

# Native American Rock Art

Students will be introduced to different types of rock art and learn how it was used many years ago. Using their imaginations, students will decipher a hidden theme in a rock wall created by their classmates.

**Grade Level :** 5th grade

## Objectives:

- Students will be able to tell the difference between Petroglyphs and Pictographs.
- Students will be able to define archeologist.
- Students will be able to identify two reasons why Native Americans used rock art.

## Materials:

- Pictures or Transparencies of Rock Art (example: National Geographic Magazines, books, and/or internet print-offs)
- Brown Paper Bags (1 per group)
- Markers/Crayons
- Tape
- Small pieces of paper for themes
- Container to draw themes from

## Time Considerations

Preparations: 30 minutes

Activity 1—Exploring Rock Art: 20 min.

Activity 2—Pictographs: 35 min.

## Related Activities:

Emigrant Trail Game, Forensic Anthropology, Mud Fossils



## Nevada Department of Education Standards

- **N.5.A. Students understand that science involves asking and answering questions and comparing the answers to what scientists know about the world.** N.5.A.1 Students know scientific progress is made by conducting careful investigations, recording data, and communicating the results in an accurate method. N.8.A.3 Students know how to draw conclusions from scientific evidence. N.5.A.7 Students know observable patterns can be used to organize items and ideas.
- **N.5.B. Students understand that many people, from all cultures and level of ability, contribute to the fields of science and technology.** N.5.B.1 Students know that, throughout history, people of diverse cultures have provided scientific knowledge and technologies. N.5.B.3 Students know the benefits of working with a team and sharing findings.

## Excellence in Environmental Education Guidelines

- **Strand 1-Questioning, Analysis and Interpretation Skills (D, F, G): Evaluating accuracy and reliability**—Learners are able to judge the weaknesses and strengths of the information they are using. **Working with models and simulations**—Learners understand many of the uses and limitations of models. **Drawing conclusions and developing explanations**—Learners are able to synthesize their observations and findings into coherent explanations.
- **Strand 2.3—Humans and Their Societies (A, B): Individuals and groups**—Learners understand that how individuals perceive the environment is influenced in part by individual traits and group membership or affiliation. **Culture**—As they become familiar with a wider range of cultures and subcultures, learners gain an understanding of cultural perspectives on the environment and how the environment may, in turn, influence culture.

Rock art is a term used in archaeology for man-made markings that were made on natural stone. Two types of rock art are petroglyphs and pictographs. Petroglyphs are markings that were carved into the stone surfaces. Scratching, abrading, pecking, carving, drilling, incising and sculpting are all ways of removing the rock surface. Pictographs are rock and cave paintings. The paints were created by using mineral pigments mixed with a binding material. Both of

these types of rock art can be found on the walls of a cave or rock shelter, or found on exposed natural outcrops.

Rock art can be found across a wide geographical and temporal spread of cultures, possibly to help enact rituals, mark territory, or to record historical events or stories. Some art depicts real events while others have no historical background. Some of the images that are found on the rocks are identifiable (like hu-

mans or animals), but others are much more difficult to identify. Its not possible to “read” the images, but with more research, people may be able to understand the relationships between the rock art and the activities that occurred where it was found.

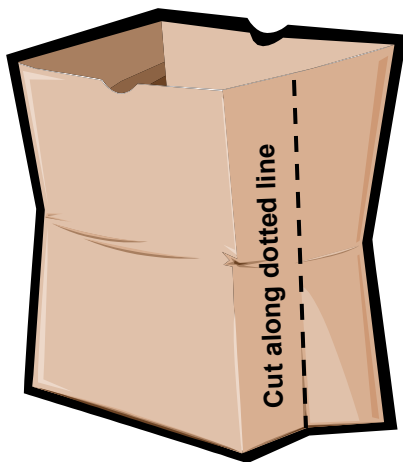
Rock art is found worldwide, and Nevada has it’s share of petroglyphs and pictographs. Some of the rock art sites are on public lands and are open to visitation such as Grimes Point, White River Narrows (eastern Nevada), and Valley of Fire (southern Nevada). There are many more sites around Nevada, you just have to look for them!



Rock art Petroglyphs, Newspaper Rock National Historical Site, near Canyonlands National Park, Utah, USA, North America.

## Preparations

Take all of the paper bags and cut them in half according to the dia-



gram. Do NOT cut through the bottom of the bag, just the sides. Lay the paper bag brown side up (side without writing). This is the side the students will use to write on. Copy the picture dictionary (page 4 & 5) for each student group to use as a guide. Write the themes for Activity 2 on pieces of paper for the students to “draw from a hat”. Gather the other necessary materials together for the class.

