ANCIENT IRELAND

Learning Outcomes

2.1 RECOGNISE how a pattern of settlement and plantation influenced identity on the island of Ireland, referring to one example of a pattern of settlement, such as the growth of towns, and one plantation

1.5 INVESTIGATE the job of the historian, including how s/he finds and uses evidence to form historical judgements which may be revised and reinterpreted in the light of new evidence

1.6 DEBATE the usefulness and limitations of different types of primary and secondary sources of historical evidence, such as written, visual, aural, oral and tactile evidence; and **APPRECIATE** the contribution of archaeology and new technology to historical enquiry
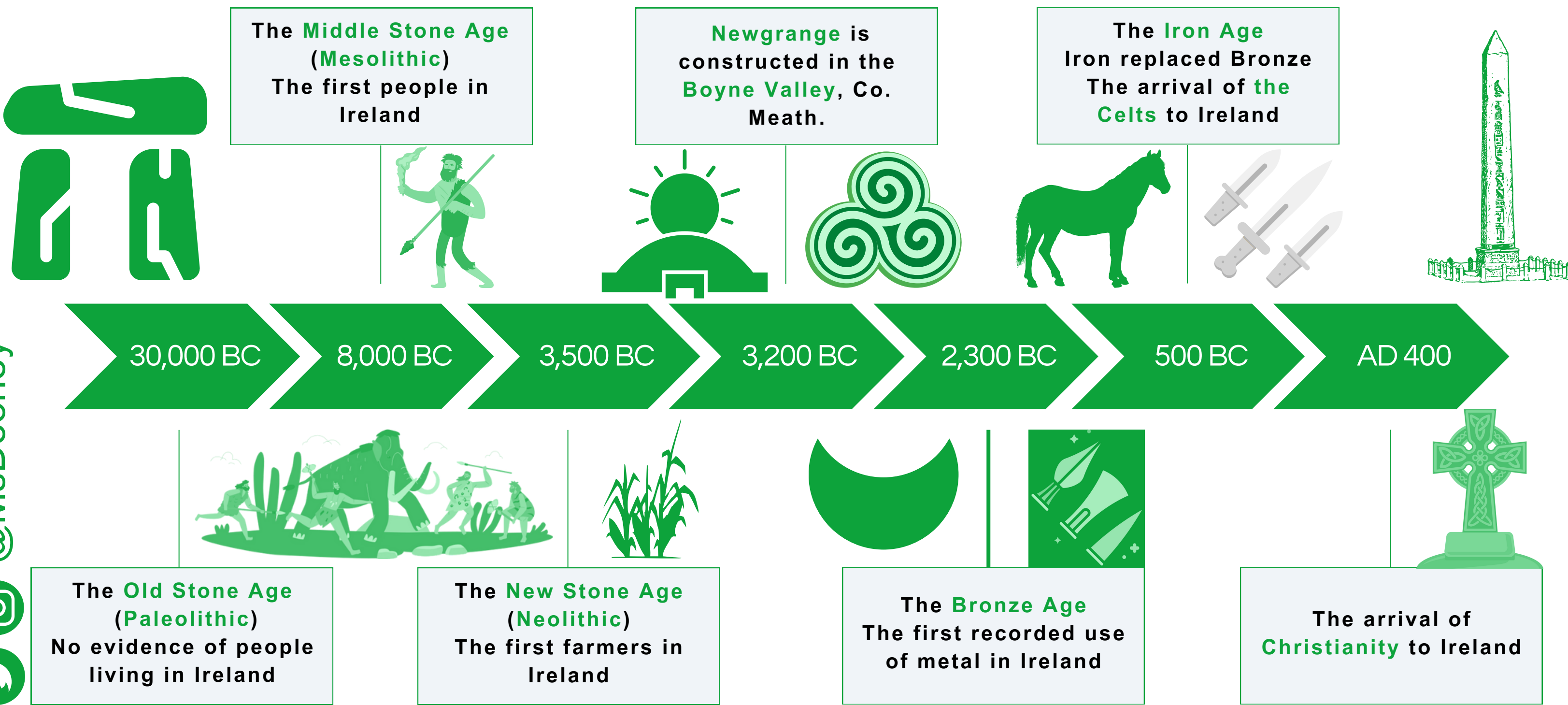
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ANCIENT IRELAND

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2.1 RECOGNISE how a pattern of settlement and plantation influenced identity on the island of Ireland, referring to one example of a pattern of settlement, such as the growth of towns, and one plantation

The **Middle Stone Age** (**Mesolithic**)
The first people in Ireland

Newgrange is constructed in the **Boyne Valley**, Co. Meath.

