

Carved stone balls are a curious type of artifact found at a number of locations in Scotland. They date from the late Neolithic period, around 4,000 years ago. They are round in shape; they were carved from several types of stone; most are about 70 mm in diameter; and many are ornamented to some degree. Archaeologists do not agree about their purpose and meaning, but there are several theories. One theory is that the carved stone balls were weapons used in hunting or fighting. Some of the stone balls have been found with holes in them, and many have grooves on the surface. It is possible that a cord was strung through the holes or laid in the grooves around the ball. Holding the stone ball at the end of the cord would have allowed a person to swing it around or throw it. A second theory is that the carved stone balls were used as part of a primitive system of weights and measures. The fact that they are so nearly uniform in size—at 70 mm in diameter—suggests that the balls were interchangeable and represented some standard unit of measure. They could have been used as standard weights to measure quantities of grain or other food, or anything that needed to be measured by weight on a balance or scale for the purpose of trade. A third theory is that the carved stone balls served a social purpose as opposed to a practical or utilitarian one. This view is supported by the fact that many stone balls have elaborate designs. The elaborate carving suggests that the stones may have marked the important social status of their owners.

Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about. None of the three theories presented in the reading passage are very convincing. First, the stone balls as hunting weapons. Common Neolithic weapons such as arrowheads and hand axes generally show signs of wear. So we should expect that if the stone balls had been used as weapons for hunting or fighting, they too would show signs of that use. Many of the stone balls would be cracked or have pieces broken off. However, the surfaces of the balls are generally very well preserved, showing little or no wear or damage. Second, the carved stone balls may be remarkably uniform in size, but their masses vary too considerably to have been used as uniform weights. This is because the stone balls were made of different types of stone, including sandstone, greenstone, and quartzite. Each type of stone has a different density. Some types of stone are heavier than others. Just as a handful of feathers weighs less than a handful of rocks, two balls of the same size are different weights depending on the type of stone they're made of. Therefore, the balls could not have been used as a primitive weighing system. Third, it's unlikely that the main purpose of the balls was as some kind of social marker. A couple of facts are inconsistent with this theory. For one thing, while some of the balls are carved with intricate patterns, many others have markings that are extremely simple—too simple to make the balls look like status symbols. Furthermore, we know that in Neolithic Britain, when someone died, particularly a high-ranking person, they were usually buried with their possessions. However, none of the carved stone balls have been actually found in tombs or graves. That makes it unlikely that the balls were personal possessions that marked a person's status within the community.

Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they challenge the specific theories presented in the reading passage.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? When teachers assign projects on which students must work together, the students learn much more effectively than when they are asked to work alone on projects. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.