



# Rock Art: The Meanings Behind Rock Art

Created by Jacob Hamill, SCDNR Heritage Trust Archivist and Kerrigan Sunday, SCDNR Heritage Trust Intern (2018).

## Grade Level

Kindergarten – 4<sup>th</sup>

## Estimated Time

1 – 1 hour 15 minutes

## Goal

Students will learn how rock art was created, and the potential meanings behind this art form.

## Objectives

After completion of the activity, students will be able to:

1. *Identify* what rock art is.
2. *Observe* the different symbols / motifs found in rock art.
3. *Discuss* why rock art is an important aspect of human culture.
4. *Explain* where and how rock art was created.
5. *Speculate* the meaning behind rock art.
6. *Create* their own rock art with a unique and personal meaning.
7. *Categorize* motifs present in their created rock art and *compare* it to common motifs found in prehistoric and historic rock art.
8. *Construct* a bar graph representing data on popular motifs present in the rock art created by students in the class.

## Academic Standards

### *English Language Arts*

Inquiry-Based Literacy Standards (I)

- K-1.1 Engage in daily opportunities for play and exploration to foster a sense of curiosity, develop the disposition of inquisitiveness, and being to verbally articulate, “I wonders” about ideas of interest.
- K-5.1 With guidance and support, recognize the value of individual and collective thinking.
- K-5.2 With guidance and support monitor and assess learning to guide inquiry.
- 1-1.1 Translate “wonderings” into questions that lead to group conversations, explorations, and investigations.
- 1-5.1 Recognize the value of individual and collective thinking.
- 1-5.2 Monitor and assess learning to guide inquiry.
- 1-5.3 Articulate the thinking process.

- 2-1.1 Ask self-generated questions that lead to group conversations, explorations, and investigations.
- 2-5.1 Acknowledge and value individual and collective thinking.
- 2-5.2 Monitor and assess learning to guide inquiry.
- 2-5.3 Articulate the process of learning and seek appropriate help.
- 3-1.1 Formulate questions to focus thinking on an idea to narrow and direct further inquiry.
- 3-5.1 Acknowledge and value individual and collective thinking.
- 3-5.2 Employ past and present learning in order to monitor and guide inquiry.
- 3-5.3 Assess the process and determine strategies to revise the plan and apply learning for future inquiry.
- 4-1.1 Formulate questions to focus thinking on an idea to narrow and direct further inquiry.
- 4-5.1 Acknowledge and value individual and collective thinking.
- 4-5.2 Employ past and present learning in order to monitor and guide inquiry.
- 4-5.3 Assess the process and determine strategies to revise the plan and apply learning for future inquiry.

### ***Mathematics***

- K.G.2 Identify and describe a given shape and shapes of objects in everyday situations to include two-dimensional shapes (i.e., triangle, square, rectangle, hexagon, and circle) and three-dimensional shapes (i.e., cone, cube, cylinder, and sphere).
- K.G.3 Classify shapes as two-dimensional / flat or three dimensional / solid and explain the reasoning used.
- K.G.4 Analyze and compare two- and three-dimensional shapes of different sizes and orientations using informal language.
- K.G.5 Draw two-dimensional shapes (i.e., square, rectangle, triangle, hexagon, and circle) and create models of three-dimensional shapes (i.e., cone, cube, cylinder, and sphere).
- K.MDA.3 Sort and classify data into 2 or 3 categories with data not to exceed 20 items in each category.
- K.MDA.4 Represent data using object and picture graphs and draw conclusions from the graphs.
- 1.G.1 Distinguish between a two-dimensional shape's defining (e.g., number of sides) and non-defining attributes (e.g., color).
- 1. G.2 Combine two-dimensional shapes (i.e., square, rectangle, triangle, hexagon, rhombus, and trapezoid) or three-dimensional shapes (i.e., cube, rectangular prism, cone, and cylinder) in more than one way to form a composite shape.
- 1.G.4 Identify and name two-dimensional shapes (i.e., square, rectangle, triangle, hexagon, rhombus, trapezoid, and circle).
- 1.MDA.4 Collect, organize, and represent data with up to 3 categories using object graphs, picture graphs, t-charts and tallies.