The **Iron Age**
Iron replaced Bronze
The arrival of **the Celts** to Ireland

| 30,000 BC | 8,000 BC | 3,500 BC | 3,200 BC | 2,300 BC | 500 BC | AD 400 |

The **Old Stone Age** (**Paleolithic**)
No evidence of people living in Ireland

The **New Stone Age** (**Neolithic**)
The first farmers in Ireland

The **Bronze Age**
The first recorded use of metal in Ireland

The arrival of **Christianity** to Ireland

Introduction

In this chapter, we will journey through Ancient Ireland, a fascinating period that extends from the Stone Age through the Bronze Age, up until the Iron Age. This was a time when pioneers first set foot on the island, gradually transforming the untouched land into thriving settlements, forging the backbone of what would eventually become our Irish community. Amidst an era shrouded in the mists of prehistory - a time before the advent of writing - the only torch lighting our path into this captivating past is the rich trove of archaeological evidence.

Progressing through the different Ages of Ancient Ireland, we will transition into the Iron Age, a pivotal period marked by the arrival of the Celts. With their intricate societal structures, advanced ironworking techniques, and rudimentary form of writing, the Celts wielded significant influence, introducing a new chapter in Ireland's expansive historical narrative.

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3.1: MESOLITHIC IRELAND

The first settlers in Ireland

- The Stone Age is split into three periods:
  - **Palaeolithic** – <u>Early</u> – 2,500,000 BC to 8,000 BC
  - **Mesolithic** – <u>Middle</u> – 8,000 BC to 3,500 BC
  - **Neolithic** – <u>New</u> – 3,500 BC to 2,000 BC
- This period of history is known as the **Stone Age** because <u>all tools and weapons were made from stone</u>.
- The first people arrived in Ireland during the Mesolithic Period.
- It's likely that they arrived from Scotland in **dugout canoes**. They were a **nomadic** people: <u>they moved from place to place</u>.
- They lived in small **basket-like huts** that were made from branches and covered with grass and animal hides.
- They were **hunter-gatherers**; <u>they hunted animals such as wild boars and birds, fished and gathered fruit, nuts and berries</u>.
- The oldest known Irish mesolithic site is in **Mount Sandel** in Co. Derry.

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Mesolithic Burial Customs

- A burial site in **Hermitage**, **Co. Limerick** tells us that the Mesolithic people **cremated** (burned) the bodies of the dead and buried them with axes and other valuable items (**grave goods**).
  - They may have cremated their dead to **stop animals from going after the decomposing bodies**.
- These are very important for archaeologists as the objects are well preserved.
- It also suggests that the people believed in some form of **afterlife**.

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Checkpoint pg. 28 (Artefact, 1st Edition)

1. Why is this period called the Stone Age?
2. Explain the terms: hunter-gatherer; nomadic; grave goods.
3. What weapons and tools did they use? What were these made from?
4. Describe a Mesolithic house.
5. Why might archaeologists think that the Mesolithic people believed in an afterlife?

