

L.O. Understand how writing was developed by the Shang People; use my knowledge to write a short story



First, a quick recap: The Shang Dynasty was the earliest well-documented dynasty in China and it ruled from about 1600-1046 BCE. A **dynasty** is a society ruled by a line of kings from the same family. We have had two lessons so far:

1. How we know so much about the Shang Dynasty. *Which was the more reliable source of evidence - archaeology or history?* Have a quick look through your book and talk to your partner about what you remember.
2. What ordinary life was like for people during the Shang Dynasty. Look at your diary entry and talk to your partner about what you remember.

## Vocabulary that will be useful today

pictographs	symbols/ pictures that represent ideas or objects
dynasty	society ruled by a line of kings from the same family
evolved	developed gradually
oracle bones	pieces of ox bones or turtle shells - used to predict the future
divine	guess / use information to determine what to do
diviner	a person who could tell the future (using oracle bones)

Let's have a look at some Chinese writing. Discuss with your partner how it is different to ours.



Chinese writing uses symbols for whole words, or part of a word, instead of an alphabet. It also runs from top to bottom instead of left to right. In China, writing was first invented during the Shang Dynasty.

維  
基  
大  
典

Imagine if writing had never been invented. How would our lives be different? What would we not be able to do?



The first evidence of writing was discovered on the **oracle bones** of the Shang Dynasty. They also wrote on bamboo and silk but these have not survived.

Can you remember from our previous lesson what the oracle bones were used for?



The oracle bones were used by kings to **divine** the future. These were usually made from the shoulder blades of large animals, such as oxen, but were sometimes turtle shells.

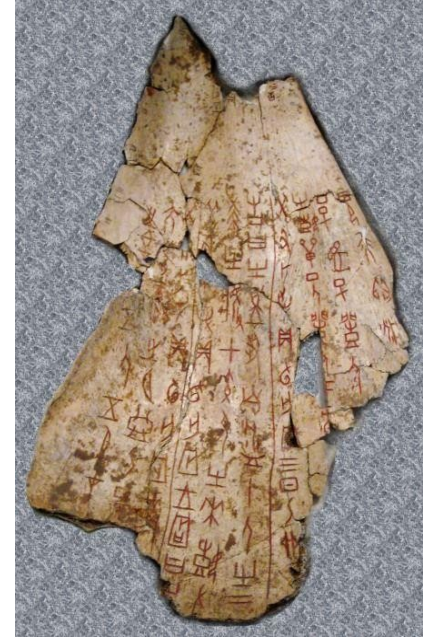
A **diviner** would write the date and a question on the bone. Little holes were made on the other side with a stone or metal drill. A hot rod was then put in the holes until the bone cracked. The king or diviner would then interpret the cracks to see what the answer to the question was. The answer would then be written on the bones too.



The questions on the oracle bones have helped historians find out a lot about the Shang Dynasty.

Questions such as

- Will the harvest be plentiful this year?
- Will the king have a son?
- Will it rain tomorrow ?
- If we send 3,000 soldiers into battle, will we win?





The Shang Dynasty also provides the first evidence of a calendar. It is possible that a calendar was developed because diviners needed an exact date in order to tell the future. Kings and religious officials also needed to know when to perform religious ceremonies and when to tell farmers to plant crops.

The calendar would have been developed by astrologers who studied the moon, sun and stars. Not much is known about the calendar but it is thought that a year was split into 12 months, with some months being 29 or 30 days long. Sometimes, an extra month was added if necessary. It was based on cycles of the Moon.



## Shang Writing

The writing developed during the Shang Dynasty contains pictographs, similar to those used in modern Chinese writing. Some characters clearly represent what they are describing whilst others are not so clear!



What do you think these pictographs, taken from the oracle bones, might mean?



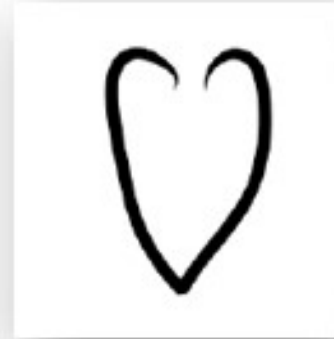
woman



water

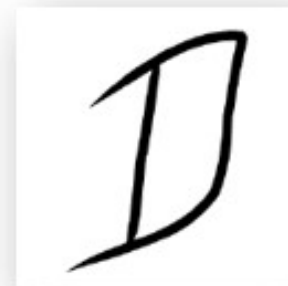
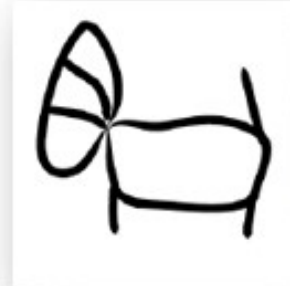


bird



heart

What about these pictographs? What do you think they mean?



