

## A HISTORY OF IRELAND IN 100 OBJECTS, A SELECTION 5TH & 6TH CLASS LESSON PLAN

### Flint Macehead c.3300-2800BC



Now, have a long look at this object. It's hard to tell what it is. What do you think? To us, it might look like a face but we'll never be sure what the people who made it were thinking.

This is a macehead. The hole, which might look like a mouth to us today, would have fitted over a long wooden staff. Some maces, with maceheads attached, were used as weapons to attack enemies. Very blunt, very basic and, as often as not, very effective.

But this is no ordinary macehead and was never used as a weapon. It's made from flint, one of the hardest rocks around and it would have been incredibly difficult to carve those patterns on its surface. So why go to all that bother if your macehead could well get damaged or even lost in the heat of battle?

No, this macehead is all about sending out a very clear message.

We are important.

We are modern.

We are smart.

The flint used to make the macehead is no ordinary flint. It's a very fine, very rare type, instead, and we now think the macehead, itself, was made in Scotland. All those patterns on the surface are wonderfully complex and there's no doubt that the macehead would have been considered to be an incredibly exotic work of art.

And it's 5,000 years old!

Added to which, people have looked really carefully at those spirals and other patterns and decided that they are so perfectly formed that some kind of drill must have been used. And the idea that people used a drill, even a very basic, (and, of course, non-electrical), drill so long ago is considered to be truly amazing.

And if that wasn't breath-taking enough, the macehead was found at Knowth passage tomb, in Co Meath. Passage tombs were used to house the ashes of the dead and we know that they were hugely important monuments in their time. It makes sense that an extraordinary object like this macehead would have been kept inside a passage tomb and perhaps displayed outside during special ceremonies.

People studied the skies a lot in those days and places like Knowth were generally built facing that point on the horizon where the sun rose or set at various times during the year. Passage tombs were also built in other countries, such as Spain and France and we're beginning to think that they were all connected in some way.

So the macehead may well have been internationally famous. So famous that it was kept at Knowth and given a wonderful view of the stars above. Who knows, maybe it was thought that the universe and the macehead could somehow communicate with each other?