

## Painted Caves: The World's First Artists!

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### Background Information for Teachers

#### What is a Cave Painting?

Humans first started to paint pictures on the walls of caves 40,000 years ago. The earliest paintings were of circles and hand prints, made by blowing ash onto the cave wall. Later our ancestors made drawings of the animals that they hunted at that time. Drawings of humans are rare.

Nearly 340 caves with paintings in them have now been discovered in Spain and France. It is not known if the very earliest cave art was made by Neanderthals (an early type of human closely related to us) or modern humans. Cave paintings of animals found in southern France date back to about 30,000 BC.



'Cave Hands' By Jo Parish – own work all rights reserved



# ART PACK: Stone Age to Iron Age

## Why Did People Make Cave Paintings?

It is unlikely that early humans painted caves as a purely decorative act. The paintings are generally found in the least accessible parts of caves and certainly not in caves or parts of caves that were used for human habitation.

The paintings were made by hunter-gatherer communities and show animal hunts. They may have been a kind of illustrated story. Their purpose may have been to seek divine aid in hunting, perhaps by capturing the spirits of the animals painted, and so help the hunters to kill them.

## Where are Cave Paintings Found?

Cave paintings have been found all around the world. In Europe, parts of France and Spain are particularly rich in cave paintings whilst closer to home there are cave etchings at Creswell Crags, Nottinghamshire.

Cave paintings have also been found across Africa, particularly in Algeria, Namibia, Niger and Chad. Both North and South America have examples including Cueva de las Manos (Spanish for 'Cave of the Hands') in Santa Cruz, Argentina. There are also cave paintings in India, at the Bhimbetka rock shelters and throughout South East Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand).



'Altamira Bison' by Rameessos - own work. Licensed under Public domain via Wikimedia Commons - <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AltamiraBison.jpg#mediaviewer/File:AltamiraBison.jpg>

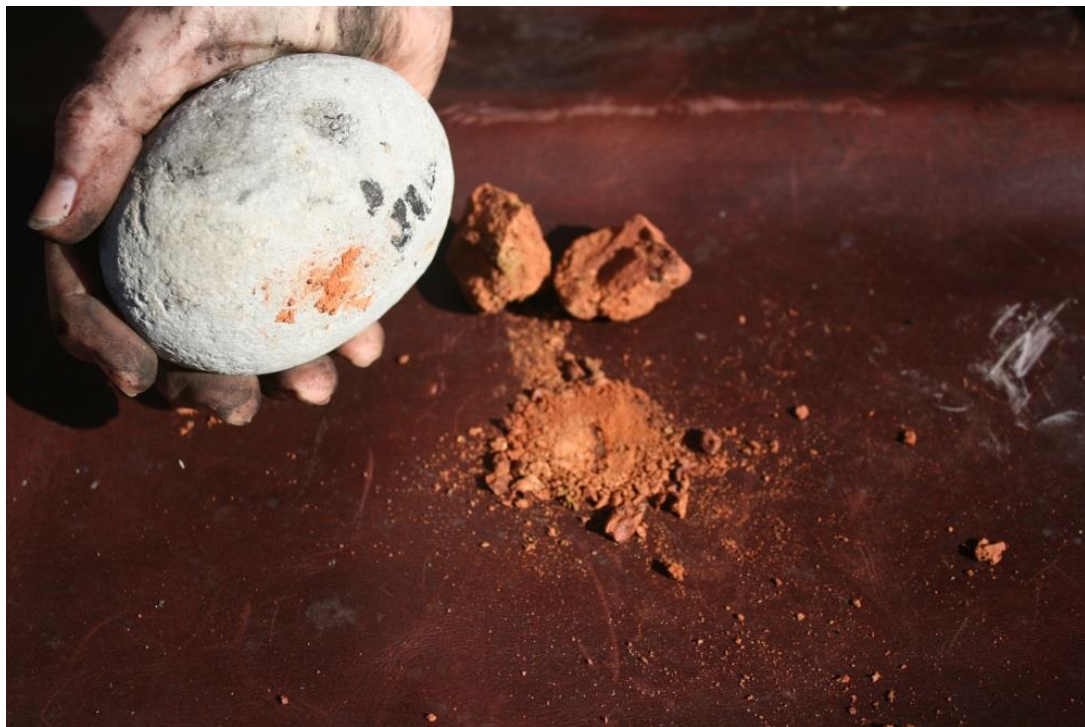


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## How did Early Humans Make 'Paint'?

Our ancestors made everything themselves using the resources that were available to them locally. Stone Age people would have noticed that incompletely burnt sticks from the fire left black marks on skin and stone alike. In areas of chalk or limestone, they would have noticed that when rubbed against a hard surface, the local stone left white marks. Iron oxide is one of the most common minerals on Earth and occurs in a range of 'earthy' colours from yellow and orange to red, brown and black. Iron oxides or ochre were used by people the world over to paint both objects and themselves and are still used today to colour paint and coatings.

