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## Lesson 5.3

# CREATING YOUR OWN ROCK ART



**Subjects:** science, visual arts.

**Skill:** synthesis.

**Strategies:** visualization, drawing, invention.

**Duration:** 45 to 60 minutes.

**Class Size:** any; groups not larger than 10.

Petroglyph from Hiwassee  
Rock, Clay County, North  
Carolina, AD 1000–1600.

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## Objectives

In their study of rock art, the students will:

- use regional rock art symbols or their own symbols to cooperatively create a rock art panel;
- use a replica of a vandalized rock art panel to examine their feelings about rock art vandalism and discuss ways to protect rock art and other archaeological sites.

## Materials

For the teacher, transparencies of “Rock Art Symbols” and “Protecting the Past: Things Not to Do” for projection. For each student, a crumpled and then flattened out brown paper bag, or, if available, a roll of brown butcher paper; markers or paint, a can of spray paint, and a copy of “Rock Art Symbols.”

## Vocabulary

*Deface:* to spoil or mar the surface or appearance of something.

*Petroglyph:* a design chiseled or chipped out of a rock surface.

*Pictograph:* a design painted on a rock surface.

*Vandalism:* willful or malicious defacing or destruction of public or private property.

## Background

People living over the entire world and in virtually every culture made rock art. It has been found in caves, on cliff walls, and on boulders. Some rock art is as old as 30,000 years.

Rock art occurs in modern America as well, although some people may not think of it as art. The most common modern rock art is painted on the concrete and brick walls in our cities and on bridge abutments and rock faces along highways. In modern America, as in all societies, this art expresses the values, attitudes, beliefs, and desires of the people who created it. As members of the artists’ society, we may or may not understand what the representations mean. While American society is based on common ideals and beliefs, many different cultures form it. On the other hand, even if we understand the art’s meaning, we may or may not like it or agree with the values or sentiments it represents.

Regardless of our views of modern rock art, however, the art means something to whoever put it there. The archaeological/historical issue of the future is this: if some piece of the art survives

into the future, will the ideas people have about its meanings even come close to what it originally meant?

North Carolina is fortunate to have fine examples of prehistoric rock art as part of our rich archaeological heritage. Six *petroglyphs* and one *pictograph* have been recorded so far in western North Carolina. The history revealed, however, is threatened by people who *vandalize* sites by collecting artifacts or *defacing* rock art. The unscientific digging of sites and other forms of vandalism are harmful because they destroy data about the past. Additionally, vandalizing and disturbing sites violates the cultural heritage of Native Americans. These sites are the burial grounds, homes, and sacred places of their ancestors, and destroying these places is the equivalent of someone vandalizing your home, church, or cemetery.

## Setting the Stage

Distribute a copy of the “Rock Art Symbols” master to each student and display it on the overhead projector. Give students time to observe and talk with each other about the symbols.

## Procedure

1. Explain to students they will be using symbols to make a group “rock art panel.” They may use the symbols from the “Rock Art Symbols” master for their artwork, or they may create their own.

2. Divide the class into groups no larger than 10 students and give each student a marker or a paintbrush and paint. Cut one 5-to-7-foot-long piece of butcher paper for each group of students or give each student a brown paper grocery bag on which to create an individual rock art panel. Lay the butcher paper pieces on a table or floor. The paper can be crumpled and re-flattened at this point to more accurately depict real rock surfaces.

3. Space students a few feet apart if working on the large butcher paper sheets. If students use brown paper bags, have smaller groups work at a time; several may tape their bags together to create a longer panel.

4. When students have completed their panels, have them share the meanings of their rock art.

5. Exhibit the “rock art panels” in the classroom. Hold a can of paint or a marker in front of one of the panels, ask the students, “How would you feel if I were to paint my name over your rock art panel? Would that harm it?” Connect their feelings about their rock art being damaged to how Native Americans, archaeologists, and the public might feel when they see vandalized sites.

## Closure

Ask students to think of ways to prevent the vandalism of archaeological sites. Draw upon “Protecting the Past: Things Not to Do.”

## Links

Lesson 5.2: “Rock Art.”

Lesson 5.4: “Artifact Ethics.”

