



# Messages in Stone

Studying the Petroglyphs of the  
Lapita



# Our Learning Goals



In this lesson, we will:

- **Identify** what petroglyphs are and why the Lapita people created them.
- **Explore** the scientific tools archaeologists use to study rock art without damaging it.
- **Analyse** common motifs to understand what was important to ancient Pacific communities.
- **Investigate** how natural forces threaten these precious stone messages.

# Key Vocabulary



## Petroglyph

Chipped stone carving or engraving.



## Archaeology

The study of human history through excavation of sites and analysis of physical remains.



## Preservation

Preserving for the future.



## Symbolism

Using symbols or images to represent ideas or important qualities.

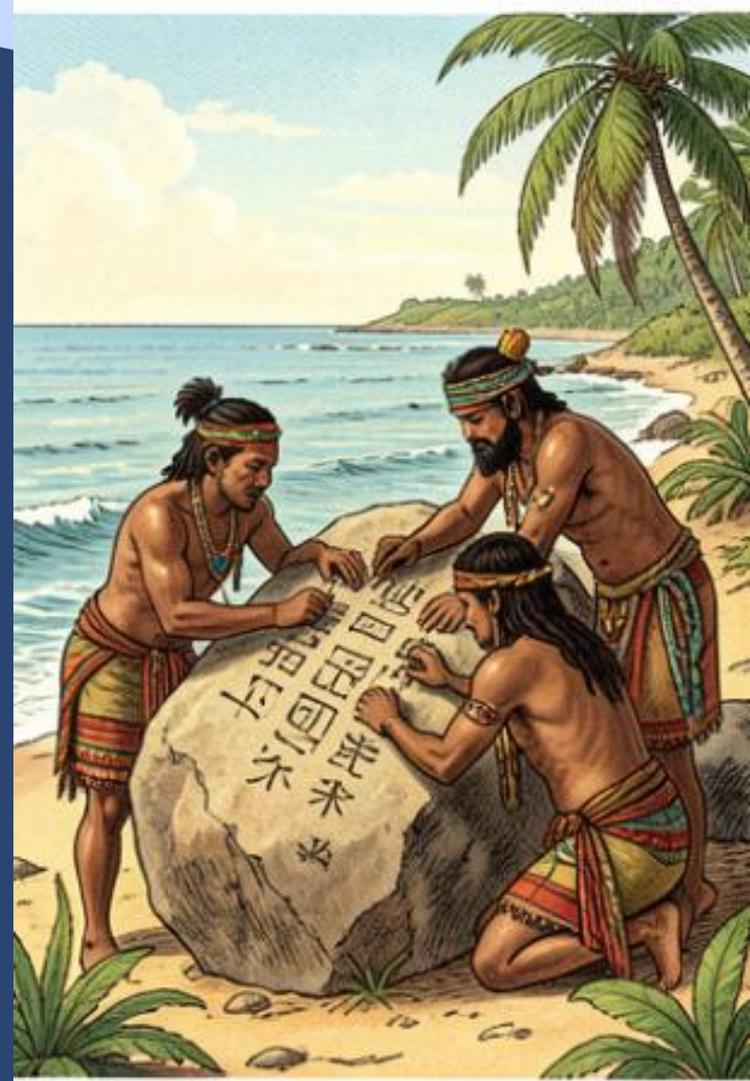
# Who Were the Lapita?

## The Ancestors of the Pacific

Do you remember our last lesson? The **Lapita people** were the brilliant navigators who first settled the remote Pacific islands thousands of years ago.

## Rock Writing

These ancestors didn't just write on paper. They carved their stories, identity, and journeys directly into the rock. We call these carvings **petroglyphs**.



# How Do We Study Them?



## Look, Don't Touch!

Archaeologists want to learn from petroglyphs without damaging them. Because these carvings are fragile, they use special **scientific methods** to study the surface carefully.

## Why?

Touching the rock can leave oils that harm the stone, and rubbing can wear the carvings away over time.

# Scientific Methods



## Tracing

Placing clear plastic over the rock and drawing the lines to record the exact shape.



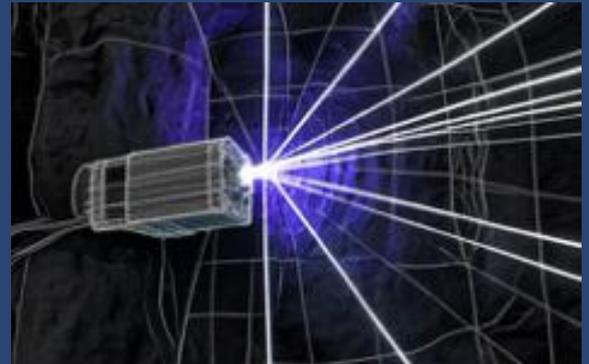
## Photography

Taking high-resolution photos, often with different lighting, to see details clearly.



