

# A Distant Relative?

How far back does your family tree go? A hundred years? A thousand years? What about 6 to 7 million years? An ancient skull found in Africa suggests that the human family might be that old.

Discovered in 2001 in the desert of Chad, the skull was nicknamed Toumai by scientists. Toumai is a rare find. The skull is nearly complete; it even includes a few teeth.

The finding is not without controversy. Some scientists think that Toumai is the oldest known hominid, or primitive human ancestor, ever found. Others say Toumai is an ape.

Most hominids that scientists are aware of lived millions of years after Toumai. The most famous one is called Lucy. She lived in Ethiopia about 3.5 million years ago. While Lucy's face looked like the face of a chimpanzee, Toumai's skull has both human and apelike features.

Because Toumai's skull looks different from other hominid skulls, some scientists think Toumai represents a whole new species. Toumai's official name is *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*.

Scientists were surprised to find a humanlike face on a skull as old as Toumai's. They thought hominids turned into humans step by step over time. Scientists plot those changes on a timeline, starting with a chimpanzee-like ancestor and ending with modern humans. Toumai's humanlike face and chimp-sized brain suggest that the development of hominids was not so simple.

There may not be a direct line leading from Toumai to Lucy to us. Instead, the timeline might resemble a tree with lots of branches. Different species in different places could have evolved humanlike features at different times.

Scientists aren't sure where exactly Toumai belongs on our family tree. Toumai could be like a great-great-grandfather—or just a distant cousin. Toumai could also be one of many types of hominids who roamed Earth millions of years ago.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why do some scientists think that Toumai represents a new species?

- A Toumai's skull was found in a different continent than other hominid skulls.
- B Toumai's brain was bigger than brains of other hominids.
- C Toumai's skull looks different from other hominid skulls.
- D Toumai's teeth were smaller than teeth in other hominid skulls.

2. Based on the passage, one could *argue* that Toumai best fits in which position on the human family tree?

- A twin brother
- B grandfather
- C great uncle
- D distant cousin

3. Which of the following statements is supported by the passage?

- A New discoveries can change how scientists understand humans.
- B New discoveries confirm what scientists already know about humans.
- C New discoveries prove that scientists are wrong about humans.
- D New discoveries help scientists make new medicines for humans.

4. Read the following sentence and answer the question: "Some scientists think that Toumai is the oldest known hominid, or primitive human ancestor, ever found."

In this sentence, the word **primitive** means

- A wise
- B early
- C complex
- D late

5. The main idea of this passage is that

- A all scientists agree that Toumai is our great-grandfather
- B scientists disagree about how Toumai fits into the human family tree
- C some scientists think that Toumai is an ape
- D scientists disagree about the location in which Toumai was found

6. What is the Toumai skull?

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7. How does the discovery of Toumai challenge what scientists know about humans and human development?

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Toumai could be the oldest hominid, \_\_\_\_\_ some scientists think that he was an ape.

- A so
- B but
- C if
- D because

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Lucy is the most famous hominid, having lived in Ethiopia 3.5 million years ago.

Who? Lucy

(is) What? \_\_\_\_\_

(having lived) Where? \_\_\_\_\_

When? \_\_\_\_\_

**10.** Read the vocabulary word and definition below, and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

**Vocabulary Word:** controversy (con · tro · ver · sy): an argument; when two people or groups disagree over something.

**10a.** Read the sentences below and underline the word **controversy**.

1. The radio announcer sparked a controversy when he stated that women were not smart, because many people did not believe that.
2. There was no controversy in saying that the dessert was delicious, because everyone loved it.
3. Because the candidates have such different opinions, there will be some controversy during their debate.
4. There was controversy among fans when the basketball player signed a contract with a different team.
5. The movie created a controversy about violence in films because it featured a lot of guns and blood.

**10b.** Which image shows something that would cause controversy if it were shown in a children's movie?



**11.** Why might some artists like to create controversy?

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 850

**Passage Text Structure:** Argumentative – the writer provides evidence for both sides of an argument

**Passage Summary:** “A Distant Relative” discusses the discovery of the Toumai skull and the scientific debate about whether and how it is related to humans. The passage also explains how this find could change the way scientists understand human evolution.