3.2: NEOLITHIC IRELAND

The First Farmers

- Between 4,000 and 3,500 BC, new settlers arrived in Ireland. The brought new skills such as: **farming, bread-making, tomb-building** and **pottery-making**.
- The most important of these new skills was the introduction of farming.
- Unlike the mesolithic people, the neolithic people settled and built communities by cutting down trees and clearing land to plant crops. They also kept animals.
- There are several major Neolithic sites in Ireland, some of which are:
  - **The Céide Fields, Co. Mayo**.
  - **Lough Gur, Co. Limerick**.
  - **The Boyne Valley, Co. Meath**.
- Like the Mesolithic people, they hunted and gathered but it was no longer their main source of food. Their tools and weapons were still made from stone.
- They ploughed land with **mattocks** and **ploughs**, grew crops like **wheat** and **barley**, domesticated animals like **sheep** and **pigs**, made **bread** using a **saddle stone** and made the first **pots** using local cay (used to store food, tools or ashes of the dead).

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Neolithic Burial Customs

- A significant change in Neolithic Ireland was a new emphasis on building tombs for cremated remains and grave goods.
- There were three main types of **megalithic** (huge stone) tombs:
  - **Passage graves** – these were huge mounds built over a central passage which led to a chamber for the dead. (**Newgrange, Co. Meath**)
  - **Court cairns** – these had an open space (*court*) at the front and a chamber originally covered by a mound of stones (*cairn*) for the dead behind. (**Creevykeel, Co. Sligo**)
  - **Portal dolmens** – Two or more standing stones and a huge capstone resting across the top with the remains placed inside. (**Poulnabrone dolmen, the Burren, Co. Clare**)
- The megaliths for these tombs would have been **floated along rivers on rafts** or **rolled for miles on logs**. Building these tombs would have taken hundreds of people and also clearly showcases that the Neolithic people clearly had knowledge of the stars and were skilled engineers.

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Checkpoint pg. 30 (Artefact, 1st Edition)

1. What important change took place in Ireland during the Neolithic Period?
2. What foods were produced by Neolithic farmers?
3. Describe Neolithic houses and how these were different from Mesolithic houses.
4. Describe (a) a passage tomb; (b) a court cairn; (c) a portal dolmen.
5. Explain the following terms: *wattle and daub*; *megaliths*.

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Checkpoint pg. 30 (Artefact, 1st Edition)

1. Farming was introduced.
2. Crops such as wheat and barley and meat from domesticated animals such as sheep and pigs.
3. Neolithic houses had poles driven into the ground (post holes) and walls of wattle and daub. The roof was thatched with straw or rushes. They were much bigger and more permanent than the houses of the Mesolithic people.
4.
   a. Passage tomb: huge mounds built over a central passage which led to a chamber for the dead.
   b. Court cairn: an open space (court) at the front and a chamber originally covered by a mound of stones (cairn) for the dead behind.
   c. Portal dolmen: Two or more standing stones and a huge capstone resting across the top with the remains placed inside.
5. Wattle and daub: wooden sticks woven together like a basket (wattle) and covered with a mud paste (daub). Megaliths: large stones

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3.3: BRONZE AGE IRELAND

Metal comes to Ireland

- Archaeologists believe the first use of metal in Ireland was around 2,000 BC; this was the Bronze Age.
- Bronze (an **alloy** (combination) of copper and tin) was **stronger** than stone but was also much **easier to shape** so people had greater control over the tools and weapons they could make.
- Copper was mined at **Mount Gabriel** in Co. Cork but tin had to be imported from the likes of **Cornwall** in Britain.
- Bronze was made by the process of **smelting** copper and tin – melting metal at a high temperature to separate it from the ore – combining them and pouring them into moulds to set.
- **Metalworkers** (smiths) made tools such as **sickles** (to cut crops), **axes** and **ploughs** and weapons such as **knives**, **swords**, **shields** and **spears** while farming remained the main source of food for Bronze Age people.

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Life in the Bronze Age

- They grew **wheat** and **barley**; kept animals such as **pigs**, **sheep** and **cattle**; and hunted animals such as **birds** and **fish**.
- As skills developed, smiths made bronze pots and cauldrons for cooking, horns for music and **jewellery** in gold and bronze like bracelets, armlets, earrings, necklaces, **torcs** and **lunulae**.
- **Querns** were used to grind corn into flour for bread.
- Meat was cooked in a **fulacht fiadh**.
  - This was a stone-lined pit which was filled with water.
  - Stones were then heated in a fire and lowered into the water to make it boil.
  - The meat was wrapped in straw and left boiling until ready to eat.
- While most houses in the Bronze Age were very similar to Neolithic houses (wattle and daub walls, thatched roofs), there were a couple of changes.
  - Firstly, they were bigger (about 6 metres wide) and circular.
  - Secondly, houses and other smaller buildings were enclosed behind timber fences, earth embankments and ditches to defend the people from attacks and/or keep their animals safe at night.

