A large, dark, charcoal-drawn bison is the central focus of the image. The bison is depicted in profile, facing left, with its head lowered. The drawing is made on a textured, yellowish-brown rock surface. The bison's body is outlined with dark charcoal, and its legs are also drawn with dark lines. The background is a mottled, textured surface of the same color as the rock.

Google Arts & Culture

# Learn Anywhere: Chauvet Cave

In association with



[Big Bisons, Grotte Chauvet - UNESCO World Heritage Site](#)

## How to use this lesson plan

This plan takes you on an exciting journey with plenty of links through to amazing online content, so no need to print. This lesson plan is suitable for anyone but we recommend it for ages 11 to 14. It's a lot of fun to go on this journey with parents, teachers or your friends, but it is designed so you can explore independently at your own pace. There are different types of questions to answer: can you discover, explore and invent? We think so.

Check in with your parents or teacher if you need to, but you'll need a tablet, computer or smartphone. You can do this *Learn Anywhere* Lesson on almost any device as long as you can get online and use a web browser.

There are 2 Chapters:

Chapter 1 - Chauvet Caves Discovered 60 minutes

Chapter 2 - Extra Discovery 45 minutes

You'll see some helpful signs on the way:



Useful information to guide you through the lesson



Things you'll need to watch, read, learn and make things with during the lesson.



Digital activity time. Take quizzes and explore.



Estimated time to do a section of this lesson



Explore online content. Discover videos, stories, or go and look at and zoom around pictures.



Activity time. This is where you get to design, make or write something of your own.



Headphones to listen to videos and audio



3D Model for you to spin around and explore.



## Things you'll need

Things that will help you during this *Learn Anywhere* lesson.



**Scrap Paper**



**Scissors**



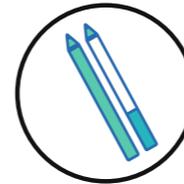
**Brush and Paint**



**Notepad**



**Tablet or Computer**



**Pens and Pencils**

## Welcome to *Learn Anywhere: Chauvet Cave*

In this *Learn Anywhere* lesson, you are going to learn all about the stunning discovery of the Chauvet Cave, a prehistoric treasure trove of art, which has helped us understand more about how we lived in prehistoric times. Discover for yourself how the Chauvet Cave paintings were created, perhaps as long ago as 36,000 years, investigate the history of the Chauvet Cave and what it tells us about our lives today. You'll create your own cave art. Get ready to investigate...

### What will you do?

1. Go on an adventure to discover the mysterious caves of Chauvet. Where are they? Who discovered them?
2. Hunt for facts and make discoveries that very few people know about the Chauvet Cave.
3. Use a 3D model of the Cave, go on a virtual adventure in the Cave, and discover how modern street art compares with ancient art.
4. Create your own cave art.
5. Write your own short story about discovering the Cave.



### **What will you learn?**

1. Learn about the moment of the Chauvet Caves discovery.
2. Explore what the Chauvet Cave discovery tell us about climate change.
3. Explore what it means for our knowledge of our ancestors.
4. Explore what it was like to live in prehistoric times.
5. Discover how archaeologists know how old things are.
6. Find out about extinction.

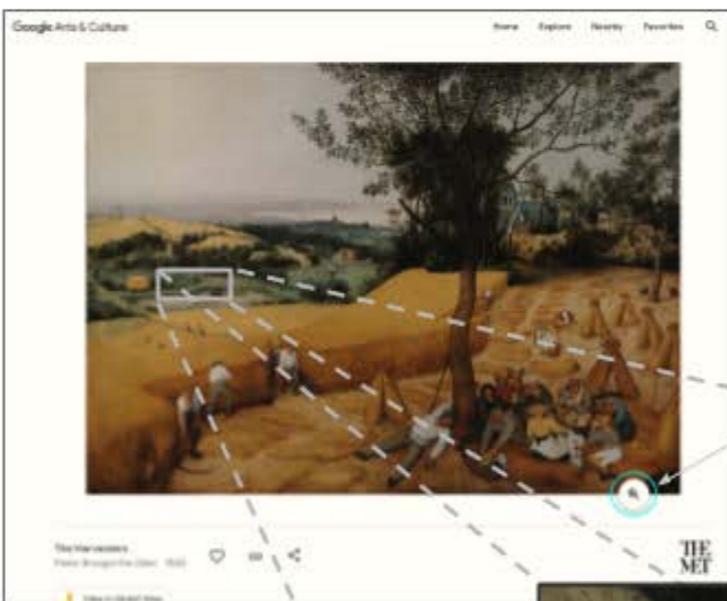
### **After studying this lesson, you will be able to:**

1. Describe and identify the different features of prehistoric art including principles and techniques.
2. Understand the importance of the Chauvet Caves discovery.
3. Create your own cave art, using art and design techniques and write a short story about the discovery.

