

Rock Art Cave Paintings

4th-6th grade

“Rock art is one of the most intimate archives of the past. It instills a sense of wonder. We want to know: Who made it? Why?” – Maxime Aubert, archaeologist

Learning Goals:

- Study examples of ancient cave paintings
- Explore organic materials in order to make rock art
- Document and share the process of experimenting with different materials and techniques in making rock art

Take a moment to study these ancient cave paintings:



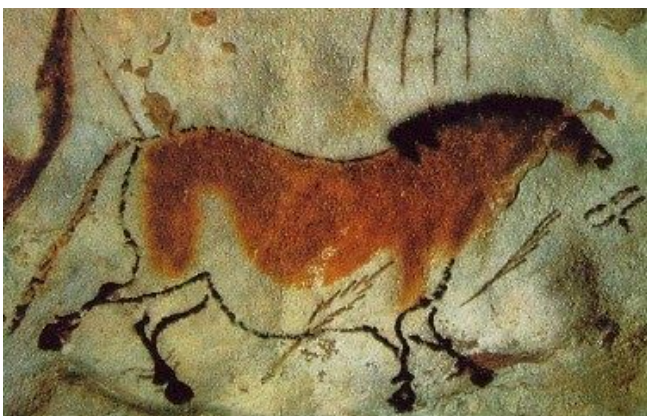
Paleolithic cave art found at the Bhimbetka rock shelters in Madhya Pradesh, central India.



Upper Paleolithic cave art found in the Patagonia region of Argentina.

What do you think is happening in the first drawing? The second drawing?

Humans have been drawing in caves for over 35,000 years. That's longer than humans have been farming, using currency, writing or reading. It was only in the last hundred years that we've discovered the art of early humans. In the year 1940, four boys in France were playing in a field with their dog. Their dog fell down a hole, the boys climbed in to find not only their pet – safe and sound – but caves full of prehistoric art. It was later discovered that the paintings inside the caves were more than 15,000 years old! These caves are called the Lascaux caves.



Since the discovery of the Lascaux caves, ancient art has been discovered in Spain, Indonesia, Norway, Australia, and many other places around the world. Archaeologists have uncovered ancient art in Africa as well, dispelling the eurocentric belief that humans began creating art after they migrated from Africa. Some of the oldest art can be found in Blombos Cave in the southern Cape of South Africa.

Why do you think humans have been drawing for so long?

Do you think humans have an innate need to create art? Why or why not?

Now that you've studied some rock art, you are going to go outside and make some of your own!

Materials needed:

- Dirt, charcoal, frozen berries, or just a pointy rock that will draw a streak
- Bowl of water
- Vegetable shortening or coconut oil
- A larger rock face for your "canvas"
- The great outdoors
- Camera (or a photographer, if you have a sibling or someone who wants to fill that role for you!)

Find a rock face that you can use as your canvas. Take out your "paint." This can be a piece of charcoal, your dirt and shortening mix, or a pointy rock.

Create a picture. Remember that these materials won't be as smooth or easy to work with as regular paint so be patient!

Once you have created your art, please make a rock art photo journal, such as the one I made below. You don't need to document every detail, but I would love to see your paintings and the process you went through!

Here's my go. I used a frozen blackberry for these two:



Then I used a pointy rock for this one (can someone identify this rock?!)

The rock was easier (and less messy to hold), but the image was much fainter:



Then I moved on to charcoal. I realize all of you may not have charcoal at home. You could use store bought art charcoal, or substitute chalk for charcoal.



And I may have gotten a little excited and decided to turn it into stage makeup (it's the theater nerd in me!!)



Finally I moved on to a dirt paste. I mixed dirt, water (not too much) and some vegetable shortening (about a spoonful). If you don't have shortening, I think hardened coconut oil would be fine.

This was definitely the most fun one for me!



I started out using a stick as a “paintbrush” and then ended up using my fingers to have more control over my design. Here’s what I ended up with:



I’m calling it Mud Muse :)