To make a pigment, the mineral was crushed and pounded into gravel with a large stone. The resulting gravel was then ground between stones to make a powder. The powder was then mixed with wet clay, gypsum, or animal fat to make a paste that was ready to paint.



'Grinding red ochre'





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## Activity 1: Make Stone Age Paint

### You will need:

- Bags of dry soil from different locations (maybe ask colleagues who live in different locations to bring in soil from their garden)
- Disposable plastic gloves
- More sealable plastic bags
- Wooden rolling pins, old spoons or smooth hand-sized rocks
- Stirrers
- Old sieves
- Containers – clean plastic tubs, paint pots or large scallop shells
- Stubby paint brushes
- Water

### Introduction:

Begin by discussing what pupils already know about Stone Age people. Show them pictures of painted caves and ask them to identify the colours used.

Ask pupils to think about how Stone Age people might have made marks on cave walls. They might know that chalk is a natural material that is found in some areas and readily leaves a white mark or that charcoal is incompletely burnt wood that is good to draw with.

Ask pupils about the colour of the soil and if they have ever noticed that it differs from place to place. Tell them that during the Stone Age, people noticed that rocks and soils varied in colour and that they discovered that some rocks, if ground up finely into powder and mixed with animal fat, could be used to add colour to their art work.



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## **Main Activity:**

Tell pupils that they are now going to make some Stone Age paint!

Show pupils the range of soil samples and make sure that they can see that soil comes in a variety of colours. If appropriate, remind pupils of work done in Science and Geography about rock and soil types.

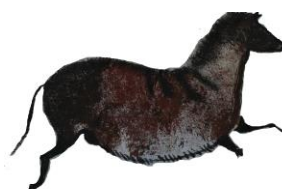
Divide the class into groups and provide each group with small bags of soil from different locations. Working in pairs and wearing gloves, pupils will make Stone Age paint.

## **Instructions for Stone Age Paint:**

- Remove any stone, twigs etc. from the soil. A sieve might be handy here
- Place the soil into strong plastic bags, remove the air and seal (freezer bags are great)
- Use wooden rolling pins (or the back of large spoons) to gently crush the soil into a fine powder
- Pour the powder into small containers and add some water. Mix the soil and water together
- Add more water as necessary until the desired consistency is reached

To demonstrate the range of different coloured soil paint, pupils should make a soil colour chart by painting bands or strips of different coloured paint.

Note: In this activity, water is used to bind the pigment together. Stone Age people are believed to have used animal fat, gypsum or wet clay. In the more recent past, egg white (tempera) and oil have been used as binding agents.



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In the classroom some of these binding agents could be used BUT:

- If lard or vegetable oil is used, paint onto large stones or pieces of slate; on paper the oil will leech out of the paint and leave nasty oily stains!
- **Be sensitive to cultural and religious objections to the use of animal fats**
- Lard will quickly become rancid in the warm classroom environment! Rather than displaying the lard and soil painted rocks, take photographs and display them instead
- Some children are allergic to egg protein and so the use of egg white is not recommended

*Teachers' Tip: to make thicker 'paint' use PVA glue instead of water!*



'Mixing red ochre with water'



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## Activity 2: Hand Prints

There are two versions of this activity – a messy one and a not so messy one.

### The not so messy version!

You will need:

- Pictures of wall paintings (see above)
- Photographs of animals depicted in wall paintings
- Sheets of brown sugar paper
- Charcoal
- Chalk



### Introduction:

Display cave paintings showing hand prints and silhouettes. Tell the class that they are going to decorate part of the classroom in the style of a Stone Age cave!! Explain that the earliest cave paintings feature hand prints and that hand prints are a recurring theme in cave paintings all over the world. Draw attention to the way individual hand silhouettes have been decorated and ask pupils what they notice about the colours. They should notice that a limited range of colours are used. Discuss why this might be the case. (Stone Age painters used local, natural pigments.)

### Main Activity:

Each pupil draws around their hand on a piece of sugar paper and cuts out the shape.

Using charcoal and chalk they decorate their hand with spots and lines. Encourage pupils to experiment with a varied but limited colour palette – Remember our ancestors used reds, oranges, yellows, and browns, black and white but not greens, purples or blues. Encourage pupils to think about the marks they mark – vary the thickness of the lines, use the chalk on its side, smudge the chalk. Try drawing careful dots and compare with a more random ‘stabbing’ action.



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## The really messy version!