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Bronze Age Housing

Rath

- A rath was an earthen fort made by digging out a circular trench and piling up the earth in the centre.
- The houses were built on the rath so they could see enemies approach.
- Houses were made of wattle and daub, timber or stone, depending on available materials locally.
- Roofs were mostly thatched with reeds or straw.
- Animals were kept in the rath at night or when under attack.
- A gateway was the only way in.

Crannóg

- A kind of fort built on the middle of a lake.
- Wooden posts were sunk into the lake. The centre was filled with stones, branches and earth until the base reached the surface of the water.
- A wooden fence surrounded the crannóg.
- Hidden stepping stones or dug out canoes were used to get out to the crannóg.
- Some had a drawbridge which could be pulled in when under attack.

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Bronze Age Burial Customs

- Some Bronze age burials were similar to those of Neolithic period.
- **Wedge tombs** were smaller versions of **portal dolmens**.
- As the population of the island grew during the Bronze Age, **cist graves** became more common.
  - These were less difficult to build; just stone-lined graves in the ground.
  - The body was buried in a **crouched** or **foetal position** with grave goods.

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Checkpoint pg. 32 (Artefact, 1st Edition)

1. Which two metals were used to make bronze?
2. Why was the use of metal important?
3. What was a fulacht fiadh and how was it used?
4. What types of jewellery were made in the Bronze Age?
5. How were houses in the Bronze Age (a) similar to and (b) different from those of the Neolithic period?
6. Describe a cist grave.

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Checkpoint pg. 32 (Artefact, 1st Edition)

