

Easter Island Clues

Divide the class in 4 groups. Give each group 1 card with clues (cut these out before the lesson). Each group will explore a different explanation for the collapse of the civilization at Eastern Island.

.....

Group 1

Clue 1: When the first Polynesians arrived on the island, some rats ‘hitch hiked’ with them from their home country.

- Q1. What happens with rats on an island where there are no predators to control the rat population?
- Q2. What do rats eat?

Clue 2: By studying soil samples archaeologists found evidence that a, now extinct, palm tree used to grow on the island.

- Q1. How are the rats and the trees connected?
- Q2. How could rats have contributed to the decline of trees?

Clue 3: Archeologists also found clues in trash pits; the people from this ancient culture used to fish far out on the ocean in wooden boats. These fish were an important part of the people’s diet.

- Q1. Why were people no longer able to catch fish on the ocean?
- Q2. What did the people have to eat now?

Question: How do you think civilization collapsed on Eastern Island?

.....

Group 2

Clue 1: Because the island was so rich in resources, the people had a lot of time to do ceremonies and built statues. When the population grew; rivalry among different tribes occurred. The statues were used as a status symbol; the more the better!

Clue 2: These huge statues had to be transported somehow over the island to their final locations. When more statues were built, more ‘rollers’ had to be created.

- Q1. What could be used as ‘rollers’ to transport the statues?
- Q2. What natural resource could the islanders use?
- Q3. How does the transportation of statues affect the amount of natural resources?

Clue 3: Archeologists found clues in trash pits; the people from this ancient culture used to fish far out on the ocean in wooden boats. These fish were an important part of the people’s diet.

- Q1. Why were people no longer able to catch fish on the ocean?
- Q2. What did the people have to eat now?

Question: How do you think civilization collapsed on Eastern Island?

.....

Group 3

Clue 1: Around 1650-1850 there was, what climatologists call: a little ice age that affected the southern hemisphere.

Q1. What can shifting temperatures do with the tropical plants that used to grow on the island?

Q2. How does a temperature shift affect some natural resources?

Clue 2: One of the effects of this temperature shift was probably the decline of trees.

Q1. What happens when there are no longer trees on the slopes of hills?

Q2. How is this process called and what effects can this process have on the other vegetation and the food production of the islanders?

Clue 3: Archeologists found clues in trash pits; the people from this ancient culture used to fish far out on the ocean in wooden boats. These fish were an important part of the people's diet.

Q1. Why were people no longer able to catch fish on the ocean?

Q2. What did the people have to eat now?

Question: How do you think civilization collapsed on Eastern Island?

.....

Group 4

Clue 1: Some archeologists believe that the first people on Easter Island arrived much later than is commonly assumed, and that when the island was discovered, the islander community was only a couple hundred years old.

Q1. If the community was so 'young', do you think that the population of people on the island was much bigger before the island was discovered in 1722?

Clue 2: These archeologists claim that the first islanders who arrived on the island had brought with them the crops, like banana's, they used to grow on their old lands.

Q1. What happens when it turns out that their crops don't grow that well in this different climate?

Q2. Do you think a population can grow rapidly under these circumstances?

Clue 3: The same archeologists found evidence that, after 1722 the island was visited by other people, who took a big part of the island population away to work as slaves. Those people also brought western diseases.

Q1. What happens with the standard of living when the biggest part of a population is taken away or dies by disease?

Q2. Do you think the island population collapsed before or after the discovery of eastern island in 1722?

Question: How do you think civilization collapsed on Eastern Island?