**Vocabulary:** ancestors, Aurignac, Aurignacian, carbon-14, cave lions, cave-dwellers, charcoal, Chauvet Caves, extinction, Gravettian, habitation, immersive, occupation, prehistoric, radio carbon dating, woolly mammoths.

There's one more thing to know before you go on your lesson. Google Arts & Culture pictures are big. So big that you can zoom in. Explore. Sometimes right down to the chisel mark.

So you just need to click on a link, then on the Magnifying Glass symbol and zoom in with the Zoom Slider. Drag the white box around and you can explore the picture. You'll find out for yourself. Here's an example of a Google Arts & Culture picture and the zoom slider.



1. Click on the magnifying glass



2. Use the slider to zoom in. The white box can be dragged to different parts of the picture.



3. Explore art works in detail. Find hidden stories.



Jean Clottes, Le Pont d'Arc, Grotte Chauvet

# Chapter 1



What's this chapter about?  
Chauvet Caves Discovered



What will I do?  
Explore the history of the Chauvet Cave  
Tour the Cave itself  
Explore what it was like to live in prehistoric times  
Learn about the art techniques used in the Chauvet Cave  
Create your own cave art



How long will this chapter take?  
60 minutes



The Chauvet Cave: the world's first art gallery.

Discovered in 1994, the Chauvet Cave is one of the most significant sites for prehistoric art.

Untouched by humans for nearly 30,000 years, the Chauvet Cave is a treasure trove. It gives us a privileged glimpse into the minds of humans from thousands of years ago: what they thought worthy of painting and perhaps why, how they might have lived (and perhaps died).

Other prehistoric sites have been severely damaged by modern visitors, who are curious to see into the minds of their ancestors. Because of the human impact on these sites, the Chauvet Cave is closed to the public.

Instead a stunning, full-size replica is open to the public close to the Chauvet Cave itself, with the same silence, darkness, temperature, humidity and acoustics completely reproduced.



Click [here](#) to explore a brief history of the Chauvet Cave and its discovery.



You can also drop straight into the Chauvet Cave itself via immersive technology. Daisy Ridley, the actress who played Rey in Star Wars, guides you through the Cave. Click [here](#) to explore.

# Meet Our Ancestors

Chauvet Cave: a 36,000-year-old art gallery, normally closed to the public, opens to everyone through immersive tech



[smergc, Aurignacians \(reconstructed\), Grotte Chauvet](#)

There were two periods of habitation discovered in the Cave.

Radiocarbon dating was used to date the cave occupation and drawings. This scientific technique relies on material known as carbon - one of the building blocks of life - decaying at an atomic level. One specific "isotope" of carbon is known as Carbon-14. It's found in charcoal, bone and antler. Carbon 14 is absorbed during life, from the environment, and no more is absorbed when things die. Carbon-14 decays at a specific rate. Like a ticking clock counting down as it degrades in a predictable way. So scientists can work out when something died or lived. Giving strong evidence to the date of occupation in the cave.

You can find out more about radiocarbon dating [here](#).

A report on the Chauvet Cave, published in 2016 concluded that the drawings dated from 37,000 to 33,500 years ago, the prehistoric Aurignacian culture.

This name, which was coined in 1906, comes from the commune of Aurignac (in Haute-Garonne, France) where archaeological material was found in a rock shelter. These people had the same physical and mental capabilities as we do and arrived in Europe at least 43,000 years ago via the Middle East. Aurignacian culture is distinguished by the rise of the artistry that we can see in the Chauvet Cave.

The later period of habitation, by a group of hunter-gatherer people which archaeologists call the Gravettian Culture, was from 31,000 to 27,000 years ago. The Gravettians only left traces, such as a child's footprints, which may be the oldest known human footprints.



Could you live like these prehistoric cave-dwellers? Click [here](#) to find out what their life was like.



Click [here](#) to find out more about some home improvement projects that these cave-dwellers carried out.





Now let's look at what makes the Chauvet Cave so special, its art.

Art plays an important role in all human culture, which is why the Chauvet Cave is such an important discovery.

The art of the Chauvet Cave is of the same type of seen in other adorned European caves: animal, geometric, and representations of humans (handprints, the lower body, the female body). The animals depicted are mainly at the top of the food chain: big cats (the most numerous), mammoths, and woolly rhinos, animals not hunted or infrequently hunted by humans.

So why did our ancestors choose to paint these images? Why were they important?

Theories range from "art for art's sake" to fulfilling some kind of spiritual or religious function for the cave dwellers. Perhaps it is not as simple as that - perhaps both are true. We may never know but perhaps it would help to think about why artists today paint.



Click [here](#) to explore more about the reasons our Chauvet people created such beauty.



Click [here](#) to load an amazing 3D model of the caves and explore right from your browser. This is humanity's first artistic masterpiece, thought to be 36,000 years old. Spanning 10 metres, this mural contains a wide variety of animal scenes. Move the model around, go full screen, explore and look closely. Can you spot drawings of reindeers, woolly rhinos, and mammoths?