- 1.MDA.5 Draw conclusions from given object graphs, picture graphs, t-charts, tallies, and bar graphs.
- 2.G.1 Identify triangles, quadrilaterals, hexagons, and cubes. Recognize and draw shapes having specified attributes, such as a given number of angles or a given number of equal faces.
- 2.MDA.10 Draw conclusions from t-charts, object graphs, picture graphs, and bar graphs.
- 3.G.1 Understand that shapes in different categories (e.g. rhombus, rectangle, square, and other 4-sided shapes) may share attributes (e.g., 4-sided figures) and the shared attributes can define a larger category (e.g., quadrilaterals). Recognize rhombuses, rectangles, and squares as examples of quadrilaterals, and draw examples of quadrilaterals that do not belong to any of these subcategories.
- 3.MDA.3 Collect, organize, classify, and interpret data with multiple categories and draw a scaled picture graph and a scaled bar graph to represent the data.
- 4.G.2 Classify quadrilaterals based on the presence or absence of parallel or perpendicular lines.
- 4.G.3 Recognize right triangles as a category, and identify right triangles.

### ***Science***

- K.S.1 The student will use the science and engineering practices, including the processes and skills of scientific inquiry, to develop understandings of science content.
- 1.S.1 The student will use the science and engineering practices, including the processes and skills of scientific inquiry, to develop understandings of science content.
- 1.P.2 The student will demonstrate an understanding of the properties of light and how shadows are formed.
- 1.E.4 The student will demonstrate an understanding of the properties and uses of Earth's natural resources.
- 2.S.1 The student will use the science and engineering practices, including the processes and skills of scientific inquiry, to develop understandings of science content.
- 3.S.1 The student will use the science and engineering practices, including the processes and skills of scientific inquiry, to develop understandings of science content.
- 3.E. 4 The student will demonstrate an understanding of the composition of Earth and the processes that shape features of Earth's surface.
- 4.S.1 The student will use the science and engineering practices, including the processes and skills of scientific inquiry, to develop understandings of science content.

### ***Visual Art***

- VA-5 I can interpret and evaluate the meaning of an artwork.
- VA-6 I can identify and examine the role of visual arts through history and world cultures.

## Activity Type: In-Class

This lesson plan is to be done as an in-class activity. The teacher will provide the required materials

## Materials

- Cardboard piece for each student
- Drawing tools (pastels, markers, etc.)
- Large black sheet (multiple if needed)
- Small electric candles

## Background

- Rock art has been found all over the world, showing that it was a widespread activity among many different past cultures. There are many different symbols in rock art and they all have different meanings to the people who created them. Rock art could have had a personal or communal meaning. Likewise, it could have had a symbolic meaning or a practical purpose. Often, rock art does not clearly convey the intentions of its creators. Therefore, it is useful for researchers to categorize rock art based on common motifs.
- Some motifs are easy to understand, such as representations of humans or animals. Other motifs are less intuitive and difficult to decipher. These are categorized as abstract forms. Because historic rock art was created by a culture more contemporary with our own and we can access written documents to supplement our research, it is typically easier for researchers to determine the age and intent of historic rock art compared to prehistoric rock art. Prehistoric rock art tends to be more abstract and it is difficult for researchers to determine its meaning and/or purpose. Additionally, rock art would sometimes be created in areas of dim light, like caves. The dim light and effects of the uneven surfaces of the rocks affected how the art was created and what it looked like once completed.
- In the South Carolina Rock Art Survey, conducted by the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA), motifs were divided into three broad categories: anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and abstract. Anthropomorphic motifs, or motifs with a human form, are relatively few in South Carolina. Zoomorphic motifs, or motifs with an animal form, are also scarce according to the survey. Abstract motifs (also called geometric motifs) have unknown or unidentifiable meanings / representations. These are the most common motifs found in South Carolina, with a simple circle being the most abundant abstract motif.