## Sources

Ashcraft, A. Scott, and David G. Moore. 1998. “Native American Rock Art in Western North Carolina.” Paper distributed at the Fall Meeting of the North Carolina Archaeological Society, Cherokee, North Carolina. [The images in this lesson’s main heading and in the activity sheets

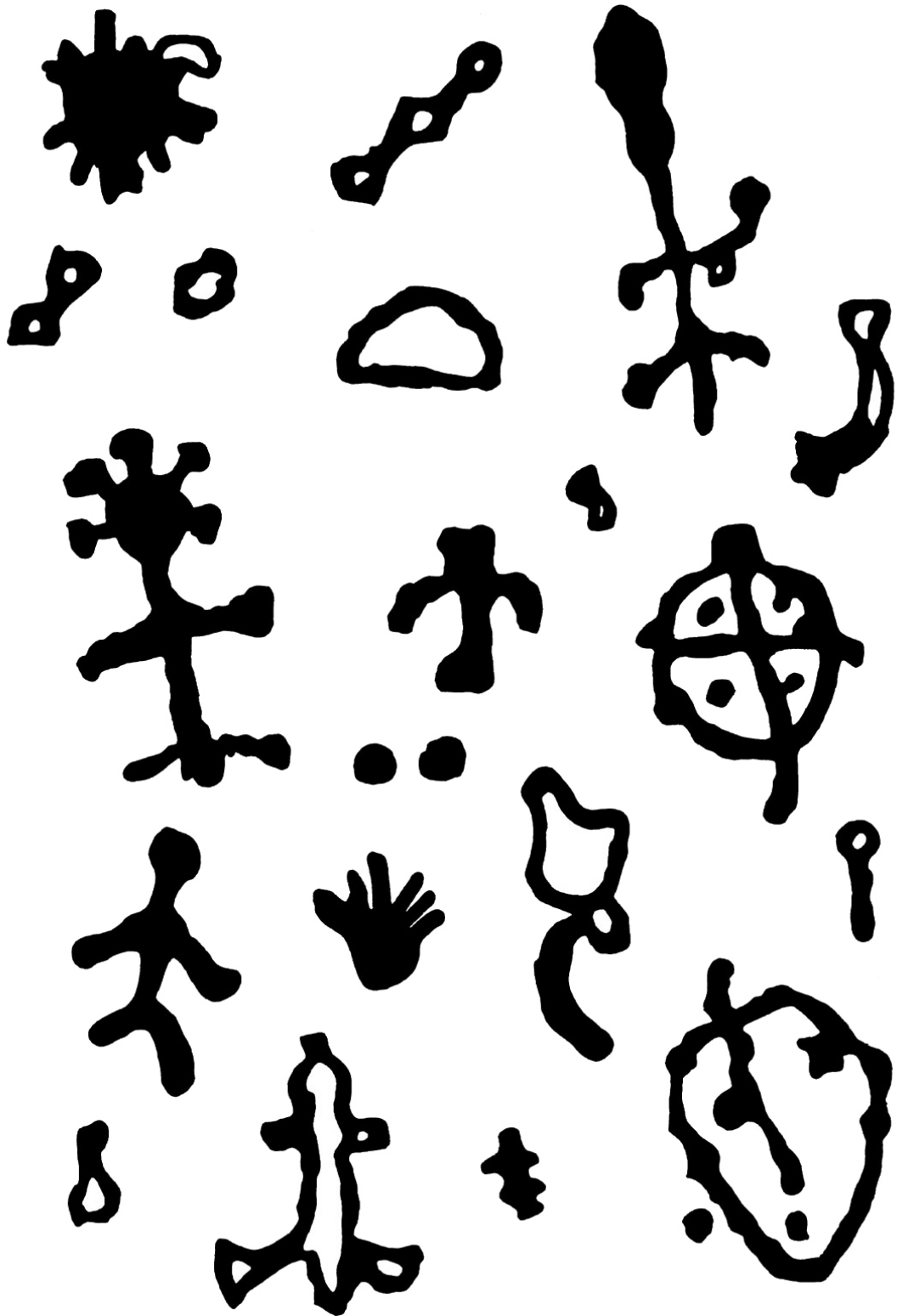
are taken from this paper, courtesy of the authors.]

Hurst, Winston B., and Joe Pachak. 1989. *Spirit Windows: Native American Rock Art of Southeastern Utah*. Blanding, Utah: Edge of the Cedars Museum.

Smith, Shelley J., Jeanne M. Moe, Kelly A. Letts, and Danielle M. Paterson. 1993. *Intrigue of the Past: A Teacher's Activity Guide for Fourth through Seventh Grades*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior. [This lesson is adapted from "Rock Art Two: Creating Your Own" on pp. 99–101, courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.]

Ward, H. Trawick, and R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr. 1999. *Time Before History: The Archaeology of North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

## Rock Art Symbols



## Protecting the Past: Things Not to Do

- Touching or walking upon rock art can harm it.
- Making paper rubbings, tracings, or latex molds of rock art can cause damage. Chalking of rock art makes it impossible to use new methods of dating the figures.
- Removal or rearrangement of artifacts destroys archaeological data. Artifacts should be left where they are found. While it is okay to pick up and look at most artifacts, do not make piles of artifacts or take them home.
- Any digging at an archaeological site is not allowed. Not only does unscientific excavation rob the site of artifacts that tell archaeologists about the past, it also destroys data about village patterns, houses, trash deposits, and other important archaeological features.

[Adapted from Hurst and Pachak (1989, pp. 25-26).]