- Items listed above plus
- Own pigments (crushed charcoal, chalk, soil mixed with water)
- Assortment of 'earth colours' (brown, ochre, yellow, dull reds, black, white) paint (powder paint is best as you can mix it to quite a thick consistency)
- Sheets of brown sugar paper or brown hessian
- Sponges, stiff chunky short-haired brushes, feathers
- Disposable gloves (small) *optional*

## Introduction:

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## Main Activity:

Wearing disposable gloves, pupils place a hand on the sugar paper or hessian and sponge or stipple with a brush around their hand to leave a negative hand print.

Pupils could experiment with using different tools to apply the paint. A stiff paint brush gives a different effect to that achieved using a softer brush or a feather. Using fingers dipped in paint will be messy but interesting!





## Activity 3: Animal Art

### You will need:

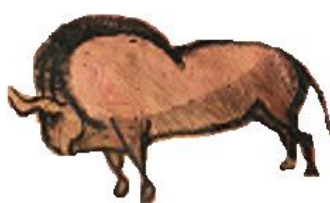
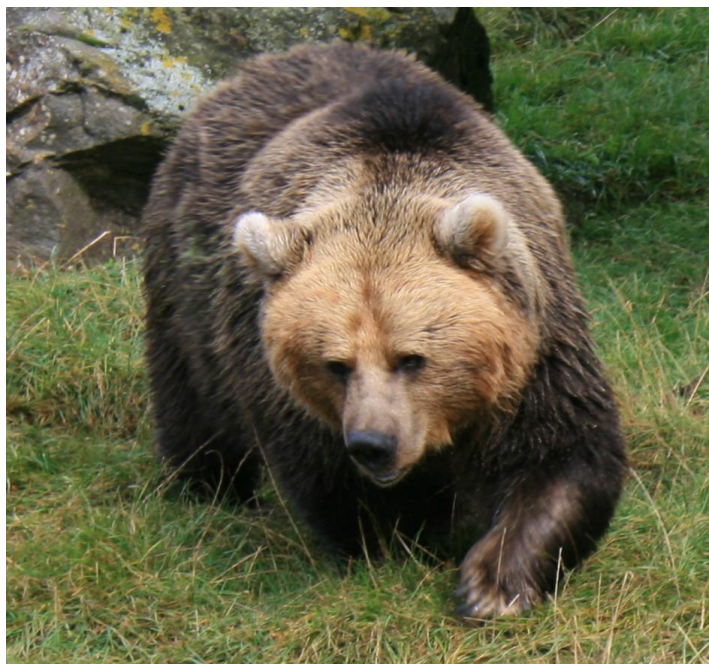
- Painting materials as above, marker pens, stiff paint brushes
- High quality photographs of bison, reindeer, horses, wild boar, bears
- Hessian or brown art paper

### Introduction:

Display pictures of wall paintings and high quality photographs of the animals depicted for pupils to see.

Talk with pupils about why people create images, and make a list. Pupils may suggest some of the following: to help them remember people (family photographs), to share experiences (holiday snaps), to help people understand something important (road safety posters), to decorate a space (wallpaper at home). You might wish to show examples of different types of images during this discussion.

Display or distribute copies of cave paintings. Ask pupils to identify the types of animals depicted in the cave paintings (bison, horses, reindeer...). Ask them to suggest reasons why these animals are depicted.



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Talk to the class about why early people painted their caves (see background notes).

Ask pupils what they notice about the colours and discuss why a limited range of colours are used (Stone Age painters used natural pigments, and animals do tend to be these sorts of colours!).

Discuss how the images differ from photographs of similar animals. You might display some photographic images:

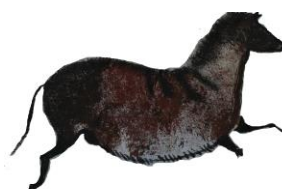
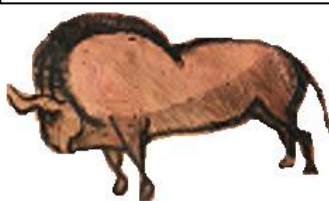
- Wall paintings capture the quality/essence of the animal without lots of detail. Photographs are realistic and capture lots of detail
- Photographs include the background (grass, trees, sky...); in wall paintings animals are isolated from the surroundings
- In wall paintings, individual animals overlap – disregard for perspective

## Main Activity:

Using the photographs of bison, reindeer etc. as reference, ask pupils to make sketches of animals in their sketchbooks. They should focus on the overall shape of the animal rather than looking too closely at the detail – cave painters captured the essential characteristics of the animal not the fine detail so the solid stance of the bison and the antlers of the reindeer are important but the quality of the fur or the shape of a hoof are not.

Pupils then copy their sketches to hessian or paper using marker pens. Using either the paint they made in activity 1 or school paint, pupils use the sponging and stippling techniques of the previous activity to paint their animals. Some children might want to use their hands instead of a brush! Remind pupils that the aim is to capture the spirit or essence of the animal.