## 3D Scanning

Using lasers to create a perfect digital model of the rock that can be studied on a computer.



# True or False



Archaeologists often make rubbings by pressing paper directly onto the petroglyphs because it is the safest method.



TRUE



FALSE



Answers on the next slide...

# True or False



Archaeologists often make rubbings by pressing paper directly onto the petroglyphs because it is the safest method.



FALSE

False. Physical contact can damage the fragile surface over time. Scientists prefer non-contact methods like photography or 3D scanning.

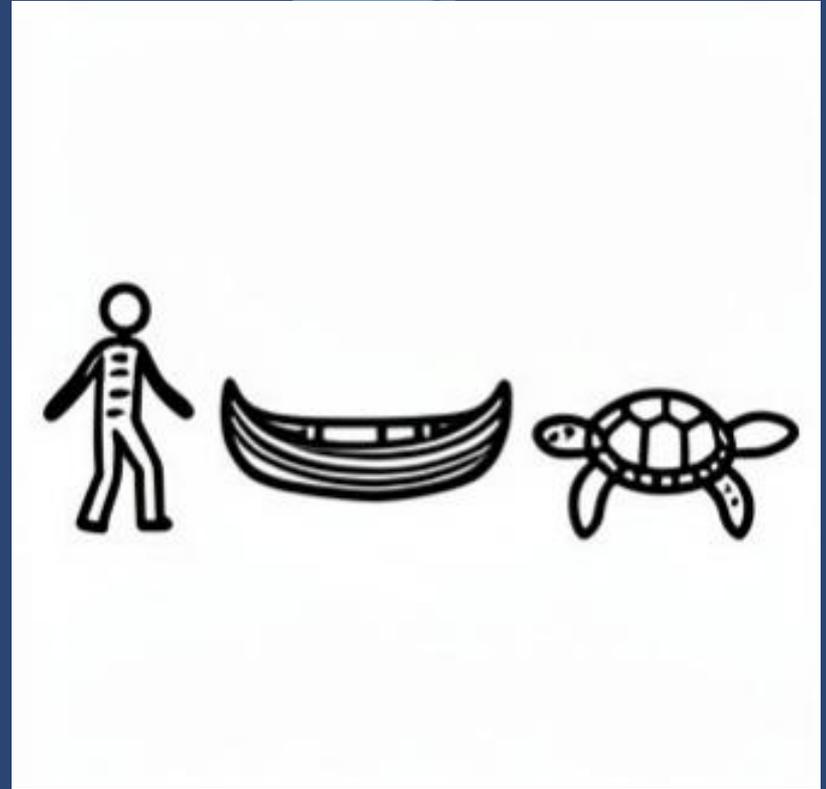
# Reading the Symbols

## Pacific Motifs

By studying the carvings, we can see what mattered most to the Lapita people. Common designs include **human figures**, **canoes**, and **turtles**.

## What Do They Tell Us?

These symbols help us understand their daily life, their spiritual beliefs, and their skills as sailors.



# Common Motifs



Human figures often represented ancestors, while canoes symbolised the vital skill of navigation.

# Discuss!



## Why Turtles?

Turtles are a very common symbol in Pacific rock art. Why do you think the Lapita people chose to carve turtles so often?



# Discuss!



**You might have said...**

Turtles provided food for long voyages.

They represent longevity and wisdom.

They travel between land and sea, connecting the worlds.

# Threats to Preservation



## Nature's Power

Sadly, many petroglyphs are in danger. They have survived for thousands of years, but natural forces are now a major threat.

## Rising Risks

**Erosion** from wind and rain slowly wears the stone away. **Rising sea levels** also threaten coastal rock art sites with flooding and salt damage.

# Group Activity: Preservation Detectives



In groups, discuss how the following threats damage petroglyphs:

1. Rain and Wind: How does water change the rock surface?
2. Rising Sea Levels: What happens when salt water soaks the stone?
3. Plants/Moss: How can roots growing in cracks break the rock?

Write down one idea for how we might protect these stones from each threat.

# Match the words with the definitions



1.

Preservation

a) The study of human history through physical remains.

2.

Archaeology

b) Using images to represent ideas or qualities.

3.

Symbolism

c) A rock carving made by chipping away the stone surface.

4.

Petroglyph

d) Protecting something from damage or decay.

# Match the words with the definitions



1.

Preservation

c) A rock carving made by chipping away the stone surface.

2.

Archaeology

d) Protecting something from damage or decay.

3.

Symbolism

a) The study of human history through physical remains.

4.

Petroglyph

b) Using images to represent ideas or qualities.

# Summary

## Messages in Stone

Petroglyphs are Lapita ancestors' 'rock writing,' recording identity and stories.

## Science and Safety

3D scanning studies them without harm.

## Protecting History

Erosion and rising seas threaten carvings; preservation is vital.

