

# AROUND THE FIRE AT TERRA AMATA

## CHARACTERS

**Narrator**    **Bandu (a storyteller)**  
**Geon (leader of group)**    **Man**    **Sark (a toolmaker)**    **Woman**

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**NARRATOR:** The time is 3,000 years ago, on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. A group of about 20 people are gathered around a campfire inside a small hut made of sticks and stones, which is their only protection against the outdoors. This is Terra Amata, a camp the group sets up every spring. Bandu, the clan's storyteller, begins to tell a story.

**BANDU:** *(As if telling a story)* The hunter had magical powers and so decided to transform himself into a rabbit. As a rabbit, he could get very close to the other rabbits without startling them and causing them to run off. In this way, he could kill his prey easily and quickly.

**GEON:** That was a wonderful tale, Bandu, one of my favorites. But I think it's time for us to sleep now. Tomorrow, the men will hunt for more meat, and the women will gather berries.

**MAN:** If we bring back any new skins, we'll need new flaying knives. Most of our knives are chipped or dull.

**GEON:** Sark, you'll have to start on the new knives in the morning. Do you have enough flint for the task?

**SARK:** I have enough right now to make two more knives to flay animal skins and one borer to help the women with the sewing. Are we planning to follow the herd of deer we saw come near early this morning?

**GEON:** The deer are our best chance for meat.

**WOMAN:** We found a fig tree near the spring. We'll gather some figs tomorrow morning when we go for water. Then we'll start weaving the baskets for the children to carry.

**GEON:** Agreed. It's still cold; we'll keep the fire burning tonight.

**NARRATOR:** The men, women, and children all find an animal fur for warmth and a place to sleep in the small hut. It's a tight squeeze, but the group is used to cramped quarters. The small space helps them stay warm and get the sleep they need. Various animal bones scattered around show what they've eaten today—birds, turtles, rabbits, and fish. Tomorrow, if they are lucky, they will feast on deer, pigs, or even elephants.

Remnants of this hut remained in southern France until 1965, when it was destroyed to make room for some buildings and a parking lot.

## "AROUND THE FIRE AT TERRA AMATA"

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Sometimes people want to destroy historical sites like Terra Amata because modern buildings or roads need to be built. What criteria would you set to determine whether a site is worth keeping? Who should decide?
- What kinds of remains of life at Terra Amata would *not* have been preserved after thousands of years? How does this affect our understanding of history?

### ACTIVITIES

#### IT'S CRAMPED IN HERE!

Before you and your class read this play, tape out an area on the floor that would approximate the size of the Terra Amata hut (20 to 25 feet long by about 10 to 15 feet wide). Conduct the day's lesson (or part of it!) in these cramped quarters with all the students and their materials inside the taped boundaries. Debrief students by asking how uncomfortable they were, what the hardships might have been for these early humans, and what activities would have been difficult in such a crowded living space.

#### DAILY LIFE AT TERRA AMATA

Challenge students to investigate archaeological evidence found at Terra Amata and write a brief description of a day in the life of a hunter or gatherer camped there. Then invite students to compare their descriptions in pairs or small groups. Have them consider the way their point of view and limited archaeological evidence might account for the differences in descriptions. Students may evaluate what parts of their descriptions were best supported by historical evidence. Ask how this description differs from a fictional account.

#### A CLASS DIG!

Conduct an archaeological hunt through . . . the garbage! Pose the question: *What evidence of your community and lifestyle might survive a thousand years from now?* Have students list or collect materials found in garbage and recycling bins and determine whether these items could be artifacts. Then challenge students to take their entire lists and classify evidence into categories such as tools, shelter, clothing, trade, religion, and others the class may generate. Discuss which categories have the least amount of evidence available and which have the most. How much of this evidence do students think will be available a millennium from today and how might this affect research about our civilization?

### RESOURCES

#### BOOKS

*An Ice Age Hunter (Everyday Life series)* by Giovanni Caselli (Peter Bedrick Books, 1992)  
*Early Humans (Eyewitness Books)* edited by Philip Wilkinson (Knopf, 1989)

#### WEBSITE

Stone Age Habitats ([www.personal.psu.edu/users/w/x/wxk116/](http://www.personal.psu.edu/users/w/x/wxk116/))

The site includes two drawings of huts at Terra Amata and reconstructions of other Paleolithic campsites.