1. Copper and tin are the two metals used to make bronze.
2. Metal was stronger than stone but easier to shape and mould to create tools and weapons.
3. A fulacht fiadh was a pit which was lined with stones and filled with water. Stones were then heated in a fire and lowered into water to make it boil. The meat was wrapped in straw and left boiling until ready to eat.
4. Jewellery was made in gold and bronze, for example bracelets, armlets, earrings, necklaces, torcs and lunulae.
5. Similarities between Bronze Age and Neolithic housing: wattle and daub walls, thatched roofs. Differences: Neolithic houses were much bigger and circular, enclosed behind wooden fences and earthen banks
6. A cist grave was a stone-lined grave in which the body was buried in a crouched or foetal position with its grave goods
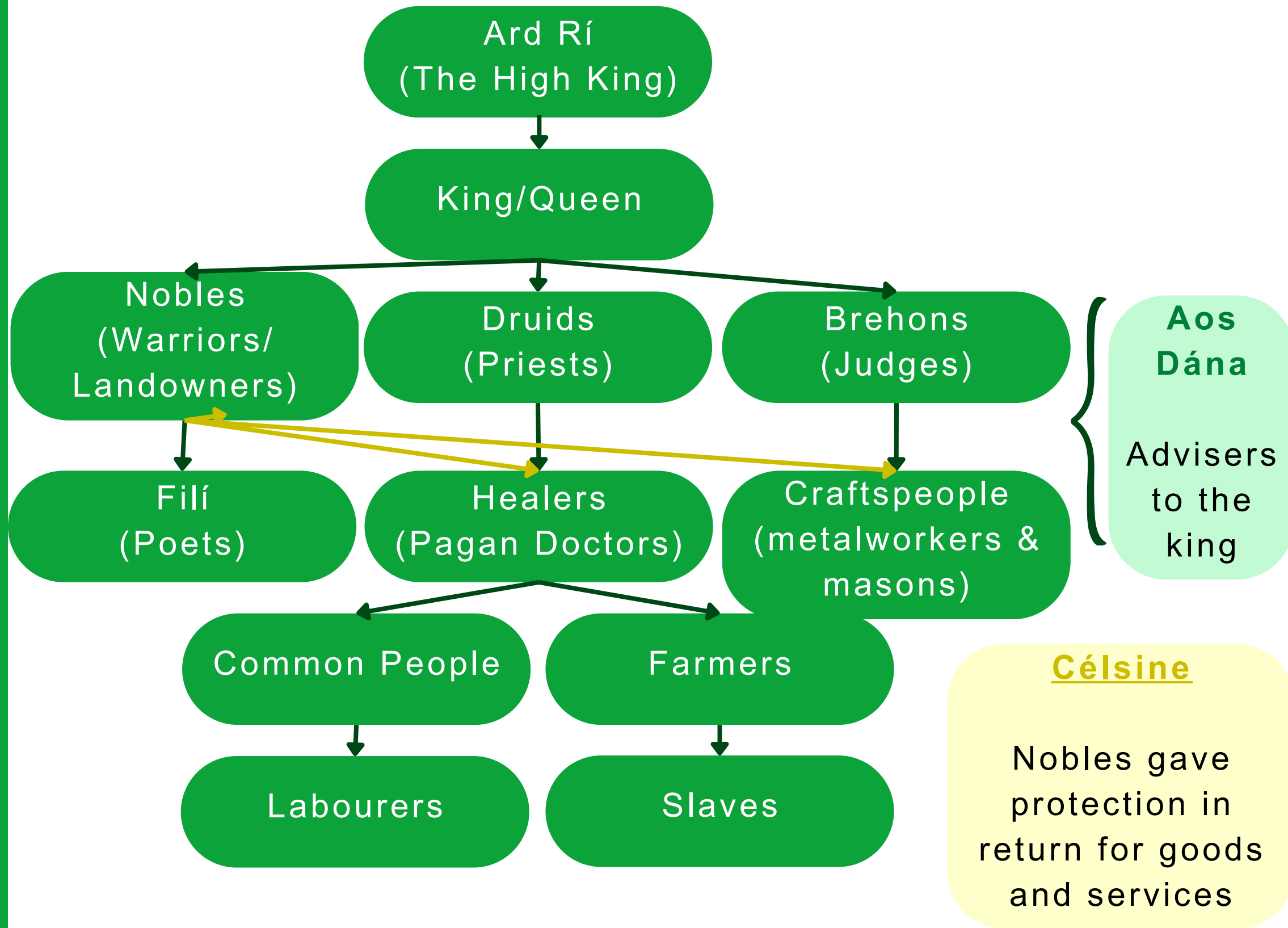
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3.4: IRON AGE IRELAND

The arrival of the Celts

- Believed to have migrated from **Central Europe**, specifically areas corresponding to present-day Austria and Switzerland, **the Celts** settled in Ireland between **500-300 BC**. Along with them, they transported their vibrant **culture**, **language**, and **religious practices**, as well as horses and iron-working skills. Iron, being a far superior material to bronze, swiftly supplanted the latter as the principal metal for fabricating tools and weapons. Simultaneously, Celtic culture burgeoned, establishing its dominance over the course of the ensuing millennium.

- The Celts were notable for introducing a highly organised society in Ireland, a precedent in the region. Ireland was partitioned into numerous **tuaths** (kingdoms), each presided over by a **rí** or (king). Immediately beneath the king were the **aos dána** – a group comprised of warriors, nobles, and individuals possessing special skills. Following them were the **farmers** and **ordinary citizens**, while the **labourers** and **slaves** formed the society's lowest class.

