
Lesson 5.2

ROCK ART

Subjects: science, social studies, language arts, visual arts.

Skills: knowledge, comprehension, analysis, evaluation, application.

Strategies: brainstorming, discussion, visualization, drawing, writing, observation.

Duration: 45 to 60 minutes.

Class Size: any.



Petroglyph from Judaculla Rock,
Jackson County, North Carolina,
3000–1000 BC.

Objectives

In their study of rock art, students will use art materials, drawings, and rock art examples to:

- differentiate between symbol, petroglyph, pictograph, and rock art;
- interpret rock art to illustrate its importance in the cultural heritage of a people and as a tool for learning about the past;
- evaluate the importance of protecting rock art for study.

Materials

For the teacher, a transparency of “Judaculla Rock Art Panel” for projection and an “Interpretation of Judaculla Rock Art” master. For each student, a copy of “Judaculla Rock Art Panel” and “Interpretation of Judaculla Rock Art;” clay, paper, and paint or marker; popsicle stick or paper clip.

Vocabulary

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

Pictograph: a design painted on a rock surface.

Rock art: a general term for the pecking, incising, or painting of designs onto rock surfaces.

Rock art panel: a group of rock art figures.

Soapstone: a type of stone which is soft and easily carved; also called steatite.

Symbol: a thing or design that represents something else.

Background

Indian people throughout North America created *rock art* in ancient times. Its meaning is mysterious and sometimes controversial. Some archaeologists think rock art is a type of storytelling. Others believe it depicts religious or spiritual beliefs, while still others regard it as solely an artistic expression.

North American rock art is not a true writing system that can be read like Egyptian hieroglyphics or a phonetic alphabet, although some rock art specialists attempt to decode rock art *symbols*. Archaeologists analyze rock art figures and patterns, and they frequently find that different cultural groups made different styles of rock art. Other researchers analyze legends and information from Indian people to draw conclusions about rock art meanings.

Some Indian tribes have oral traditions about rock art and its meanings. Many Indian people believe that the spirits of the makers reside in what they have created. Therefore, rock art is living, and it has a spirit. Whatever our responses to, or interpretations of, rock art may be, it stimulates our thoughts and imaginations. It expands our awareness of cultural expressions. Rock art can mean something different to each person who ponders it.

Setting the Stage

1. Discuss the meaning of the word *symbol* and brainstorm examples of symbols meaningful to us today. You may want to use the American flag or the bald eagle as examples to get the students started thinking about symbols and their meanings.

2. Give each student a piece of paper, a marker or paint, clay, and a popsicle stick or paper clip. Ask them to flatten the clay into a slab and imagine that it and the paper are rock walls. Ask them to carve a symbol of their culture into the clay with the popsicle stick or the paper clip. Have them paint or draw this same symbol on the paper.

3. Show students the words *pictograph* and *petroglyph*. Ask them to determine which word fits which method of rock design and give reasons for their answers. Verify the correct answer and explain that both design methods are classified as rock art. Give them the definitions of the root words prior to determining the correct definitions:

- “picto,” to paint (Latin);
- “graph,” to write (Greek);
- “petro,” rock (Latin);
- “glyph,” carved work (Greek).

Procedure

1. Project the “Judaculla Rock Art Panel” transparency. Explain that this *rock art panel* was created by ancient peoples of North Carolina.

2. Use the following questions to analyze the rock art panel:

- What words might you use to describe the symbols on this page?
- Why do you think people created these designs?
- If there is a message in these designs, what do you think it is?

3. Using the “Interpretation of Judaculla Rock,” share the various interpretations with the students.

4. Discuss the ways rock art might be important to archaeologists’ study of ancient people?

Closure

In summary, why is the preservation of rock art important?

Evaluation

Instead of allowing students to answer the last question as a group, require them to answer it individually in a story, poem, essay, advertisement, or song.

