What Makes Us Human

When historians research a question or topic, one of the first things they must do is compile and assess, or weigh, their evidence, which can come from a variety of different primary and secondary sources. Once they have determined what evidence is most relevant and best answers their question, then they can begin combining that evidence to come to a conclusion and present an argument.

The problem: Humans may share certain traits and characteristics with other animals, but the ways humans use and adapt these characteristics sets them apart and has enabled humans to adapt as the most "developed" species. <u>But how did these characteristics make us uniquely human? How have they distinguished us from other species and facilitated our survival and evolution over time?</u>

Your task: The Smithsonian Museum has recently decided they want to answer this question by creating a "What makes us human" exhibit that will include a special showcase of one human characteristic as the most important in human evolution–the one that helped *Homo sapiens* not only survive, but also thrive. They have asked for your help to decide which of the following has been most important in human evolution and convince them that it is the best choice:
- Bipedalism
- Tool use
- Brain size
- Social organization
- Bodies
- Language, symbols and communication

First weigh the evidence for each choice. Conduct research using the sources below, articles you read for class, and/or other research/websites. You can use the chart on the next page to organize your research. Cite any sources used somewhere at the end of your presentation/report.
https://humanorigins.si.edu/human-characteristics
https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/how-we-became-human.html
https://humanorigins.si.edu/evidence.

Then compile your research, decide which was most important, develop your argument, and decide how to present your argument proposal to the Smithsonian panel. Think back to the hot dog debate: come up with a clear, logical claim and explain using examples or evidence. What makes this particular characteristic so important in human evolution? Why is it more important than the other characteristics and deserving of its own special showcase in the "what makes us human" exhibit? How has it played a critical role in human development, from our early ancestors to today? You should address possible counterarguments and defend your choice against other characteristics.

The rubric can be accessed here. You will be assessed on the following:
- Strength of argument and evidence
- Appropriate use of evidence
- Ability to defend your choice against others
- Creativity, organization and presentation of argument/choice

Remember, you want to both impress and persuade the Smithsonian panel! Your proposal can take whatever form you think is best to make your argument: a written proposal like this or something made on the computer like a presentation, infographic, or video. We will be working on this assignment in class. Whatever you do, <u>use complete sentences.</u> This is supposed to be for a professional organization!

Characteristic/ Development	What does the evidence say? How did this characteristic set humans apart and enhance their evolution?	Strength of evidence/degree to which this characteristic set humans apart and allowed them to thrive (scale 1-10, with 10 being strongest/best evidence)
bipedalism		
Tool use		
Brain size		
Social organization		
Bodies		
Language, symbols, communication		