The First Hominids

1. When did humans first appear?
   About 3 million years ago, the first “hominids” – known as Australopithecus – appeared in Southern Africa. Ancestors of many of the animals you see today were plentiful: deer, giraffes, hyenas, cattle, lions, elephants, sharks, birds ... These ancestors are as similar to the creatures you know today as you are to the first hominids.

7. The early hominids were different from apes because:
   - they could walk upright, without using their hands
   - their hands were jointed differently: whereas an ape’s hands are perfect for hanging and climbing, the hands of Australopithecus were perfect for making and using tools.

12. Their diet was mostly vegetarian, along with some meat, probably obtained by scavenging. The tools that Australopithecus made were simple, made mostly from bone and used for digging and scraping.

15. Who came next?
   As far as we know, true humans, Homo habilis, first appeared in Africa about 2 million years ago.

18. Homo habilis were taller than Australopithecus and had larger brains. They often sheltered under cliffs as they followed herds of animals. These early people soon learned that there was safety in numbers and would band together to hunt and look after each other. Homo habilis couldn’t make fire.

22. When did people have fire?
   Homo erectus date from around 1.5 million years ago. These people looked more like we do today: they were about the same size as modern humans although their brains were only two-thirds as big. Homo erectus could make fire. That meant that the people could now:
   - choose where they camped – they didn’t always need shelter
   - cook food – making it more edible as well as killing off diseases
   - begin to develop a more formal family and social life around the fire.

---

Dive Deeper 1
Write down one word that you don’t know what it means. Read the sentence again and explain what you think it means using what you do know.

Dive Deeper 2
Why did the author write this text? Who did they write it for? Explain why you think this.

1. Read the text. Time yourself. How long did it take?
2. Re-read the text. Time yourself. How long did it take?
3. Write a synonym (similar word) for the word “start”? Find this word in the text.
4. Find a word in the text that is an antonym (opposite) of “disappeared”? What do you notice about how these two words are spelt similar but are different?
5. Does this text tell you facts or opinions?