

CHAPTER

1

SECTION 1

Section Summary

UNDERSTANDING OUR PAST

READING CHECK

What is anthropology?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *technique* mean in the first underlined sentence? Look for the word *technology* in the second underlined sentence. Notice that these two words have a common root. Use these related words to help learn what *technique* means.

READING SKILL

Summarize In your own words, summarize the important discoveries made by anthropologists Mary and Louis Leakey at Olduvai Gorge.

The long period before the invention of writing is called **prehistory**. Then about 5,000 years ago, humans invented writing and recorded history began.

Historians learn details of the past from **artifacts**, such as clothing, coins, and artwork. However, most rely on written evidence, such as letters or tax records. Historians must also evaluate evidence to determine if it is reliable. Then they interpret it to explain why an event, such as a war, happened. Historians help us understand what happens today and what may happen in the future.

Anthropology is the study of the development of people and their societies. Some anthropologists study human bones to understand how physical traits have changed. Others study **cultures** from the past and present. **Archaeology**, a specialized branch of anthropology, is the study of past cultures through material remains, including buildings and artifacts. In the past, archaeologists might just choose a likely site and start digging to try to find ancient artifacts. Today they work with experts in many fields, such as geology and biology. They also use modern innovations, such as computers and aerial photography. A technique for measuring radioactivity helps these scholars determine the age of objects.

Before the 1950s, anthropologists knew little about early humans and their ancestors. Anthropologists **Mary** and **Louis Leakey** searched for clues in East Africa at **Olduvai Gorge**. There they found many ancient stone tools. The tools showed that whoever had made them had developed the skills and tools, or **technology**, to survive. Early human relatives, or hominids, must have made them. Then, in 1959, after two decades of searching, Mary Leakey found the skull of an early hominid. In 1974, anthropologist **Donald Johanson** found pieces of a hominid skeleton in Ethiopia. “Lucy” was at least 3 million years old. Discoveries like these helped establish that a number of different groups of hominids, such as *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus*, lived over the course of several million years. Two groups of *Homo sapiens* arose. One group—the Neanderthals—disappeared between 50,000 and 30,000 years ago. Early modern humans were then the only hominids on Earth.

Review Questions

1. What evidence do historians study to learn about the past?

2. What have stone tools taught anthropologists about early humans?
