

Plain of Jars

On land | Laos | Iron Age (dates still studied) | Grades 6-8

Name _____

Date _____

Thousands of huge stone jars sit on the hills of Laos, and scientists are still figuring out their full story.

Read the story

The Plain of Jars is on the Xieng Khouang plateau in Laos. Across more than 100 sites, there are thousands of stone jars, mostly carved from sandstone. Some are up to about 3 meters tall and weigh several tonnes.

Archaeologists think the jars were connected to burials during the Iron Age. Human bones, beads and tools have been found in and around them. Some scientists think bodies may have been placed in the jars for a time before final burial. Recent studies suggest some jars were placed more than 2,500 years ago.

A local legend says the jars were made by giants to brew rice wine to celebrate a victory. No one knows exactly who made them, which makes them a great mystery.

How it ended

The jar-making culture faded long ago, and the reasons are still unclear. The jars stayed on the hills. In the 1960s and 1970s, bombing damaged some sites, and clearing them is ongoing.

Key words

- Iron Age: the time when people began making tools and weapons from iron
- burial practice: the customs a group follows for taking care of the dead
- unexploded ordnance: bombs or shells that did not go off and are still dangerous

Wow facts

- The largest jars are around 3 meters tall.
- Some stone discs nearby may have been lids.
- A legend says giants made the jars to brew rice wine.

Talk about it

1. Why do you think people went to so much trouble to make giant jars?

2. How can a place be important for both ancient history and modern history?

Try this

Draw a map of Plain of Jars as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. In which country is the Plain of Jars?

- A. Laos
- B. Japan
- C. Peru
- D. Kenya

2. What do scientists think the jars were used for?

- A. Burials
- B. Cooking dinner
- C. Storing gold
- D. Holding fish

3. What legend explains the jars?

- A. Giants brewed rice wine in them
- B. Aliens dropped them
- C. They grew like trees
- D. Dragons laid them

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/plain-of-jars/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. The Plain of Jars is in Laos.
2. A. Bones and objects suggest they were linked to burials.
3. A. A local story says giants made them for rice wine.