

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

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

## The First Americans

Over thousands of years, people spread out from Africa into Europe and Asia. Long before the invention of farming, the wheel or writing, the first hunters reached Beringia. Beringia is a modern name for a strip of land that once connected Asia to Alaska in North America.

The current evidence suggests the first humans crossed this “land bridge” at least 40,000 years ago and perhaps even earlier.

Asia and America have been separated by the Bering Strait for about 15,000 years. The continents are now more than fifty miles apart, but at one time they were connected by a passage more than 1000 miles wide.

Beringia existed during the Ice Ages, periods when the climate of the earth was colder. During an Ice Age, precipitation that fell on land would harden into large masses of ice called glaciers. The forming of glaciers caused sea levels to fall about three hundred feet.

Scientists fear modern industry has made the earth warmer, causing ice at the Polar Regions to melt. These melting ice caps could cause the oceans to rise and coastal lands to be submerged.

Although the climate of Beringia was very cold, it appears to have been warmer than nearby land is today. Beringia was not covered with ice because there was very little snowfall in the region. Instead, Beringia was covered with grass and small trees that fed large mammals such as bears, bison and the now extinct woolly mammoths and mastodons. These animals attracted human hunters to the

region. The hunters who crossed Beringia into America came in small groups beginning about 40,000 years ago.

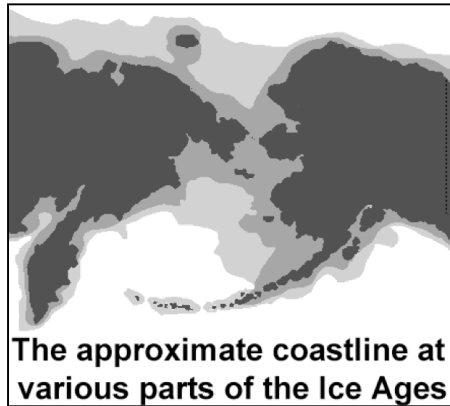
As the earth grew warmer, the glaciers melted and the land bridge slowly closed about 15,000 years ago—this was at least 9,000 years before civilizations developed in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China.

The Inuit—traditionally known by outsiders as Eskimos—also reached America from Asia, but long after the

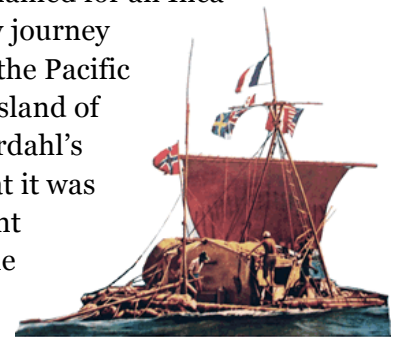
land bridge had closed. The Inuit crossed the frigid waters of the Bering Strait in boats between 6000 and 2000BCE. Their DNA indicates that the Inuit are genetically unrelated to the other indigenous peoples of America.

Archaeologists are also intrigued with ancient skeletal remains found primarily in South America that do not fit the profile of the people who passed through Beringia. DNA evidence suggests that there may have been some migration to America from the Polynesian Islands of the Pacific Ocean, possibly by sailors who were blown off course.

In 1947, adventurer Thor Heyerdahl constructed a raft using ancient technology. Heyerdahl and a crew of six sailed 3770 miles on the Kon-Tiki, named for an Inca god. Their 97-day journey took them across the Pacific from Peru to the island of Puka Puka. Heyerdahl’s voyage proved that it was possible for ancient sailors to travel the Pacific Ocean, but not that it actually occurred.



**Woolly mammoth**



**Kon-Tiki**

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### Fill in the Blanks

About \_\_\_\_\_,000 years ago, the first humans crossed a land bridge from A\_\_ia to the A\_\_e\_\_i\_\_as. They were probably h\_\_n\_\_e\_\_s in search of large mammals that included b\_\_s\_\_n and m\_\_s\_\_a\_\_o\_\_s. The l\_\_d b\_\_i\_\_ge between Asia and the Americas closed about \_\_\_\_\_,000 years ago as g\_\_a\_\_e\_\_s melted and sea l\_\_v\_\_ls rose about \_\_\_\_\_ feet. The c\_\_o\_\_i\_\_g of the land bridge occurred t\_\_o\_\_s\_\_n\_\_s of years before c\_\_v\_\_l\_\_z\_\_t\_\_on developed in M\_\_s\_\_p\_\_t\_\_m\_\_a, Egypt, and C\_\_i\_\_a.

The Inuit crossed the B\_\_r\_\_ng S\_\_r\_\_it from Asia long after the c\_\_o\_\_i\_\_g of the land bridge, but thousands of years before the arrival of the E\_\_r\_\_p\_\_a\_\_s. There is also evidence that \*s\_\_i\_\_o\_\_s reached the Americas from the P\_\_l\_\_n\_\_s\_\_an Islands of the P\_\_c\_\_f\_\_c. Adventurer Thor H\_\_y\_\_r\_\_a\_\_l proved that it was p\_\_s\_\_i\_\_le for an a\_\_c\_\_e\_\_t ship to travel between Polynesia and America, but we don't know why or when any sailors from the Pacific arrived in America.

### Answer in complete sentences

\*1. Explain why there are no written records from Beringia.

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\*2. Why did the sea level rise at the end of the ice age.

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\*3. Explain why are many modern scientists concerned about global warming.

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4. How do the Inuit differ from most other indigenous people of the Americas?

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5. What did Thor Heyerdahl's expedition prove?

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\*This is a higher order-learning question. Any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.