## Doing the Activity

### Activity 1—Exploring Rock Art

Tell the students that they are going to be archeologists today. Ask them what an archeologist does. An archeologist learns about past human cultures by studying old places and objects. Explain to the students that you will be talking about Rock Art today. Assess their current knowledge by asking them “what is rock art?”. Ask if any of the students have seen rock art before. Rock art was something that Native Americans used to enact rituals, mark territory or tell about a historical event or story. There are quite a few rock art pictures that are hard to identify. You cannot always “read” the rock art like a book. Instead, you need to study the art and do research on it. Even though many other cultures have used rock art, today the focus will be on Native American rock art. There are two main types of rock art that you will generally find regardless of its location. These main types are pictographs and petroglyphs. Pictographs are rock and cave paintings. Petroglyphs are markings that were carved into the stone surfaces. To help the students remember how to decipher between the two, you may choose to show them the root words to help them with definitions

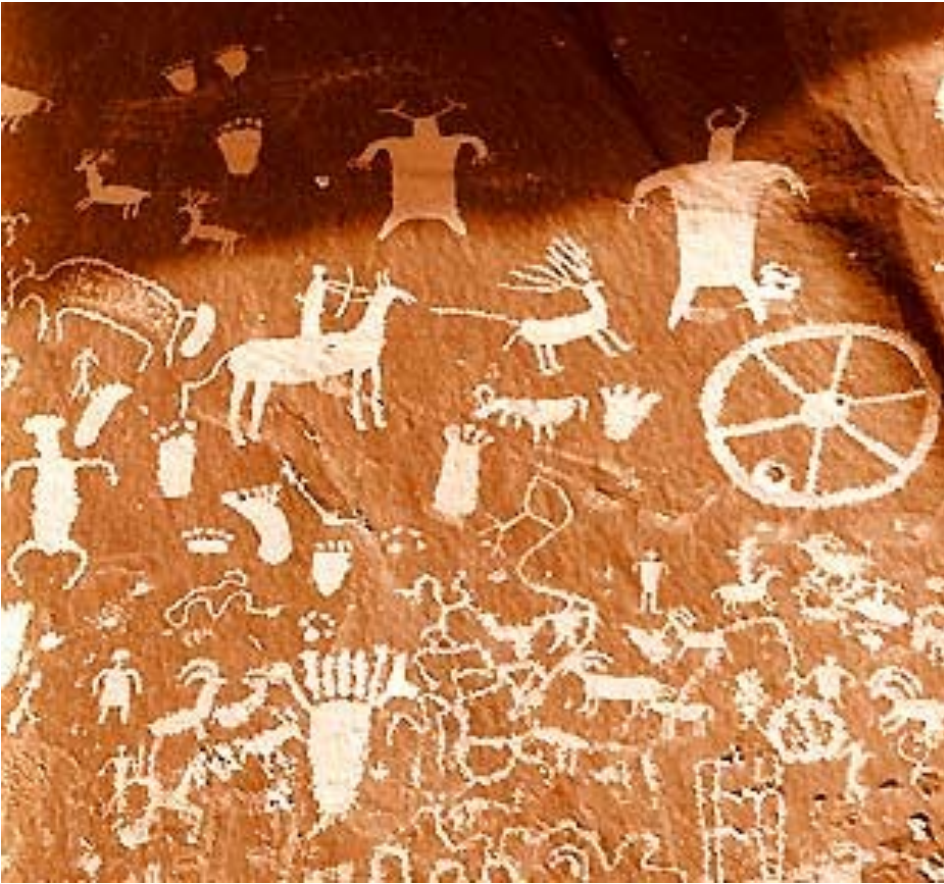
(picto: to paint, graph: to write, petro: rock, glyph: carved work). Show the students the pictures of rock art. Ask them if it is a pictograph or a petroglyph. Some may be difficult to determine by the picture and you may have to help them.

### Activity 2— Pictographs

Tell the students they are going to have a chance to create a pictograph with their group. Split the class into groups of 3. Each group will get a theme and a picture dictionary page. Give the students approximately 15 minutes for creating their art.

Themes for students:

1. A large celebration took place
2. Drought affected your camp
3. Wildfires killed off large numbers of buffalo
4. You now use horses to hunt and it helps you catch more deer
5. War broke out between two camps
6. Good year for food (large amounts)
7. Your youngest daughter died
8. Cold, tough winter and your camp was covered in snow
9. The Great Spirit led you to an area of water with many fish
10. The drums were the only-



Rock Art from Utah, about 1700 AD

## Vocabulary

**Archaeology:** A method of studying past human cultures.

**Glyph:** Carved work.

**Graph:** To write.

**Petro:** Rock.

**Petroglyphs:** Design chiseled or chipped into rock surfaces.

**Picto:** To paint.

**Pictographs:** Designs painted on rocks and caves.

**Rock Art:** A term in archaeology for any man-made markings made on natural stone.



noise you could hear before the war. Feel free to add any other themes that you need, trying to incorporate contents of the picture dictionaries.