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Celtic Society

Ard Rí
(The High King)

King/Queen

Nobles
(Warriors/
Landowners)

Druids
(Priests)

Brehons
(Judges)

Aos Dána

Advisers to the king

Filí
(Poets)

Healers
(Pagan Doctors)

Craftspeople
(metalworkers &
masons)

Common People

Farmers

Célsine

Nobles gave protection in return for goods and services

Labourers

Slaves

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Women in Celtic Society

- Women in the Celtic society were given rights far ahead of their time, very similar to the rights seen in the **Norse society** (Vikings).
- It was not uncommon for women to achieve an influential status such as becoming **Druidesses** who were respected throughout Celtic lands or ruling as **Queens**.
- Celtic women could own property and were represented in the law.
- Women could even become **Brigh Brigaid** (female judges) and for the most part, any other career path they saw fit.
- The are also many female goddesses prevalent in Celtic mythology.

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Celtic Art

- The Celts introduced their distinctive artistic flair to Ireland, heralding an era of creativity known for its unique patterns and designs. This specific style, identified as the **La Téne style** (owing to the discovery of an artefact cache in La Téne, Switzerland), encompassed an array of design elements such as spirals, florals, fantastical creatures, and elegant curves.

- Moreover, the Celts demonstrated remarkable craftsmanship in the creation of elaborate golden jewellery, utilising their design principles to a high degree of detail. As time passed, this artistic style didn't remain stagnant but instead underwent a continuous evolution. The influence of this transformational La Téne style is profound, having left an indelible mark on subsequent generations of Irish art.

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Celtic Burial Customs and Religion

- Celtic burial practices bore considerable resemblance to those established in the Bronze Age, demonstrating a continuity of customs. Celtic traditions included cremation of the deceased, with the remains subsequently interred in pits or cist graves. These burials were typically accompanied by grave goods, providing an enduring testament to the person's life.

- A distinctive aspect of Celtic burial practices was the use of **ogham stones** to denote graves. These standing stones, often utilised as boundary markers, showcased the earliest known form of written script in Ireland. The ogham writing system, characterised by horizontal and diagonal etchings along a central vertical line, was a unique addition to the Celtic cultural landscape.

- Prior to the advent of Christianity, **druids** held the spiritual reins of Celtic society. Their status was only second to the King, reflecting their substantial influence and prominence. Enjoying privileges such as tax exemption and abstention from combat, their societal role was diverse and vital. Druids presided over religious ceremonies, an integral part of the Celtic spiritual life, and held the honour of crowning the King, underlining their pivotal role in maintaining the societal hierarchy.

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Celtic Burial Customs and Religion

- The Celts, as pagans, worshiped many gods.

Gods	Goddesses
Dagda - King of the Gods, God of Death	Danu - Mother of the Celts, Goddess of Nature
Cú Chulainn - God of Heroes	The Morrigan - Goddess of War, Queen of Demons
Lugh - God of War, Harvest and Sun	Medb, Queen of Connacht - Goddess of Heroes
Cernunnos - God of Nature, Grain, Wealth and Horned Animals	Badb - Goddess of Death, Bringer of the End of the World
Aengus - God of Youth and Love	Brigid - Goddess of Poetry, Prohecy, Healing, Agriculture, and Fire

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Checkpoint pg. 34 (Artefact, 1st Edition)

1. When did the Celts arrive in Ireland?
2. How was Celtic society organised?
3. Describe (a) a crannóg and (b) a ring-fort.
4. What was the La Téne style?
5. What did the Celts do with their dead?
6. What was ogham? Why is it important?

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Checkpoint pg. 34 (Artefact, 1st Edition)

1. The Celts arrived in Ireland between 500 and 300 BC.
2. The rí (king) was at the top of the tuath, with the aos dána (nobles, judges, poets, doctors, skilled craftsmen) and warriors under him, then the peasants, and the slaves at the bottom.
3.
    a. (a) Crannóg: Human-made islands. Tree trunks were driven down into the bed of a lake and a platform was built on top.
    b. Ring-fort: Circular enclosures surrounded by a ditch, earth bank and wooden fence. Some also had an underground passage (souterrain).
4. La Tène style was an artistic style that originated in Switzerland, featuring spirals, florals, fantasy animals and curved lines.
5. The Celts cremated the bodies of their dead and buried them in pits and cist graves, often marked by Ogham stones.
6. Ogham was the first written language in Ireland. It is a series of lines and notches along a vertical line to represent letters

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3.5: SUMMARY
Summary

In this chapter, we have learned that...

