Discussion 1

How are ancient scripts deciphered?

Objectives: To encourage pupils to think about how we decipher ancient texts and why it is important in increasing our understanding of ancient civilizations. For children to understand how we begin to decipher complex ancient scripts.

Materials: Photographs, books and/or illustrations of a collection of ancient scripts, especially Chinese characters.

Class Set-up: Whole group discussion

Vocabulary: palaeography, philologist, epigrapher, logograms.

Discussion: Begin the discussion by showing the children pictures of Chinese writing and comparing it with other scripts where symbols are used to form words or sounds via their meaning. (e.g., Egyptian hieroglyphs) Ask the children if they can see any similarities, but mostly they will be able to see *differences.*

The children should be able to spot recurring figures and symbols.

Do the symbols refer to a picture of something, is it picture writing?

What are the problems of trying to write purely in pictures?

The children could attempt to suggest how we could write a complex message in just pictures. Write one with them.

What difficulties would we have? Why would we not understand every message?

What might the symbols refer to if they are not purely pictures. The children may guess that they refer to words and then you could introduce that they may refer to parts of words, sounds or syllables.

Background Information:

Writing

Language