

CRAFTY ROMANS

JET BEAD ACTIVITY



Image: Jet bead

Jet is a type of lignite coal, which is formed from carbonized driftwood. Jet is dense in texture, dark black, easy to cut and can be polished to a high gloss effect. The Jet found at Arbeia comes from Whitby, where it was produced in quantity naturally by the sea coast. Jet could be used to make beads for bracelets and necklaces, pins, rings, dice and other objects.

This broken jet bead reveals the hole, less than 2mm across, drilled down its length. Beads like this required skill in creating a long hole, as well as a bow drill with a very fine bit. Skill would also be needed to make the thread that the bead was strung on as part of a necklace or bracelet. It had to be strong enough not to break but fine enough to fit through the hole.

ACTIVITIES

TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT THIS BEAD

What do you see, notice and wonder about it? Do you think it was from a necklace or bracelet? Was it one of many that looked alike or different? How long do you think it would take to carve a bead like this?

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Using materials you have try to make some beads and string them into a necklace or bracelet or both! What things do you have that already have a hole through them? Can you make beads from newspaper and magazines? Watch this video from Red Ted Arts to learn how.

LEARNING EXTENSION

Jet is a form of coal called Lignite. Lignite is formed from the decomposition of wood that has changed under extreme pressure over millions of years. You can think of jet as a type of fossilized wood. Jet can be either hard or soft. Hard jet is formed from carbon compression and salt water. Soft jet is formed from carbon compression and fresh water. The Jet from Whitby is hard jet as Whitby is on the sea. Since jet is considered a type of gemstone, it can be easily polished and turned into beautiful objects like the bracelets above.

Try this experiment and learn how to polish stones and wood to bring out their natural beauty. You will need to collect some stones and wood. A good place to find these would be a beach, park or forest. Next, clean any dirt off the stones and wood by putting them in warm soapy water for 30 minutes and then drying them off afterwards. For the next part you will need either fine grade sandpaper or toothpaste to rub the stones and wood with all over. Rinse in warm water and repeat several times. Using a piece of cloth, denim works well, rub the stones and wood all over until you start to see a shine. Which was easier to polish, the stone or the wood? Why?