*Teachers' Tip: if paper is used, once the paint is dry, tearing around the paintings rather than using scissors will give a softer, more natural edge but this does require a bit more care and is probably best carried out by an adult.*



## Displaying the Work

You will need to prepare a display board by covering it with brown sugar paper or display paper (sugar paper gives a nice texture) or brown hessian fabric.

If using paper: roughly tear along the edges of the paper sheets so that the overlaps look like fissures in the cave wall. Add scrunched up tissue paper in a similar shade of brown to provide texture or make rocks by covering thick sheets of polystyrene in PVA glue and tissue paper. Allow the tissue paper to wrinkle and crease to give greater texture. Paint with different shades of brown poster paint.

If using hessian, pad out parts of the wall with scrunched up newspaper before attaching the hessian to create an uneven 'rocky' surface.

Add the hand prints, hand silhouettes and animals. Allow images to overlap each other and space randomly.



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Templates





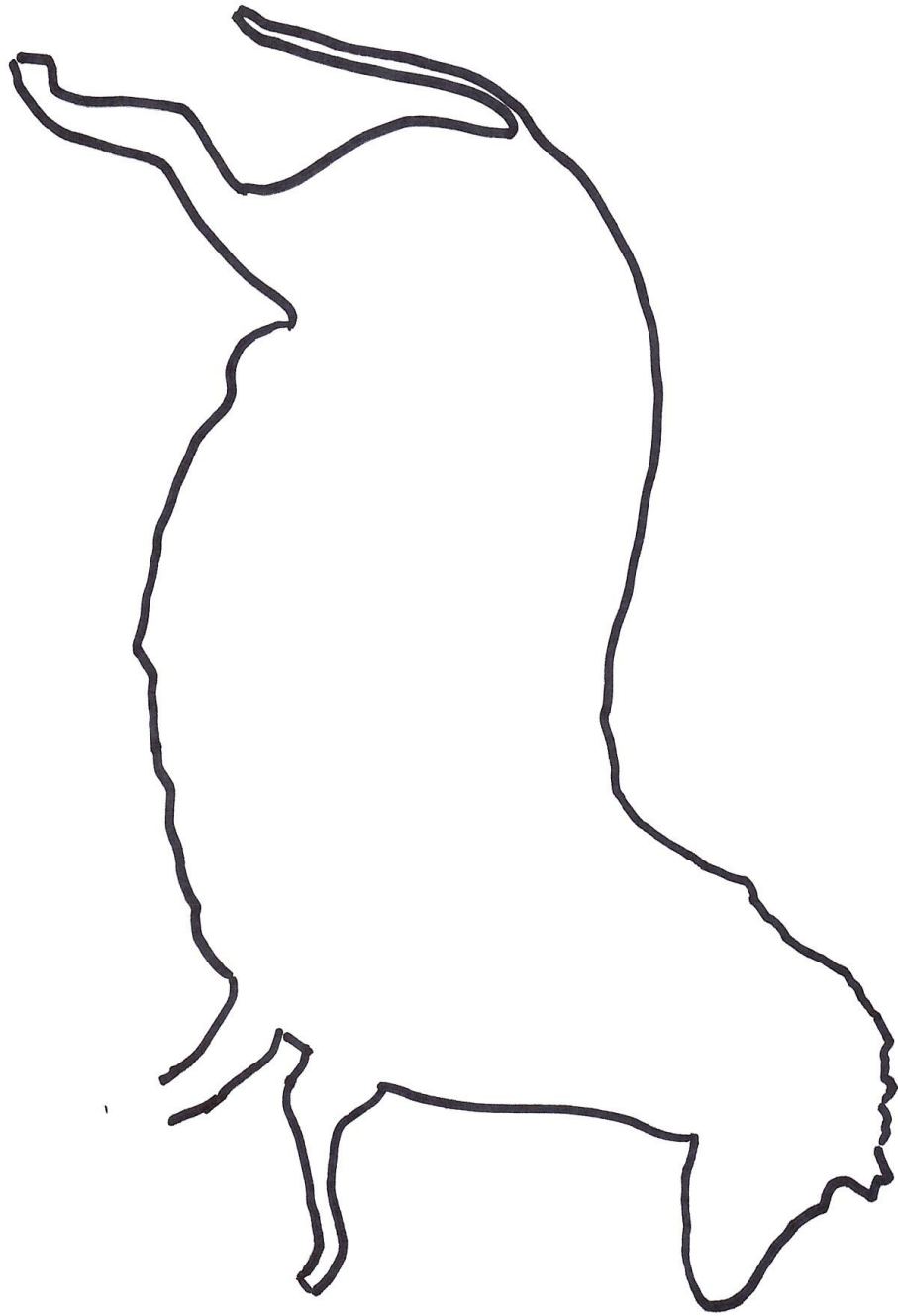




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