WHERE DID LITERATURE BEGIN?

And what IS it, anyway?

LITERATURE (from Webster’s dictionary)
- writings in prose or verse; especially: writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest.

Source: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/literature

Image: http://members.cox.net/academia/coyote.html
THE FIRST STORIES

The first stories were essential to people living in the landscape. It was not the built landscape of today.

It was the natural landscape. They needed to warn each other of natural dangers or good places to hunt or to give directions in a wild and wide open world.
IN THE BEGINNING...

Language was ... Pictures

a b
c d
WHAT IS A PETROGLYPH?

- A picture symbol ancient peoples used to convey meaning.
- These are the beginnings of written language.
- Many different tribes on the American continent used similar symbols, so all tribes could understand.
- They were used as warnings, directions or place names.
- Also called a PICTOGRAPH
USEFUL MARKINGS

cross over   go around   you missed something in this direction   near or close
USEFUL MARKINGS

Looking
(Two stylized eyes)

Footsteps for a short distance in the specified direction
(Two stylized footprints)

go up

go down
PICTOGRAPHS ARE NOT THE SAME AS PICTURES
MODERN PICTOGRAPHS

National Park Service Pictographs

Who can guess what this is?
TELL YOUR OWN STORY

Try it for yourself: You can use some of these symbols, or make up your own pictographs to tell a short story of your own.

Will it be an adventure? A love story? A tragedy? A comedy?

This is an actual pictograph found near a swiftly flowing river in the Pacific Northwest of the United States (in Oregon). It is hundreds, if not thousands, of years old. It represents a story.

Take a few minutes now to write down your own story of what this might represent to you.
A STORY IN A SINGLE PICTURE

- man bent-over = "old man"
- without a belt or crotch line = "poverty"
- upper hand showing the palm at heart level = "good"
- triangular symbol extending away from the buttocks = ??????
Native American fishermen in the area had the custom of leaving their catch on the rocks so that those in need could take a fish to eat. Whenever someone came by, a fisherman who did not have any fish to spare would indicate this by slapping his buttocks loudly since speech could not be heard over the roar of the falls. The slap and gesture, however, were unmistakable. The individual would then move along without taking any fish. This practice is known because of historical records and oral tradition.

The reverse arrow on the petroglyph therefore signifies "please do not let those in need go hungry by slapping your buttocks". While two figures, that of an old man and that of a fisherman, would have been clearer, it would have taken twice as long to make the petroglyph. Shorthand, it appears, is particularly useful when the message must be carved into rock.
WHY DO WE STUDY LITERATURE?

- Because those ideas of universal interest are what give our lives meaning. Literature deals with the big themes:
  - Where did we come from?
  - How did we get here?
  - How will we survive?
  - What is birth?
  - What is death?
  - Why do we suffer?
  - What does it mean to be alive?
WHO ARE YOU?

- Above all, literature gives us a sense of who we are, as individuals, as families, as groups of friends, as members of a community, a town, a race, a religion, a country or a species.
- Literature gives us a sense of identity.
- And the way we explore that identity is through stories and poems.
What stories are important to you?

- We have seen that literature gives us a sense of who we are. Literature gives us a sense of identity. And we share that identity through stories.
- What are the stories that help you know who you are?
- What stories are important to you?
PRIMITIVE ART COMES IN THREE FORMS:

- **Naturalistic** art depicts real things -- such as animals, insects, humans -- as they actually are. The image may be quite crude. For example, a human drawn as a stick figure, the sun drawn as a curve with rays, or even something as simple as a handprint.

- **Stylized** art depicts unreal things, but with some grounding in reality. For example, mythical creatures, X-Ray views of animals, faces decorated like masks, or objects distorted in some way.

- **Abstract** art depicts objects with no grounding in reality. For example, geometric patterns, spirals, curves, etc.

Adapted from Ancestral Art website: *The Meaning of Primitive Art*, found at http://www.ancestral.com/materials.html