Wrap up the art creation time and have the students hang up their art on the walls around the room. Have the students stand by their art, then ask them shift over to another groups artwork. Ask the students to try to decipher the rock art that their classmates drew. Go around the room and see what the guesses were and the actual theme that was trying to be portrayed.

Review the different types of rock art with the students, and review what an archeologist does.

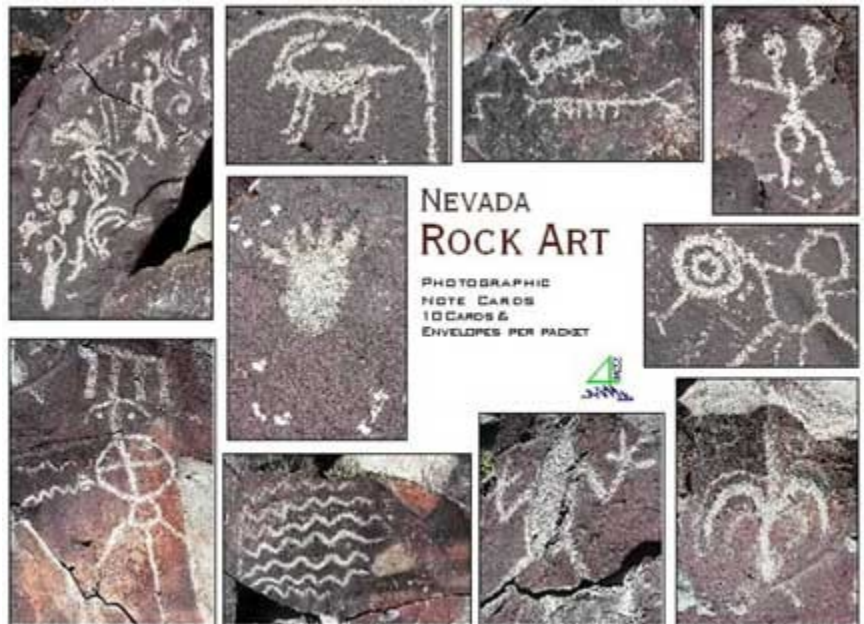
### Extension—

Have students view a picture of rock art and write a description of what it tells them. There are no right or wrong answers with this activity, everyone's interpretation may be different!

### Sources—

Wikipedia. Rock Art. Accessed on 8/25/2008. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock\\_Art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock_Art)

Lockard, Vicki. Pictographs. Accessed on 8/25/2008. [http://www.turtletrack.org/Issues00/Co02122000/CO\\_02122000\\_pictographs.htm](http://www.turtletrack.org/Issues00/Co02122000/CO_02122000_pictographs.htm).



# A Picture Story

Native Americans of long ago did not have a written alphabet as we do today. Instead, they used symbols to communicate. Sample symbols are on this page and on the Picture Dictionary. You may create additional symbols as you need them.

Use symbols (no words) to rewrite this quote from *The Gift of the Sacred Dog*.

"The people were hungry. They had walked many days looking for buffalo herds...Even the .....crows circled, looking for something to eat.....wolves called out with hunger at night."

When you have finished, trace this skin pattern and make a neat copy of your picture story on it.



people



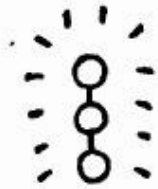
hungry



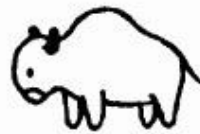
famine (no meat) empty rack outside tipi--



three days



many days



buffalo



many buffalo



look



crows



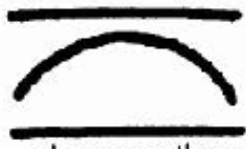
circling



no buffalo



# Picture Dictionary



clear weather



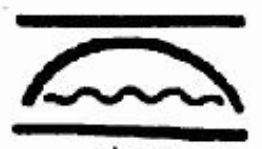
rain



snow



no rain



storm



sad



happy



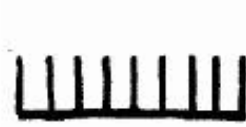
help



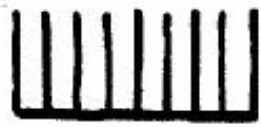
war



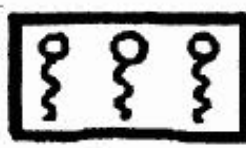
peace



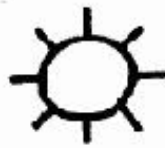
spring



summer



winter



sun



moon



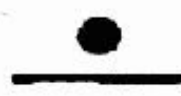
star



Indian camp



campfire



good



bad



wise



man



woman



boy



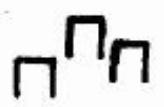
girl



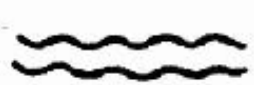
Great Spirit



horse



horse tracks



river



mountains



lake



drum



dancer



eagle



turtle



fish



many fish



The next three pages are photos of rock art near Burns, OR