- The epochs of the Stone Age (encompassing the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods) and the Bronze Age denote Ireland's prehistoric era - a time devoid of any known written records. The dawn of the Iron Age ushered in the introduction of ogham, marking Ireland's earliest foray into written script.
- During the Mesolithic era, Ireland's inaugural inhabitants arrived, characterised by their hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Their existence was underpinned by the use of stone tools and weapons, a nomadic way of life, and the practice of cremating their deceased.
- The Neolithic period bore witness to a significant shift in lifestyle, with the introduction of farming to Ireland. Now, people began to settle, constructing permanent dwellings, cultivating crops, and rearing livestock. This era also saw the construction of grand tombs, such as passage tombs, portal dolmens, and court cairns, for their deceased, showcasing a shift in burial practices.
- The advent of the Bronze Age brought with it the commonality of metal tools and weaponry in Ireland. People continued to farm and began to dwell in larger residences, bolstered by wooden fortifications for protection. Burial practices evolved further, with graves diminishing in size.
- The Iron Age witnessed the arrival of a new group in Ireland - the Celts. Characterised by their structured society, the Celts came to dominate the cultural and social landscape of Ireland, a domination that persisted until Christianity's arrival on the island.

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Check Your Learning (pg. 12, Chronicles, 1st Edition)

1. Place the following periods into chronological order: Bronze Age, Neolithic Period, Iron Age, Mesolithic Period, Palaeolithic Period.
2. How did people cross from Scotland to Ireland in Mesolithic times?
3. Relating to the Mesolithic Period, give one piece of information about each of the following: (a) housing, (b) work, (c) burial customs.
4. When did farmers first arrive in Ireland?
5. Relating to the Neolithic period, give one piece of information about each of the following: (a) housing, (b) work, (c) burial customs.
6. Which settlement is older, Mount Sandel in County Derry or the Céide Fields in County Mayo?
7. Describe how bronze was made by Smiths in Bronze Age Ireland.
8. Relating to the Bronze Age, give one piece of information about each of the following areas: (a) housing, (b) food, (c) weapons and tools.
9. Who were the Celts?
10. Relating to the Iron Age, give one piece of information about each of the following areas: (a) housing, (b) language and art, (c) weapons and tools.

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Project

Guidelines:

1. **Length**: The depth of your project should reflect about 2-3 weeks of work.
2. **Sources**: Use at least three different sources for your research. These can be books, scholarly articles, or reputable online resources.
3. **Citations**: All information and images that are not your own should be properly cited.
4. **Mediums**: You may choose to present your project in one of the following ways:
   - **Poster**: Your poster should be informative and visually engaging.
   - **Minecraft or Lego Model**: If choosing this option, please also include a brief report explaining your model.
   - **Painting/Drawing**: Your artwork should be accompanied by a description.
   - **Recycled Materials**: Create your model using recycled materials and provide an explanation of your creative process.

Assessment:

Your projects will be assessed based on:

1. Research and Content
2. Creativity and Presentation
3. Understanding of Context
4. Adherence to Guidelines

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Project

Historical Sites

Newgrange, County Meath

The Ceide Fields, County Mayo

Mount Sandel, County Londonderry

Poulnabrone Dolmen, County Clare

Lough Gur, County Limerick

Historical Figures

Cú Chulainn

Queen Medb (Maeve)

Fionn mac Cumhaill

Deirdre of the Sorrows

Lugh Lamhfada

Cathbad

Mug Ruith

Niall of the Nine Hostages

Tuathal Techtmar

Érimón and Éber Finn

Gobán Saor

Dagda

Aengus

Tuatha Dé Danann

Fir Bolg

Milesians

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Classwork

Complete the handout given.

Some letters are not part of the the Ogham alphabet. You can use alternatives or drop that missing letter.

Once you have both your first name and surname filled out on the sheet, colour in the Celtic God you have been given.

Make sure your name is written at the top of your sheets.

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