

# Cave Paintings

Developed with Mary Kortemeyer | Grades K-12

## objectives

- **Lower grades should be able to...**
  - Identify caves and types of animals
  - Paint a recognizable animal
- **Middle grades should be able to...**
  - Understand the approximate time period of cave paintings
  - Create somewhat more advanced images using a rock-like surface
- **Upper level students should be able to...**
  - Make overlapping images on dimensionally-formed, rock-like surfaces



# background information

Cave paintings have been found primarily in France, Spain, and Australia. However, they have also been found and documented in Mexico, India, Africa, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia. Perhaps the most famous and most documented for art history are those in Lascaux, France. Discovered in September 1940 by a group of archaeologists, the caves have since been closed to the public for preservation. Life-sized models of the more famous sections have been created for people to visit and observe.

Cave art has been able to survive for thousands of years for two reasons: durable writing agents and ideal environments. Among other materials, these early artists expressed themselves using iron ore, coal, ash, or plant oils on the walls of caves. The drawings, whether of animals or people, took residence in extremely favourable conditions. The seemingly dehydrated caves offered exceptional protection and preservatory surroundings.

There were different reasons and beliefs behind cave art. To exert more “control” over the outcome of a hunt, some artists drew a hunting scene prior to the actual event. The motivation for such images was to inject magic into the hunt. These artists even took advantage of cave wall compositions to supply a clever realism. For instance, if the wall’s formation lended well to the actual shape of an animal, it became a canvas. It is also believed some painters went into hallucinogenic states, for various reasons, and drew whatever they saw, like zig-zags, spirals, hatch marks, and squares.

A well-known cave art expression is called the negative hand image. Instead of writing their names, artists would press their hand against the wall and project paint, possibly using a hollow reed, bone, or possibly their own mouth, until a negative image of their hand appeared on the wall. However, not all of these hand images looked like high fives. In fact, some of them were missing fingers or totally fingerless! Thought by some archaeologists to be a form of mutilation practiced at the time, it is now believed that these seemingly impaired hands were indeed intact on the painter but intentionally manipulated in their artistic appearance, thus serving as a distinguishable trait of the artist, like a painter signing his work. In fact, this apparently universal trademark of the artist’s most essential writing instrument is believed by some to be a signature.

It is critical to realize that these artists were individuals — they were not all from the same culture or time in history. Therefore, the methods used to create the paintings and the motives behind them were as unique and different as the artists that painted them.



# instructions

1. Mix Celluclay according to package directions. Using about 4 cups of warm water per pound of material, mix and knead well until smooth and elastic. The easiest mixing is done by placing all materials in a plastic resealable bag. Push out excess air, seal, and work until clay-like.
2. For more advanced techniques, use small amounts of tempera as part of the water mixture to dye the Celluclay. Two or three colours mixed together will give the appearance of stone.
3. Take a fist-sized ball of prepared Celluclay, lay it between sheets of plastic, and roll with a rolling pin until flat and about  $\frac{3}{16}$ " thick. Peel back the top layer of plastic and smooth the surface using fingers or craft sticks and dabbing with water.
4. For larger cave wall renditions, additional amounts of Celluclay will be needed. A form created from wire mesh can be used as a support. (CAUTION: Handle wire mesh with care. Fold rough edges under wearing heavy gloves to protect your hands).
5. Cave surfaces may be draped or allowed to dry as flat as desired. Dried Celluclay will flatten if sprayed lightly with water and ironed to "relax." For a very stone-like surface, sprinkle a bit of glitter on to the rolled-out surface. Cover with plastic and roll again lightly before final arrangement and drying.

## helpful hints:

- Use time between class periods for drying purposes
- Sign and date the cave
- Have students sketch a general picture of their animal(s) with a charcoal pencil and then have them paint over the sketch using watercolours





## materials list

- Prang® Oval Watercolour Sets:  
8-colour — [9700449](#)  
16-colour — [9708307](#)
- Prang® Peel-Off Charcoal Pencil, soft — [0901178](#)
- ACTIVA® CelluClay:  
5-lb. gray — [0900540](#)  
5-lb. white — [9706147](#)  
24-lb. white — [9706149](#)

## optional:

- Nasco Country School Tempera Paint, pint:  
Yellow — [9703627C](#)  
White — [9703627H](#)  
Brown — [9703627F](#)  
Black — [9703627G](#)
- WireForm Diamond Mesh — [9714156](#)
- Mixing tub or sealable plastic bags
- Measuring cup
- Plastic sheeting or garbage bags
- Rolling pin

