THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Follow-up 9
Writing & Pictograms

Objectives: To explore the idea of how writing evolves. To encourage pupils to think about why writing is important and how it is used.

Materials: Writing and drawing materials.

Class set-up: Individual, partner-work, group or whole class

Vocabulary: Pictogram, logogram, ideogram

Activity: Remind the pupils of the themes touched on in the writing outline. Chinese is not based on an alphabet of symbols representing sounds, but on characters which represent an idea, word or part of a word. A fraction of these characters are pictographic. It is probable that Chinese evolved from a more pictographic script.

Ask the children to discuss the pros and cons of having a pictographic script. What ideas would be easy to communicate – what things would present more of a problem? Ask them to team up in pairs. Each one must think of a sentence, for example 'the dog ate the bone', and use pictures to illustrate this.

Do they have much success in communicating their message? What did they notice about using this system – was it faster, slower, more ambiguous?

Give them a more difficult sentence to illustrate, for example 'She danced gracefully at the concert', 'Johnny is kind' or 'nobody knows her name'.

Finish up the discussion by asking the children to list the things that were very hard to communicate by a purely pictographic script.

Background information: Writing and Language