

The First Animation of the Ancient World

AGES 3-12 · 42 PAGES · SHAHR-E SUKHTAH — THE BURNT CITY, SOUTH-EASTERN IRAN

Aryan and Ariana are carried into the deep past by the Homa, a mythical bird, and arrive at a city that was already ancient when the pyramids were being built. There they find a clay goblet with five small pictures painted around its rim — and discover that when it spins, the pictures move.

THE BIG QUESTION — FOR EVERY STUDENT

What can an object tell us about people who left no writing behind?

Ask it of the whole class. The supports below are for students who need a way in — not an easier question.

Words to know

archaeologist artifact goblet ibex animation

Before you read

- What is the oldest thing you have ever touched? How old do you think it was?

Talk about it

- The artist drew a goat leaping up to eat leaves. Why a goat, and not a person?
IF STUCK I think they drew a goat because ...
- The people of the Burnt City had no writing at first. What do we know about them anyway, just from this one cup?
IF STUCK This cup tells me they knew how to ...
- What can an object tell you about a person that a written story cannot?
IF STUCK An object shows me ... but a story tells me ...
- The book calls this the world's first animation. How could anyone prove something is the first of its kind?
IF STUCK To prove it was first, you would have to ...

Make it

The Goblet That Moved

25-30 MINUTES

Paper, pencils, scissors, and one sharpened pencil per pair of students.

Step-by-step instructions are on the student sheet overleaf — photocopy one per child.

Check they got it

As students hold up their finished strips, ask each one: **what did the ancient artist have to know to make the cup work?** Listen for *the pictures have to be in order* and *each one changes only a little*. “They were good at drawing” means the idea has not landed — follow up with: what would happen if picture three came last?

What students often get wrong

- ✗ That “ancient” means “simple.” Sequencing five images so they read as movement takes planning and a steady hand.
- ✗ That we know the artist meant to make an animation. We do not know what they intended — saying so out loud is honest history, not a gap.
- ✗ That “first” is a fact. It is a claim about evidence: it means the oldest one anybody has found *so far*.

The real archaeology

- The goblet is roughly the size of a coffee cup, and was excavated at Shahr-e Sukhteh in south-eastern Iran.
- Five sequential images run around its rim, showing a wild goat (an ibex) leaping toward a tree, eating its leaves, and landing.
- The Burnt City was a working city around 3200 BCE — with craft workshops, trade goods and a cemetery archaeologists are still excavating.

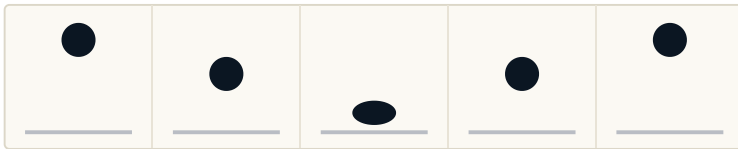
Make a picture that MOVES

A long, long time ago — 5,200 years — someone in Iran painted five little pictures around a clay cup. When the cup spun, the goat jumped up and ate the leaves. You are going to do the same thing.

- 1 Think of ONE thing that moves. A goat jumping. A ball bouncing. A flower opening.
- 2 Draw it five times in the boxes below. Change it just a **tiny** bit each time.
- 3 Cut along the dotted line. Tape the two ends together to make a ring, with your pictures on the **inside**.
- 4 Spin the ring and peep over the top edge at the pictures on the far side.

My moving thing is:

Like this — a ball bouncing:



See how the ball only moves a little between each box? That is the whole trick.

Now your turn:

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✂ CUT ALONG THE DASHED LINE

Now think: Did it work? What happened when you changed the picture too much?

One question I would ask the person who made the cup:

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Finished early? Draw a sixth picture — what happens next?