

Meet the Masters

January Program

Chumash Rock Painting (c. 650 B. C.)**Artwork Overview:**

(See following two pages.)

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you find this example of rock painting exciting or beautiful? Why or why not?
2. If you were walking along a mountain trail and saw this would you stop and look more closely?
3. What intrigues you most about this image?
4. What colors do you see in this image?
5. What kinds of shapes and lines do you see?
6. Are these shapes and lines repeated?
7. Is this painting like a puzzle?
8. What can you learn from a puzzle?

**Hands on Art Activity: Paint Your Own Symbol on a Rock
Or Group Rock Painting****Teacher Preparation: This activity can be done one of two ways, the choice is yours:**

1. Have the children bring a palm size rock to school. This rock should be large enough for a painted symbol. (See attached note to distribute)
2. If rocks are not available, cut out rock shapes from brown or gray paper. These will then be glued or stapled onto a large brown paper to make a group of rock paintings.

Materials:

Palm size rock or brown paper cut in shapes of rocks
Tempera paints
Paper plates for palettes
Large brown construction paper 24" x 36"
Newspaper

Water tubs and paper towels
Small paint brushes
Staplers
Glue

Directions:

1. Discuss the function of this Chumash Rock painting and how it could have been used like a sundial.
2. Discuss symbols that could be used on a sundial.
3. For cut out rocks, cut the paper in the shape of a large rock, make two pieces for a top and a bottom.
4. Students should paint their own symbol on their rocks or cutout rocks.
5. For cut out rocks, place the top on the bottom and staple edges together, leaving an opening to push newspaper inside, thus forming a three-dimensional rock. Staple opening shut after rock has been stuffed.
6. Be sure students initials are somewhere on the rock.
7. Each student should then attach his or her rock to the large brown paper. This can then be displayed on the wall with a brief explanation of the meaning of the rock paintings.

Attention 5th graders:

You will need to bring a small rock to school for our Meet the Masters Chumash Rock Painting activity. The rock should be approximately the size of your hand and have enough area to paint a symbol upon.
Please bring your rock to school by:

Thank-you,

Your Meet the Masters Volunteers

Cro-Magnon hunters paint now-extinct beasts on walls of southern European caves at Altamira and Lascaux.

Trees, animals, people carved and painted on rock outcroppings in Tassili N'Ajjer in the Sahara in Algeria.

Chumash occupy central California coastal region.

Anasazi chip some 15,000 petroglyphs throughout central New Mexico.

Chumash Rock Painting

Theme

RITUAL AND CEREMONY

Chumash rock paintings are generally believed to have been created by shamans and therefore are presumed to carry both religious and spiritual significance. Today, these works stand as vivid reminders of Chumash ritual and ceremonial life.

Biographical Background

The Chumash have lived for thousands of years along the south-central coast of California. Their rock paintings are found throughout the chaparral region north of Los Angeles, reminders of Chumash culture and civilization predating contact with sixteenth-century Spanish explorers. Other than a brief stop in 1602 by a second Spanish expedition, for the next 170 years the Chumash lived peacefully and undisturbed in permanent villages scattered over a 6,500-square-mile coastal area. Rock painting probably continued throughout this time.

Between 1772 and 1804, five Franciscan missions were established in Chumash territory. The mission system, which forced the hunter-gatherers to become farmers, virtually enslaved the Chumash, and along with the missionaries came European diseases to which the Chumash had no immunity. The Chumash population rapidly declined. Today there are approximately fifteen-thousand people of Chumash ancestry living in south-central California.



Chumash
Mineral pigment on
sandstone
Southern California

Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo (Spain) sails up the coast of California; first contact of the Chumash people with Europeans.

Sebastián Vizcaíno explores the California coast.

Gaspar de Portolá leads Spanish expedition through Chumash country to establish settlements and missions in northern California.

Beginning of mission period in Chumash country; San Luis Obispo mission established.

Severe epidemic of pleuropneumonia greatly reduces Chumash population.

Medium

The Chumash usually painted on sandstone cave walls or volcanic basalt outcrops using earth colors made from natural materials. Red was made from hematite ore, an iron oxide. White was made from earth deposits containing fossil shells of tiny sea creatures. Burned graphite produced rich blacks.

The ores were crushed in a sandstone mortar, producing powders that were then wetted, pressed into lumps, and stored for future use. Oil-base binders, made from milkweed juice and seed oils, were added to the pigments to make a permanent waterproof paint. Paint was applied with feathers, sharpened sticks, fingers, or brushes made of frayed yucca fiber or soap plant husks. Sometimes a shaman would draw directly on the rock surface with a lump of compressed pigment.

Cultural Context

Dualities—day/night, rain/drought, life/death—have intrigued people since the beginning of time. Because Chumash shamans were responsible for monitoring the movements of the sun and its effects upon the seasons, there is evidence to suggest that Chumash rock painting reflects a belief system based upon spiritual control over nature and dualities.

This rock painting site appears to mark the winter solstice, when days begin to lengthen. At sunrise on the first day of winter, a triangular beam of light passes through the notch in the rocky overhang and falls on the concentric circles at the left of the panel. The concentric circles are believed to symbolize the cosmos. The Earth may be represented by the middle rings. Oral traditions tell of Chumash festivals that took place around the time of the winter solstice celebrating the rebirth of the sun and ensuring a renewed annual cycle of growth and harvest.

References

- R. Gibson. *The Chumash* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991).
- C. Grant. *The Rock Paintings of the Chumash* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).
- E. Krupp. *Echoes of the Ancient Skies: The Astronomy of Lost Civilizations* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983).
- E. Krupp. *Beyond the Blue Horizon* (New York: Knopf, 1991).
- B. Miller. *Chumash: A Picture of Their World* (Los Osos, CA: Sand River Press, 1988).



This photograph shows how the rising sun lights the concentric circles of the Chumash rock art on the first day of winter.

Native American - Ritual and Ceremony

Chumash Rock Painting (e. 650 B. C.)

The Chumash have lived for thousands of years along the south- central coast of California. Their rock paintings are found along the chaparral region north of Los Anglos.

The Chumash people usually painted on cave walls and sandstone outcroppings using earth colors made from natural materials.

Symbols were used on the cave walls to mark the winter solstice, when days get longer. The cycles of nature were important to the Chumash people because they depended on nature for their own survival.

Students made their own personal symbols and then painted them onto this large rock. Some of the symbols tell stories. Can you tell what these symbols might mean?