

## Replica Petroglyph – Teacher Notes



Footprints petroglyph Burrup Peninsula

Aboriginal people chipped away oxidised rock to expose different coloured un-oxidised rock below. Oxidation proceeds very slowly allowing these petroglyphs to remain for many thousands of years. Since petroglyphs are often reworked in later years the cultural reason for their existence must have continued to be very important.

I managed to make one reasonable footprint similar to the one above using only a rock chipper. It took me over two hours in low temperatures with fresh water on tap. Working with heterogeneous rocks such as granite made me realise why the representations must be iconic. Detail is difficult to achieve and the general essence of the subject matter must be overt.

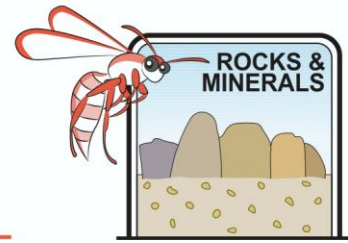
Burrup petroglyphs contain representations of animals like the thylacine which have been extinct from Western Australia for a long time.

Vikings, Celts, Gauls and other Indo-Europeans have used petroglyphs similarly in pre-historic times. In Europe the technique of sgraffito was used to decorate medieval houses and later became fashionable during the Arts and Crafts movement from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Layers of different coloured plaster were applied to the exterior of houses and artists cut through layers to form a cameo relief.

Students may wish to make their own replica petroglyphs using the sgraffito process. If this is an excitable class I recommend that the teacher mixes and dispenses the plaster of Paris or that it is prepared in a prior class.

### Materials per student

- Access to pictures of Aboriginal petroglyphs or the internet
- Half a Petri dish, a yoghurt pot lid or a small ball of plasticine to use as a mould
- Kitchen spray
- A small beaker or container to make the plaster of Paris mix
- 4 tablespoons full of plaster of Paris
- A spoon or stirring rod



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- A little water
- Iron oxide or other colouring material. It is considered offensive for non-Aboriginal people or Aboriginal women to use ochres as pigments.
- A scraper or sharp metal nail

1. If using plasticine, mould it into a shallow dish shape
2. Spray the inside of the mould lightly with oil/kitchen spray if possible. It will prevent sticking
3. Use 2/3 of the plaster of Paris to make the first layer. Mix plaster of Paris and water to a custard consistency. Add sufficient oxide to make a rock-like colour.
4. Quickly spread the plaster over the base of the mould and leave for five minutes to become a little firm

**HINT** Vibrate the mould gently to flatten the plaster

5. Make a moister plaster mix with the remaining plaster of Paris but do not add colour
6. Spread a thin layer of white plaster over the earlier thicker base.

**Hint** The thinner the second layer of plaster is the easier the carving process.

7. Leave the plaster to set. It may take about twenty minutes.
8. Meanwhile research petroglyphs and decide what shape you will make for your own. It should be particularly significant to you. (My Scottish family have the crow as the source of our family name. We were masons and worked in quarries where crows are often found)  
Start scraping and chipping your replica petroglyph.

**Hint** Less artistically able people like myself find it easier to sketch an outline onto the dried plaster first.



These can be sealed using terracotta spray or ornamental sealer found in hardware stores. They make a fine display if stuck onto a card with the student's explanation of their choice of shape below.