## Vocabulary

- **Abstract / Geometric Motif** – A motif with no discernable meaning or representation.
- **Anthropology** – The study of humans, past and present. In the United States, the study of Anthropology is divided into four subfields (Sociocultural Anthropology, Biological or Physical Anthropology, Archaeology, and Linguistic Anthropology).
- **Anthropomorphic Motif** – A motif suggestive of a human form.
- **Archaeological Site** – A place where human activity occurred and material remains were deposited.
- **Archaeologist** – An Anthropologist (social scientist) who studies the material remains of past human activity.
- **Cultural Heritage** - A tradition of intangible attributes (i.e., language, origin stories, and rites of passage), artifacts, structures, and places of importance associated with a group of people that are preserved and passed from one generation to the next; defines a group's identity.
- **Cultural Resources** - Evidence of past human activity. They include archaeological sites, historic homes, battlefields, burial grounds, shipwrecks, historic and prehistoric artifacts.
- **Culture** - A set of learned beliefs, values and behaviors or way of life shared by the members of a society.
- **Historic** – The period of the past that is accounted for in the written record.
- **Motif** – A decorative image or design, especially a repeated one forming a pattern.
- **Petroglyph** – Any carving or inscription on rock.
- **Pictograph** – A pictorial sign or symbol created by drawing or painting without carving on any kind of surface.
- **Prehistoric** – The period of the past that predates written records.
- **Preservation** - Protection; keeping from damage or destruction.
- **Rock Art** – A popular catch-all term used to refer to both petroglyphs and pictographs.
- **Vandalism** - Treasure hunting or nonscientific excavation; destruction or damage of property.
- **Zoomorphic Motifs** – A motif suggestive of an animal form.

## Lesson

1. Have a brief discussion on the background of rock art. Explain how it was created and where it can be found in South Carolina. Use images to show different types of rock art and different motifs present in rock art, such as animals, humans, and celestial art.
2. Have students brainstorm ideas about what certain examples of rock art could mean.
3. Distribute sheets of cardboard. Tell your students how the cardboard they will draw on will be representative of the rocks and cave walls on which rock art was originally created.

4. Construct several makeshift caves for small groups out of black sheets, chairs, and tables; discuss how creating their art under the sheet can imitate the caves that some rock art was made in.
5. Have your students come up with ideas for symbols / images they want to draw that have a personal meaning to them.
6. Give each group of students an electric candle and have them gather underneath their sheets with their cardboard and drawing tools.
7. Discuss how the different lighting affects the drawing process of the art.
8. Students can now draw their rock art on their cardboard using the light of their candle to see the board.
9. Once students have finished their art, have them leave the covering of the makeshift cave and view their artwork in the light of the classroom.
10. Discuss with students how different it was to create art in the dim light as compared to the bright light of the classroom.
11. Have your students share the meaning behind the symbols they created. Why did they select these symbols? Why are they important to them?
12. Discuss with your students how rock art relates to the people who created it. Rock art represents an individual's environment and experiences.
13. Have students identify different motifs in their artwork. Students can classify their artwork into three broad categories: Anthropomorphic, Zoomorphic, and Abstract Motifs. Define these terms for your students and instruct them to count how many times these motifs appear in their rock art. Alternative categories may be used depending on the class size and grade level.
14. Create a chart on the board using the three categories. Collect your students' data. Have your students use the class data to create a bar graph comparing the three motif categories (or alternative categories). Discuss the results as a class. Is one category represented significantly more than the other two? Are all categories equally represented? Discuss ways archaeologists might collect numerical data about rock art to study and better understand the past.

## References

- Charles, Tommy. *Discovering South Carolina's Rock Art*. University of South Carolina Press, 2010.
- Clottes, Jean. *Cave Art*. Phaidon Press, 2014.
- Huey, Lois Miner. *Children of the Past: Archaeology and the Lives of Kids*. Millbrook Press, 2017.
- Lauber, Patricia. *Painters of the Caves*. National Geographic Society, 1998.
- Moe, Jeanne M., et. al. *Project Archaeology: Investigating Rock Art*. Project Archaeology, Montana State University, 2018.