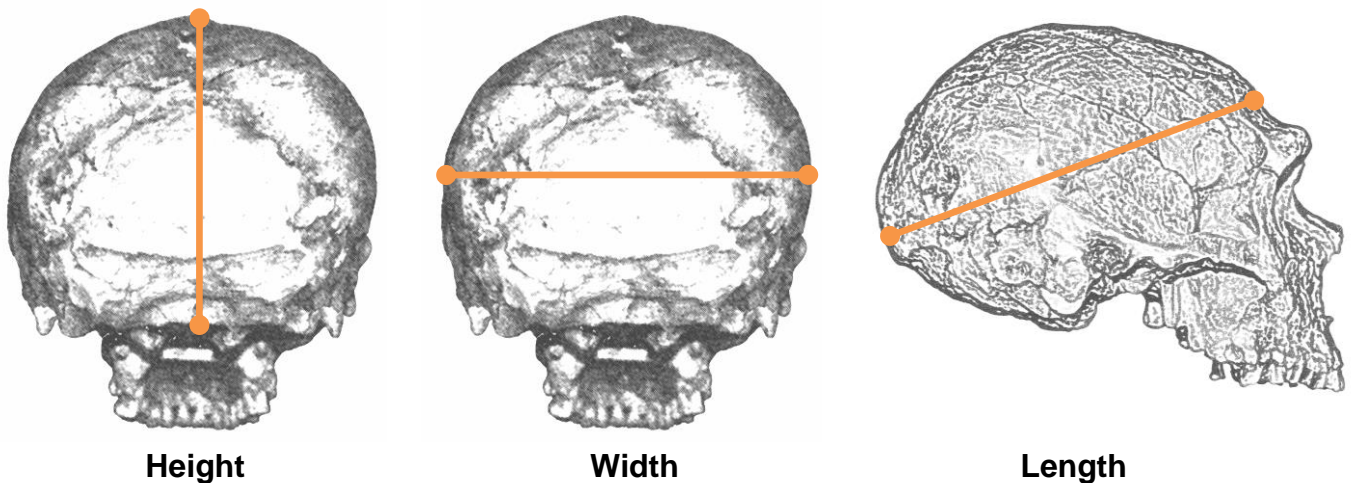
Measurement 1: Foramen Magnum



Measurement 2: Maxillary Prognathism



Measurement 3: Cranial Capacity

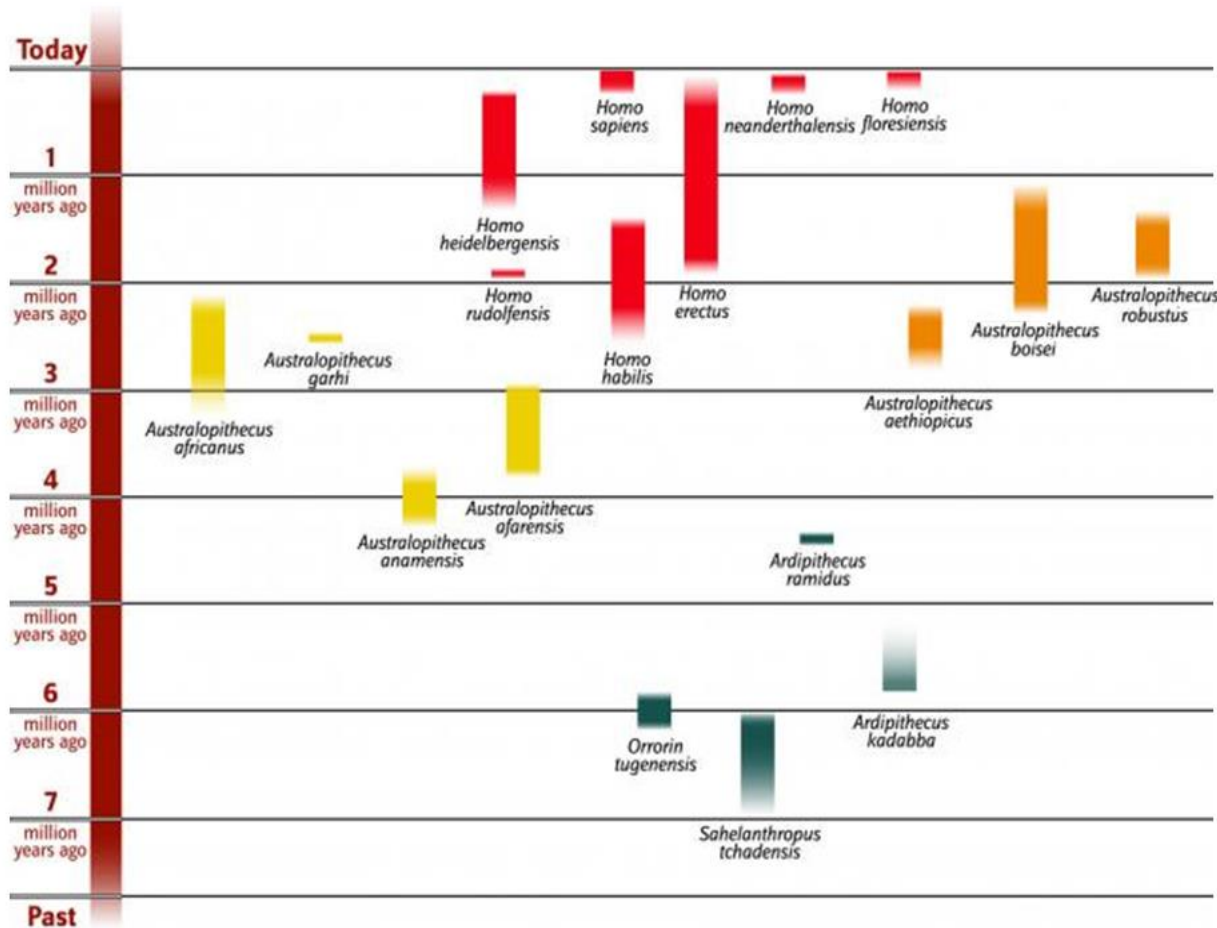


Handout #5:

Terms	Operational Definitions
Anterior	Situated before or toward the front
Arborealism	Living in trees
Argon-argon	Argon-argon (Ar/Ar) dating is a relative dating method which utilizes the half-life of argon isotopes
Bipedal	Walking on two legs
Caliper	An instrument used to measure the distance between two opposing sides of an object
Canine tooth	A deep-rooted tooth, lateral to the incisors, that is used by most animals for grasping and piercing food
cc	cubic centimeters
cm	Centimeters
Cranial capacity	The interior volume of the cranium, where the brain is housed
Cranium	The portion of the skull that does not include the mandible (lower jaw)
Encephalization	An increasing cranial capacity over generations
Evolution / Evolve	Change over generations in one or more inherited traits found in populations of organisms. There are four pressures behind evolution: (1) natural selection, (2) genetic drift, (3) mutation, and (4) gene flow
Foramen magnum	A hole in the base of the skull through which the spinal cord exits
Gracile	Gracile, in general, connotes something slender, less robust. Gracile hominin skulls are characterized by orthognathism and less pronounced dentition and cranial features as robust hominins.
Hominid	A member of a group of primates that includes orangutans, gorillas, chimps, and humans (also referred to as the great apes)
Hominin	A member of the tribe Hominini and evolutionary trend that led to humans, including the animals most closely related to <i>Homo sapiens</i> as opposed to chimpanzees and bonobos
Hominini	The taxonomic tribe comprising the tree of hominids resulting in humans, evolving separately from chimpanzees
Index	A number (as a ratio) derived from a series of observations and used as a composite indicator

Mandible	A bone that forms the lower jaw
Mastication	The process of chewing
Maxilla	A paired bone that forms the upper jaw
Morphology	A branch of bioscience dealing with the study of the form and structure of organisms and their specific structural features
mtDNA	mitochondrial DNA
Orbit	The two hollow eye sockets in the cranium that house the eyeball and assist musculature