1. Why do some scientists think that Toumai represents a new species?

- A Toumai’s skull was found in a different continent than other hominid skulls.
- B Toumai’s brain was bigger than brains of other hominids.
- C **Toumai’s skull looks different from other hominid skulls.**
- D Toumai’s teeth were smaller than teeth in other hominid skulls.

2. Based on the passage, one could *argue* that Toumai best fits in which position on the human family tree?

- A twin brother
- B grandfather
- C great uncle
- D **distant cousin**

3. Which of the following statements is supported by the passage?

- A **New discoveries can change how scientists understand humans.**
- B New discoveries confirm what scientists already know about humans.
- C New discoveries prove that scientists are wrong about humans.
- D New discoveries help scientists make new medicines for humans.

4. Read the following sentence and answer the question: “Some scientists think that Toumai is the oldest known hominid, or primitive human ancestor, ever found.”

In this sentence, the word **primitive** means

- A wise
- B **early**
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5. The main idea of this passage is that

- A all scientists agree that Toumai is our great-grandfather
- B **scientists disagree about how Toumai fits into the human family tree**
- C some scientists think that Toumai is an ape
- D scientists disagree about the location in which Toumai was found

6. What is the Toumai skull?

**Suggested answer:** The Toumai skull is an ancient skull found in Chad that is between 6 and 7 million years old. [paragraph 1]

7. How does the discovery of Toumai challenge what scientists know about humans and human development?

**Suggested answer:** Scientists thought that hominids turned into humans step by step over time, but Toumai does not fit on their timeline because he is older than other hominids yet still has a humanlike face. This may mean that humans developed differently in different places and times. [paragraphs 7, 8]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Toumai could be the oldest hominid, \_\_\_\_\_ some scientists think that he was an ape.

- A so
- B **but**
- C if
- D because

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Lucy is the most famous hominid, having lived in Ethiopia 3.5 million years ago.

Who? Lucy

(is) What? **the most famous hominid**

(having lived) Where? **Ethiopia**

When? **3.5 million years ago**

10. ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

**Vocabulary Word:** controversy

**Step 1:** Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (con · tro · ver · sy)
- b. Teacher says: "This word is controversy. What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "controversy."]

**Step 2:** Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: "The word controversy means an argument. When two people or groups disagree over something, it is often called a controversy."
- b. Teacher says: "In the passage, there is an argument about the Toumai skull because scientists disagree about what it means. The controversy is whether Toumai is a hominid or an ape."
- c. Teacher says: "What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "controversy."]

**Step 3:** Practice the word

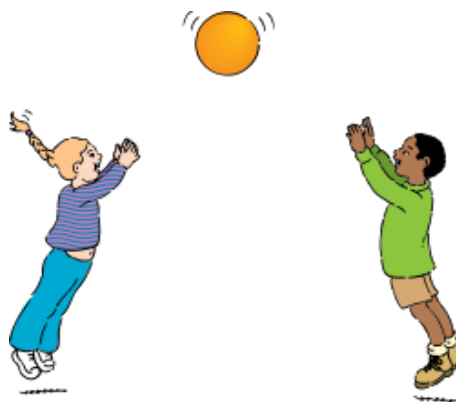
Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the first sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word, prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.

- 10a.**
1. The radio announcer sparked a controversy when he stated that women were not smart, because many people did not believe that.
  2. There was no controversy in saying that the dessert was delicious, because everyone loved it.
  3. Because the candidates have such different opinions, there will be some controversy during their debate.
  4. There was controversy among fans when the basketball player signed a contract with a different team.
  5. The movie created a controversy about violence in films because it featured a lot of guns and blood.

**Step 4:** Check for student understanding

This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

- 10b.** Which image shows something that would cause controversy if it were shown in a children's movie?



- 11.** Why might some artists like to create controversy?

**Suggested answer:** Artists might like to create controversy because it attracts attention to their work.

*Suggested Additional Vocabulary:* ancient, resemble