Sketches, Fanny Le Bagousse, Grotte Chauvet

Let's look at the techniques that the Chauvet people, known as the Aurignacians, would have used and then see what's changed today.

The Aurignacians drew, painted and engraved images. The black drawings were made by applying charcoal, mainly produced from pine oil. In order to obtain quality charcoal, the Aurignacians mastered the technique of combusting wood, an early example of art driving technological progress.

Shading is a technique that had not been identified before the discovery of the Chauvet Cave. It adds layers to the art depending on the nature and texture of the wall.

Shading first involves the application of a charcoal mark on the wall. The charcoal is then re-applied and spread with a finger or a tool.

The figures consisting of red dots or handprints were made by placing a palm filled with ochre on the wall.

Figures were made by blowing pigment on the wall (aerography). People of this era prepared the pigment and blew it directly around their hand.

Prehistoric art and modern art are more similar than you might think - have a think about some street art that you might have seen. Does it remind you of this cave art? The next page explores those links.



Click [here](#) to find out more about these techniques.



Click [here](#) to explore the links between the Chauvet cave art and modern art.



Click [here](#) to explore some 360 views of street artist Banksy's most famous murals.

IF GRAFFITI  
CHANGED ANYTHING  
- IT WOULD  
BE ILLEGAL



Now a quiz! Click [here](#) to see if you can tell the difference between modern art and prehistoric art.



Activity time! Create your own cave art (we suggest on paper or on a tablet, not on your wall) - a sketch, a handprint, anything you'd like.



Can You Guess Modern Abstract Art From Prehistoric Cave Paintings?

# Questions for Chapter 1

Let's finish this chapter with some questions. When you **Discover**, you are comprehending and remembering. When you **Explore**, you are really able to understand it and think it through. When you **Invent**, you are able to comprehend, understand, remember, analyse and do something cool with your new knowledge.

## **Discover:**

When did the Aurignacians create their art in the Chauvet Cave?

## **Explore:**

Why do you think the Aurignacians chose to create cave art?

## **Invent:**

Why is it important to understand the links between prehistoric and modern art?





# Chapter 2



What's this chapter about?  
Extra Discovery



What will I do?  
Explore what the Chauvet Cave discovery  
tells us about climate change  
Relive the moment of discovery of the  
Chauvet Cave



How long will this chapter take?  
45 minutes



The Chauvet Cave had been untouched for tens of thousands of years when it was discovered and some of the animals depicted are distinctly unfamiliar to us, as they are now extinct. Cave lions, woolly mammoth, creatures of legend. Click [here](#) to see six incredible animals that the Chauvet people knew but we don't.





Animals becoming extinct isn't the only change - cave art is under constant threat from modern life, our industry, tourism, even vandalism. Click [here](#) to see how we are protecting this most fragile, and most important art.

# What Is Threatening Our Earliest Art?

And how can we protect it?



The Chauvet Cave has a bold response to these threats. Not only have they created an immersive Chauvet Cave, which you experienced earlier, they created a full size replica. Click [here](#) to explore it.





To finish our exploration of the Chauvet Cave, relive the moment of discovery. Click [here](#) to discover more.



# Questions for Chapter 2

Time for some questions. Here's a reminder of how it works. When you **Discover**, you are comprehending and remembering. When you **Explore**, you are really able to understand it and think it through. When you **Invent**, you are able to comprehend, understand, remember, analyse and do something cool with your new knowledge.

## **Discover:**

Can you name one of the threats to cave art?

## **Explore:**

What do you think leads to animals becoming extinct?

## **Invent:**

How would you feel if you discovered the Chauvet Cave?  
Write a short story about your discovery.



**Congratulations.** You have proven yourself an inventive student of prehistory.

Continue your journey into the Chauvet Caves [here](#)



# Answers to all the questions

## Chapter 1

Discover: When did the Aurignacians create their art in the Chauvet Cave?

Answer: 37,000 to 35,000 years ago.

Explore: Why do you think the Aurignacians chose to create cave art?

Answer: Answers can vary but may include the points that they were moved and impressed by the incredible animals that they saw around them. Perhaps, because the caves were dark and had no windows, they wanted to bring the beauty of outdoors inside. Perhaps they also wanted to create something that would allow others to understand what they saw and thought was interesting. Perhaps it was spiritual and a form of worship.

Invent: Why is it important to understand the links between prehistoric and modern art?

Answers may vary but can include understanding the purpose of art and refer to techniques used by prehistoric and modern artists.

Art exercise: Answers may vary but should take account of techniques found in the Chauvet cave.

## Chapter 2

Discover: Can you name one of the threats to cave art?

Answer: Any answer of vandalism, tourism, climate change, etc.

Explore: What do you think leads to animals becoming extinct?

Answers can vary but could include reference to climate change causing shifts in habitat and food chains, hunting, reduced food supply, new competitors.

Invent: How would you feel if you discovered the Chauvet Cave? Write a short story about your discovery.

Answers may vary but could describe the process of discovery, emotions felt on discovery, some interpretation of the finds.