



Activity title

Cave paintings - the first record of what people were thinking?

Time Required

1-2 hours

Activity summary

Producing cave paintings.

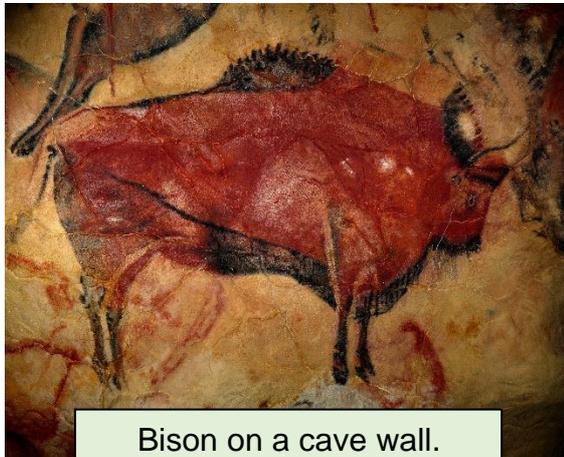
By the end of this activity, you will be able to:

Create cave paintings using two different techniques.

What's this all about?

Before computers, before television, before paper, even before houses, people stayed in caves. We know they were there because they left paintings on the walls.

Scientists have taken tiny samples of the materials used to make these pictures. Using a technique called carbon dating they have been able to work out how old they are. The oldest known cave paintings are more than 44,000 years old!



Bison on a cave wall.
Painted 35,000 years ago!



Hands on a cave wall.
Painted 9,000 to 13,000 years ago!

Cropped from image by Mariano

What were the paintings for? Perhaps some were used to show how to catch the animals? Perhaps others were used to show who lived there, like the photos you might have at home? Or perhaps they were used as decoration? No one knows for certain. What do you think?



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What equipment will you need?

- **Something to paint on.** This could be a stone, paper printed with an image of stone or just a piece of plain paper. If you use a wall, make sure you get permission from a responsible adult first!
- Optional: If using plain paper, some PVA glue and sand.
- **Something to paint with.** Water-based paint and a small brush would be ideal.
- Optional: a disposable plastic glove for your left hand, or some scissors and card.
- **Something to draw with.** This could be chalk, charcoal, crayons or felt tip pens.

Ancient cave painters didn't have pens and pencils. They used chalky rock, charcoal, crushed leaves, even dirt mixed with fat!

Now try this

There are three things you could do – take your pick but do at least two!

You need to do this one the day before you need the paper for painting, so the glue can dry.

1. If you are using plain paper – make it look like rock.

One way to do this is to lightly crumple the paper and paint it very light brown or grey.

However, you can make it much more rock-like:

- a) Using a brush, paint a thin layer of PVA glue all over the paper.
- b) Sprinkle a thin layer of sand over the paper.
- c) Leave the PVA overnight to dry, then carefully tilt the paper to tip off any sand that hasn't stuck.

... and now you have a surface that looks and feels like rock!

2. Making hands

Many of the earliest cave paintings are left hands. Scientists think that these are left hands as the people used their right hand to apply paint. There are two ways to do this – choose one and try it!

Method one

- a) Put one hand on the paper.
- b) Using your other hand, draw round the hand on the paper. Crayons or felt tips do this well.
- c) Shade the area around your hand to make it stand out.



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Method two

Be careful, this method can get messy!

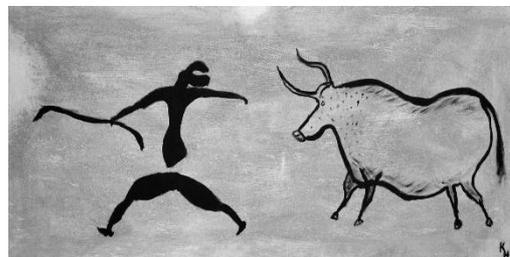
- Wearing a plastic glove, put your left hand on the paper.
- Dip a brush in some paint. Keeping your left hand still, gently dab the brush around it to paint the outline.
- Keep doing this all the way round the outline of your hand.

Be careful that you don't dab on too much paint, or it will run under your hand.

You could draw round your hand on a piece of card, cut this out and use this as a stencil to flick the paint around.

3. Cave drawings

Many cave drawings show animals. Draw an animal that you have seen. Charcoal, chalk or crayons can do this well. You could also add colours to make your cave drawing even more realistic.



Ancient cave painters used coloured materials mixed with fat. Crayons are made from colours mixed into man-made wax.



You could also

Try both ways of making the hand paintings. Which do you prefer? Why?

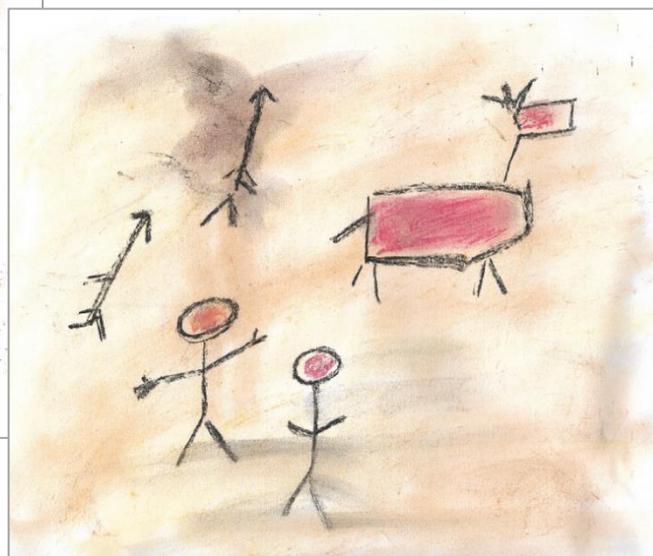
You could create a complete hunting scene. What animals would they hunt? What would they use to hunt them?

The following websites can be used for additional background information:

- BBC Bitesize – how did stone age hunter-gathers live? Includes an interactive cave painting. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z82hsbk/articles/z34djxs>
- Examples of cave paintings from around the world: <https://www.touropia.com/prehistoric-cave-paintings/> and <https://www.oldest.org/artliterature/cave-paintings/> and https://youtu.be/h1CGXy_h-ii

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What results are expected



The following websites show examples of cave paintings produced by some other schools:

- <https://www.chingfordcofe.org.uk/art-cave-paintings/>,
- <https://www.daubeney.hackney.sch.uk/year3/cave-paintings>,
- <https://www.westcliffprimary.com/cave-paintings/>

With thanks to Hawthorns Primary School, Worthing, for sharing these resources which were created as a series of activities to celebrate 150 years of the IET.