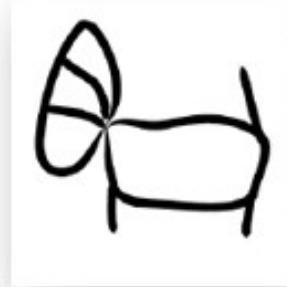
Which pictograph do you think most looks like the thing it represents?



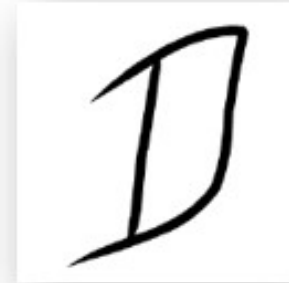
rain



moon



rabbit



meat

























The pictographs on the oracle bones and other objects found from the Shang Dynasty tell us information that would have been lost forever if it had not been written down.

Over to you...















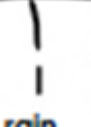





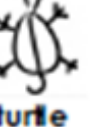



Work with your partner to match the pictographs to the words you think they represent.

child	king	eye	heart
sun	moon	mountain	rain
field	earth	water	fire
cowry shell	meat	knife	cow
turtle	bird	fish	rabbit
elephant	person	man	woman








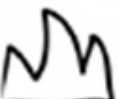






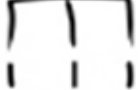









			
			
			
			
			
			

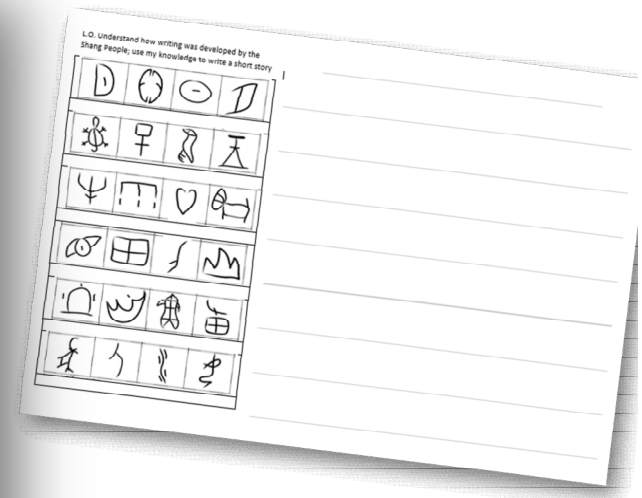
How many did you get right?

 man	 woman	 child	 king	 person	 eye
 heart	 mountain	 field	 water	 fire	 earth
 sun	 moon	 rain	 cowry shell	 knife	 meat
 cow	 fish	 turtle	 bird	 rabbit	 elephant



Now copy the correct words under the symbols on your own worksheet.

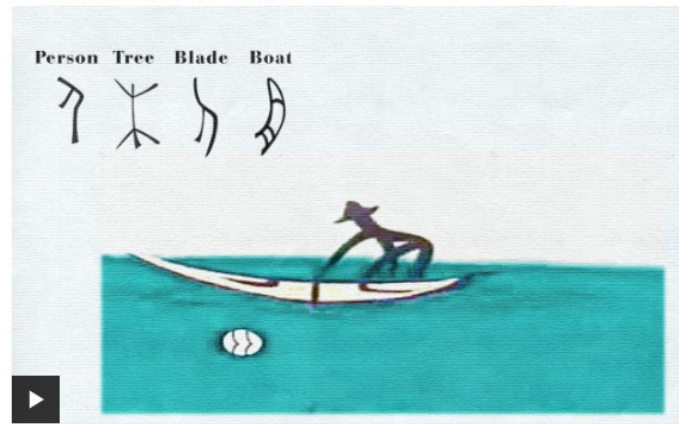
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Let's look at how the Shang people developed their writing:

### History KS2: How the Shang Invented Writing

BBC Teach > Primary resources > KS2 History > The story of China



Now that you know what some of the pictographs mean, you should be able write a short story about a person (farmer, peasant, craftswoman, nobleman etc.) in the time of the Shang Dynasty.

Not every word needs a symbol - just write a simple story in English that uses as many of the pictograph words as possible. Do this on the lines of your worksheet. Then, simply draw the symbols above the corresponding words. You could even invent your own pictograph for the words that you don't have.

When you're done, give it a title and read your story to someone.





## China Lesson 1: Shang Dynasty