Orthognathic	Derived from the Greek words <i>orthos</i> (straight) and <i>gnathos</i> (jaw) to denote a jaw that does not project forward resulting in a (near) vertical face
Palate	The roof of the mouth
Physiology	The science of the function of living systems and their features
Phylogenetic tree	A branching diagram which shows relations between organisms based upon similarities and differences in their physical or genetic characteristics – an evolutionary tree of life
Posterior	Situated behind
Prognathism	Derived from the Greek words <i>pro</i> (forward) and <i>gnathos</i> (jaw) to denote a protruding upper jaw (Maxilla)
Protractor	An instrument used to measure an angle or a circle
Quadrupeds	An animal that walks on all fours
Radiocarbon dating	A leading dating technique measuring the decay of carbon isotopes used on fossils from 40,000 years ago to 1945
Robust	Robust hominins sport heftier, thicker skulls. A robust hominin skull is characterized by large grinding molars, widely flared zygomatic arches, and a large sagittal crest.
Sagittal crest	A protruding bone formation sitting above the sagittal suture which function is to anchor the temporalis muscle for mastication and to reinforce the cranium.
Skull	The bones that make up the head of an animal, including the cranium and mandible (lower jaw)
Stratigraphy	A branch of geology which studies rock layers and layering (stratification)
Superposition (Law of)	Sedimentary layers are deposited in a time sequence, with the oldest on the bottom and the youngest on the top.

Handout #6: Hominin phylogenetic tree and ages



Age (million years)	Hominin Species
7 to 6	<i>Sahelanthropus tchadensis</i>
4.4	<i>Ardipithecus ramidus</i>
3.6 to 2.9	<i>Australopithecus afarensis</i>
3 to 2	<i>Australopithecus africanus</i>
2.7 to 2.3	<i>Australopithecus aethiopicus</i>
2.3 to 1.4	<i>Australopithecus boisei</i>
2.3 to 1.6	<i>Homo habilis</i>
1.8 to 0.3	<i>Homo erectus</i>
1.8 to 1.5	<i>Australopithecus robustus</i>
0.6 to 0.1	<i>Homo heidelbergensis</i>
0.6. to 0.03	<i>Homo neanderthalensis</i>
.2 to present	<i>Homo sapiens</i>

Source: PBS ¹⁶

Adapted from Smithsonian Institute¹⁷

VI. Resources

IHO. Becoming Human. <http://www.becominghuman.org>

UC-Berkeley. Understanding Evolution. <http://evolution.berkeley.edu>

The Leakey Foundation. African Fossils. <http://www.africanfossils.org>

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