

Activity 8 (Local History & Craft) Carved Balls and Symbols Stones

Suitable for ages 3 plus with some adult help.



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Learning and Outreach Role
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We will be recreating the mysterious **Stone Age Carved Balls** and **Pictish Symbols Stones** that can be found in Elgin Museum. All you need for this activity is dough or clay of some sort (Play-doh, air-drying clay, salt dough) and your imagination!

Over 400 decorated carved stone balls have been found by archaeologists. Most have been found in north-east Scotland. They are otherwise known as petrospheres, which is the name given to any round man-made object made of stone. They are around 4,000 years old and date to the late Neolithic or Bronze Age. The balls are about 70mm in diameter - about the same size as a tennis ball.



No one knows for sure what these petrospheres were used for. Perhaps they were used in ceremonies; they could be held as a symbol of power or perhaps they were passed around to someone if they wanted to speak. Could leather have been strung around the balls so that they could be used as weapons? Were the balls part of a game? The balls could have even been just decorative. What do you think?

Make your own:

Roll your clay or dough into a ball and add your design – have a look at the pictures for inspiration. You could add pinches of clay to make a nobby one, use a toothpick to carve swirls, circles or patterns, if you are allowing your clay to harden maybe you could paint it. What do you think these stone balls were used for in the past? Can you come up with a game to play with them?



Pictish Symbols Stones

The Picts were the people of what is now North East Scotland between about 300AD and 900AD. They left no written history so it is difficult to know much about them for sure. We are not even sure what they called themselves; the name 'Pict' comes from the Romans, who referred these northern people as 'Picti', meaning 'painted', probably because of the tattoos or warpaint the Picts used. What we DO know has been uncovered by archaeologists, from what the Romans wrote of them and from the carved symbol stones they created, like the Dandaleith Stone you can **view it here:** bit.ly/2Xis077

Each stone was ornately carved, often with mysterious symbols such as discs, crescents and swirling circles. Others are illustrated with images of animals such as salmon, serpents and eagles.



< Can you work out what the symbols >
are on the Dandaleith Stone
at Elgin Museum?

'Despite centuries of study, the meaning behind these Pictish symbols carved across Scotland continues to elude us. Despite many interesting theories, we have no idea what they truly mean, so we have to find our own personal connection with them.'

Hamish Findlay Lamley (@pictavia.leather)



sun disc, chariot, eagle, arrow

Make your own:

Form your clay into a sausage about 10cm tall, squash it so that it has two large, flat faces. Choose from the symbols here or come up with your own to carve on either side, using a toothpick. Once you have completed your design stand your stone up on a piece of thick card and allow it to dry. You can also paint your finished stone. If you have facepaints why not give yourself some Pictish 'tattoos' or warpaint?

