

Historian tip #8: Historians learn about the language(s) of the time and place they are studying.


Today's investigation: **The Chinese Writing System**

Outcome of the investigation: Our historians will be able to

1. articulate the benefits, for both power holders and non-power holders, of having a written language
2. match past pictographs to modern pictographs
3. analyze ideographs and make educated guesses at possible meanings
4. create pictographs and ideographs to communicate ideas

Vocabulary: pictograph
ideograph

Materials: Chinese writing overhead

Mini lesson: Interestingly, the Chinese style of writing developed from the cracks on oracle bones like the ones we looked at yesterday. For example, if the cracks on the bones looked like this , it represented the word **above**. So instead of using an alphabet, the Chinese use pictures to show words. These are called pictographs. Over time, some of these pictures have evolved, so they look a little different today than they did in ancient times. Let's look at his overhead (show pictographs, match ancient forms to modern form). Now sometimes it is hard to describe an idea using pictures. So instead, people began using ideographs. Turn to your partner for a second and discuss why you think these ideographs might stand for **"above"** and **"below"** (show ideographs on overhead). Sometimes, two pictographs come together to make an ideograph. Let's look at these next two ideographs. Discuss with your partner why you think **sun + moon = bright**, and **person + person = agreeing**. Finally, take a minute to think about what these last two ideographs might mean (**tree + tree**, and **person + enclosure**).

Activities: Students should work in pairs or threes to develop a list of pictographs, then combine some of these pictographs to create ideographs. They may even construct simple sentences using these. Students in the class should walk around asking others to read what they have written. Stress that success lies not in them "stumping" someone else, but in communicating their ideas clearly enough so that they **are** figured out.

Connecting past to present: In your historian's notebook tonight, collect any evidence you see of pictures being used to communicate ideas.

