

Great Piltdown Forgery

The Piltdown man, also known as “the earliest Englishman,” was one of the greatest hoaxes in science. The forgery lasted 40 years, and a scientific fraud like it was never seen before or since. But who committed the forgery? Explore the suspects in this activity.

Procedure

- 1 You will be assigned some of the questions below. As you watch the video, take notes on your questions. Answer only the questions assigned by your teacher.
- 2 After watching the program, have each team member write down the name of the individual(s) that he or she thinks committed the forgery. Team members should not share their choices.
- 3 Work with your team members to answer your questions. Choose a member of your team to share answers to your team’s questions with the class.

Questions

Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

- 1 What object was initially found at the Piltdown site? Who found it?
- 2 What did Charles Dawson claim he noticed about the skull?
- 3 How does Charles Darwin fit in to the story of the forgery?
- 4 What evidence did Germany, Spain, and France have in relation to the evolution of humans that England did not have?
- 5 How did the time period—WW1—affect the atmosphere surrounding the hoax?
- 6 Who was Charles Dawson?
- 7 Why might Dawson have wanted to be associated with Sir Arthur Smith Woodward?
- 8 Who was Woodward? What remains did he and Dawson find at Piltdown?
- 9 When was Piltdown man presented to the world? What was he called?
- 10 What was the initial response of the science community to Piltdown man?
- 11 What was the significance of the canine tooth that was found?
- 12 Where was the second Piltdown man found? Who discovered it? What was the significance of this second find?
- 13 Who was Kenneth Oakley? What was his role in the Piltdown hoax?
- 14 What items were revealed to be forged? How were some of the items faked?
- 15 What evidence points to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s possible involvement? What might have been his motivation? Describe his character.
- 16 What is the evidence for Dawson’s involvement? Describe his character.
- 17 Why might Woodward have been considered a suspect? Why might Woodward not have conducted more rigorous science tests on the artifacts?
- 18 Who was Martin Hinton? What is the evidence of his connection with the forgery? Include a description of his character.
- 19 What object was planted that might have revealed the Piltdown hoax? What happened when it was found?
- 20 What character traits might have compelled some of the scientists to be involved with or taken in by the hoax?

