

## Student Sheet

In this practical I will be:

- Analysing the accuracy and styling of cave painting.
- Reproducing examples of cave art, under similar conditions to the original artists.
- Interpreting cave paintings and discussing my, evidence based, opinion.
- Express my own story, style and ideas through cave art.

### Introduction:

As a science-artist, you need to appreciate the skills and creativity that go into creating a piece of art. For centuries, fellow science-artists have been studying cave paintings and trying to understand the stories that the original artists were trying to tell.

A recent newspaper article has condemned cave paintings, calling them, “ancient scribbles and cave doodles- no better than a toddler’s finger painting.’

You need to help explain how interesting and complex cave paintings are. But to do this, you need to gain a greater understanding yourself...

### Equipment:

- Pictures of animals from cave paintings
- Photographs of any of these animals
- A4 white paper
- A4 brown paper
- Brown, black and white paints
- Paintbrush
- Beaker and water (to clean your brush)
- Newspaper (to cover your work area)
- Pegs or pins to place your paper on a board or wall

### Method:

1. Look at the single animal pictures from the cave paintings and select the photograph that best matches the painting.
  - Describe how accurate you think the painting is compared to the photograph.
2. Using the charcoal pencil try to reproduce your own drawing of the animal on a piece of clean smooth white paper.
3. If possible try painting it.



- How easy is it to produce the image on the clean white paper?
  - Did you try to copy the animal or did you try to draw it in your own style?
4. Now take a piece of the brown paper and crumple it up (by loosely screwing it up).
  5. Smooth out the brown paper and pin it on a notice board.
  6. Now try to draw and, if possible, paint the same animal on the brown paper on the notice board.
    - How easy is it to produce the image on the crumpled brown paper?
    - Did you try to copy the animal or did you try to draw it in your own style?
  7. Look at the image of a whole wall of cave paintings and try to interpret the paintings.
    - What do you think was drawn first?
    - What is your evidence for that?
    - Does the wall tell a story if so what do you think is the story?
    - What is your evidence for your story?
    - Does everyone agree with you and if not what are their reasons?
  8. Try to create your own wall story using more crumpled brown paper on the notice board.
    - We are trying to understand the idea of style in paintings and the way the artist uses it to paint an image. Comment on what you think of the styles in the range of cave paintings.
  9. How can you make use of the different light effects on the crumpled surfaces
  10. Make a note of your observations of the difficulties, ease of painting on the different surfaces.

### Going further:

Look at the paintings of Picasso, particularly the paintings and drawings of bulls.

Can you see any similarities to the cave paintings? If so what are they?

### Theory:

A study of the cave paintings from many places around Europe shows the common themes are large wild animals, such as bison, horses, aurochs, and deer. Also notable, are the many tracings of human hands and abstract patterns.



The animal species are most often those hunted, evidenced by the actual prey found in local deposits of bones, but not always. For example, at Lascaux the deposits of bones are mainly reindeer, but this animal is not portrayed in the cave paintings; the horse is the most common. In some cases the animal form is cut or incised into the rock. Drawings of humans in the cave paintings are rare. When they are drawn they are usually schematic rather than detailed natural images. It has been conjectured that the painting of the human form was prohibited by their religion; but maybe it was thought to bring bad luck!

The evidence suggests that the pictures were not merely decorations of living areas, since the caves in which they have been found do not have signs of ongoing habitation. They are also often located in areas of caves that are not easily accessible. Some theories hold that cave paintings may have been a way of communicating with others, while other theories ascribe a religious or ceremonial purpose to them.

A French Catholic priest, archaeologist, anthropologist, ethnologist and geologist, Henri Breuil (1877–1961), known as Abbé Breuil, studied the cave art in the Somme, Dordogne valleys, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Ireland, China, Ethiopia, British Somaliland, and South Africa. He was one of the first to interpret the cave paintings of the Paleolithic era. He saw them as hunting magic whose purpose was to increase the number of animals caught.

Lewis-Williams<sup>i</sup> worked on the South African cave paintings and advanced the argument that the paintings are the products of shamans. This is based upon his studies of contemporary hunter-gatherer societies. He argues that the majority of paintings are found in the darkness of the caves, and often in areas where the echoing sound is good, or the surface is such that the shadows of the rock helps to give the painting form and shape. This is because the shaman would enter a trance-like state to paint and the chanting and shadow movement enhances the trance and images.

R. D. Guthrie<sup>ii</sup> took a different route and reached a different view. He argued that, from the art and skill point of view, there is a wide range of skill and a range of ages amongst the artists. From an analysis of the themes of the paintings, mainly hunting, it suggests that these paintings are the result of adolescent male fantasies. This idea is countered by D. Snow<sup>iii</sup> who has analysed the hand prints and stencils in French and Spanish caves and concludes that many of these are of female hands.

---

i Whitley, David S. (2009). *Cave Paintings and the Human Spirit: The Origin of Creativity and Belief*. Prometheus

ii Guthrie, R. Dale (2005). "Preface: Reassembling the Bones". *The Nature of Palaeolithic Art*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

iii Hammond, Norman (September 11, 2009). "Cave painters' giveaway handprints at Pech-Merle". *The Times*