

Student Handout # 4 – The Iron Age

Directions for Talking to the Text:

- When you read about something that helps explain how and why iron was developed and spread, put a "C" for cause at the beginning of the sentence.
- When you read about something that happened as a result of iron technology, something that changed because of iron, put an "E" for effect by the sentence.

How the Iron Age Changed the World

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A thousand years before the age of empires in Rome and Greece, the Iron Age was ushered into the world with the clank and clatter of the blacksmith's anvil. The transition from the Bronze Age occurred at different times in different spots on the globe, but when and where it did, the distinctive dark metal brought with it significant changes to daily life in ancient society, from the way people grew crops to the way they fought wars.

Iron has remained an essential element for more than 3,000 years, through the Industrial Revolution – helping Britain become the foremost industrial power – and into today in its more sophisticated form, steel.

Accidental metal

People in parts of western Africa and southwestern Asia were the first to realize that the dark-silvery rocks poking out of the earth could be worked into tools and weapons, sometime around 1500 B.C., evidence shows. The metal was probably discovered there by accident when some ore was dropped into a fire and cooled into wrought iron, historians think.

The eureka moment didn't reach Europe for another 500 years, traveling slowly north and west through Greece, Italy, central Europe and finally to the British Isles with the spread of the famous Celtic tribes. The Celts diffused iron technology over much of the continent through warfare, where their victory was assured due to the strength of iron weapons. Perhaps not the most peaceful of cultural exchanges, but where the technology did travel, it caught on fast.

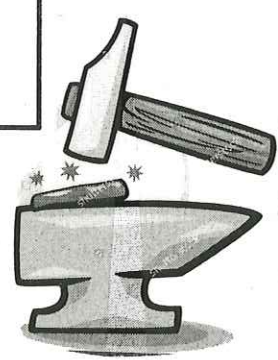
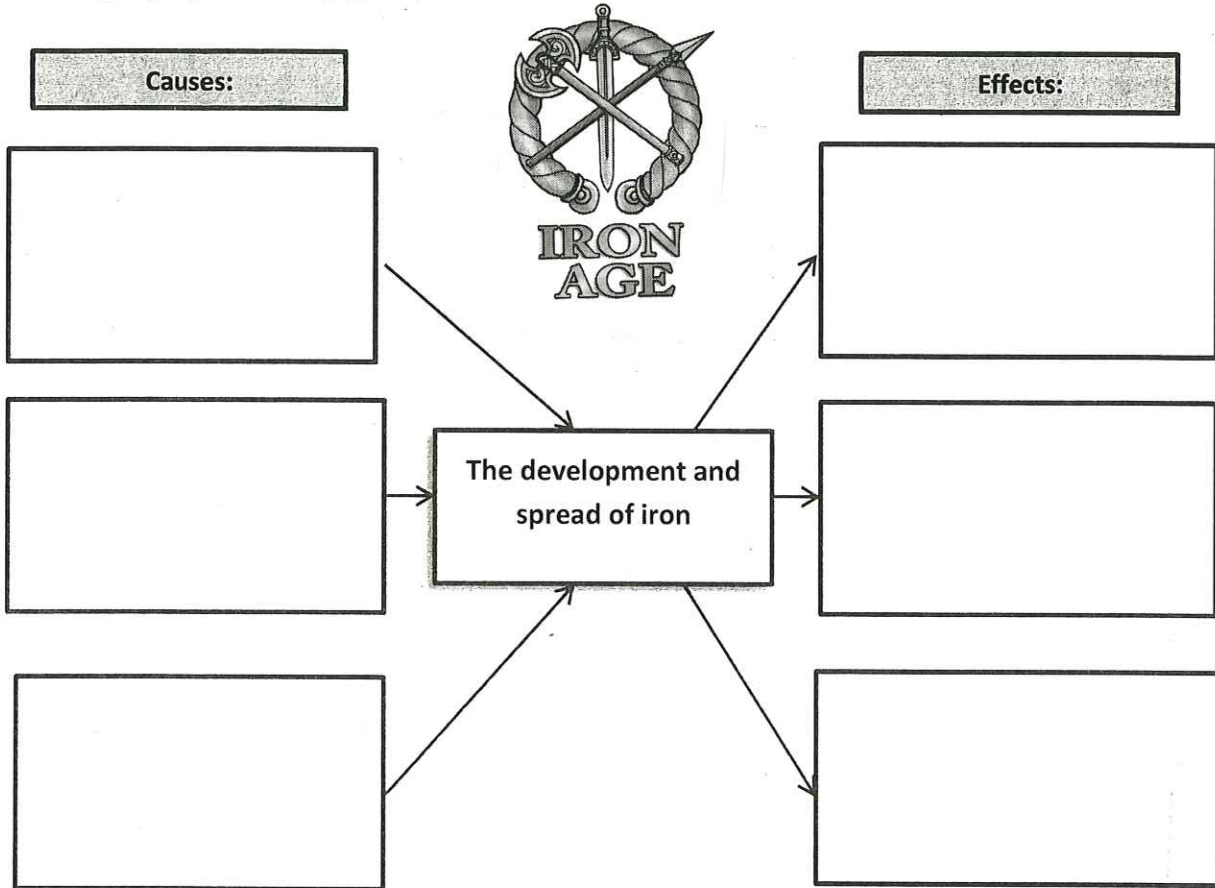
Iron made life a lot easier in those days, when just living to the age of 45 was a feat. By that time, much of Europe had settled into small village life, toiling the soil with bronze and stone tools. Iron farming tools, such as sickles and plough tips, made the process more efficient and allowed farmers to exploit tougher soils, try new crops and have more time for other activities.