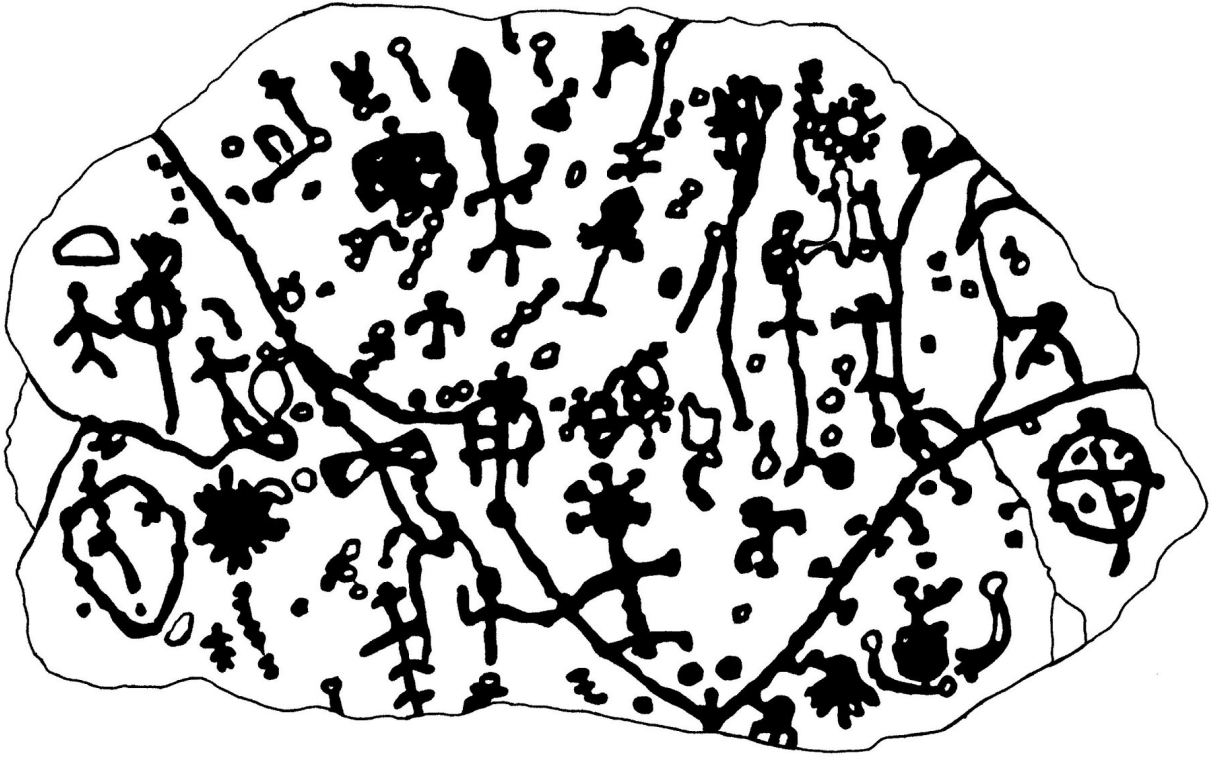
Links

Lesson 5.3: “Creating Your Own Rock Art.”

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.]
- 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 One: An Introduction" on pp. 95–98, 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.
- Wilburn, Hiram C. 1952. "Judaculla Rock." *Southern Indian Studies* 4, pp. 19–22.
- Wilburn, Hiram C. 1952. "Judaculla Place-Names and the Judaculla Tales." *Southern Indian Studies* 4, pp. 23–26.

Judaculla Rock Art Panel



Interpretation of Judaculla Rock

Judaculla Rock, located in western North Carolina, is a large soapstone boulder whose surface is covered with carvings. The rock has sometimes been described as depicting a map of a battle in 1755 between the Cherokee and their enemies. Some people believe this battle was between the Cherokee and the Creek Nation, while others believe the Cherokee fought with the Catawba. In reality, the carvings are probably much older. Archaeologists studying soapstone quarries believe the Judaculla Rock was probably carved during the time archaeologists call the Late Archaic, which dates from 3000 to 1000 BC. Outcrops of soapstone, used by Native Americans in the past to sculpt pipes, beads, bowls, and bannerstones, are located near the Judaculla Rock. Archaeologists think Native Americans camped at, or near, the rock when they came to quarry the stone.

James Mooney, a researcher at the Smithsonian Institution who collected southern Indian stories, recorded the Cherokee legend of Judaculla Rock in the 1880s. According to Mooney's story, a being named Judaculla (called by the Cherokee *Tsul-ka-lu*, or the Great Slant-eyed Giant) was a giant hunter who lived atop a mountain at the head of the Tuckaseegee River in Jackson County. Judaculla was very powerful and could control the wind, rain, thunder, and lightning. The carvings on the boulder represent scratches made by Judaculla's feet as he jumped from the top of the mountain to the creek below. The seven-toed foot at the lower right hand side of the boulder is said to depict Judaculla's footprint.

The actual meanings of the Judaculla Rock symbols are a mystery. It is possible these figures may represent humans, animals, or figures of religious importance. As late as the 1880s and 1890s, Cherokee groups would assemble at Judaculla Rock to hold ceremonies. Today the land around the Judaculla Rock has been turned into a small park, where visitors can view the boulder and ponder its meaning.