

Lessons on Lascaux

Create a cave wall that crackles
with authenticity (art + history)

Cave art dating as far back as 40,000 years was more recently made famous by the Paleolithic paintings uncovered in 1940 in the Lascaux Caves of France. Most scenes portray large wild animals, such as bison, horses, or deer, with equine species being the most common. Often, tracings of human hands as well as abstract patterns were also seen. Drawings of humans were rare and usually more schematic than the more detailed and naturalistic images of animal subjects.

In many examples of cave painting, the images were actually incised or engraved into the rock wall of the cave, taking them out of the strict definition of cave "painting." This lesson plan will focus on that difference, and result in a finished product that really looks like a cave wall.

Pigments traditionally used included red and yellow ochre, hematite (black), manganese oxide (purple), and charcoal. The use of contemporary powdered tempera imitates the look of these ancient storied walls. Natural colorants such as those inherent to mud, fruit, vegetables, flowers, leaves can also be used. There is a surprising strength and variety of colors that can be obtained through rubbing, crushing, and dripping these natural items onto the modern "cave" wall.

GRADES 3-12 Note: instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Research cave painting imagery and techniques.
2. Mix various colors of powdered tempera with water and flour to form a thick paste, and distribute it across the class.



Materials

Rich Art® Fresco Dry Tempera, assorted colors (00104-); share at least three colors across class

Grafix® Dura-Lar®, .003", 25-sheet pad, 9" x 12" (55506-1303); need one sheet per student

Blick® Studio Acrylics, assorted colors, 8-oz (01637-); share at least three colors across class

Blick® Economy Canvas Panels, package of 24, assorted sizes (07015-); need one panel per student

Richeson® Plastic Painting Knives, 3" trowel offset (03105-1003); share five across class

White Flour

Optional Materials

Colored Sand, assorted, 2-lb (61006-)

Process, continued

Process

1. Using the canvas panel as a guide, ask students to draw imagery they would like to use on their cave wall and that will fit easily within the confines of the canvas panel. The imagery can be traditional large animals, hand tracings, or modern figures.
2. Using a marker, have students draw a simple outline around each figure.
3. Place a sheet of Dura-Lar over the drawing paper, and trace the outline of the figure onto the Dura-Lar with a permanent marker.
4. Cut out the interior space of the figure, leaving at least a 2" border around the figure, thus creating a stencil.
5. Position the stencil on the canvas panel and, using a pallet knife, smooth the tempera and flour mixture over the stencil. Carefully remove the stencil and repeat if desired to show movement. The stencil may need to be rinsed between applications of tempera mixture. Using a palette knife, fingers, or a brush, add additional tempera paste to the panel to create terrain or other areas of interest.
6. Allow to dry overnight. The areas where the tempera and flour were applied should now be cracked like the wall of a cave!
7. Paint a thin wash of acrylic paint over some areas of the composition, and use powdered pigment in its dry state to color other areas. Rub the powdered tempera into the cracks, and smooth it over other areas. Rub or crush natural pigments onto the cave wall. As an option, either mix colored sand into the tempera/flour mix, or pour it on top of the mixture while it's still wet.



Step 1: Trace drawn cave imagery onto Dura-Lar and cut out the interior shape to make a stencil.



Step 2: Position the stencil on the panel and trowel the tempera mixture over the top. Repeat as desired.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas.

K-4 Students select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning

5-8 Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks

9-12 Students apply subjects, symbols, and ideas in their artworks and use the skills gained to solve problems in daily life

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

K-4 Students demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art

5-8 Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures

9-12 Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art-making



Step 3: When completely dry, use powdered tempera and washes of acrylic paint to recreate an authentic-looking cave wall!