Some families spent their new free time making salt, sewing clothes and crafting luxuries such as jewelry, many of which were traded over long distances.



Student Handout 4 continued:

Using your Talking to the Text notes from the article above, write down in your own words some of the factors that lead to the development and spread of iron (Causes), as well some of the ways that iron changed people's lives (Effects).



Chapter 3 - The Military Revolution
Introduction

This Iron Age was marked by **almost constant war**, a time in which states of all sizes came into existence only to be extinguished by the rise of still larger empires, which, in their turn, were destroyed by military force....

The Iron Age also saw the practice of war firmly rooted in man's societies and experience and, perhaps more importantly, in his psychology. War, warriors, and weapons were now a normal part of human existence. **Also at this time armies produced the prototype of every weapon that was developed for the next three thousand years.** Only with the introduction of gunpowder would a new age of weaponry and warfare begin. A military revolution that eventually produced the age of modern warfare had begun.

One of the most important stimuli for this military revolution was the discovery and use of iron. Iron was first employed as a technology of war about 1300 B.C. by the Hittites. Within a hundred years the secret of iron making and cold forging had spread at least to Palestine and Egypt and, perhaps, to Mesopotamia as well. Iron weapons were heated and hammered into shape rather than cast, making them **stronger, less brittle, and more reliable than bronze** weapons.

... The importance of iron in the development of ancient warfare lay *not* in its strength or ability to hold a sharp edge. **Iron's importance rested in the fact that unlike bronze, which required the use of relatively rare tin to manufacture, iron was commonly and widely available almost everywhere.** It was also somewhat easier to extract from its carrier ore, and the plentiful supply of this new strategic material made it possible for states to produce enormous quantities of reliable weapons cheaply. This fact made the weapons explosion possible. No longer was it only the major powers that could afford enough weapons to equip a large military force. Now almost any state could do it. The result was a **dramatic increase in the frequency of war.**

<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/gabrmetz/gabr0008.htm>

Finish the sentences below in your own words using ideas from the reading on the Iron Age:

1. Large, permanent armies emerged during this time period in part because

2. Iron was better than bronze for weapons because

3. More weapons began to be produced in this era because

4. With larger armies and more weapons, there was also more

