

READING CHALLENGE

The Children Who Found a Cave

In 1940, four teenagers and a dog discovered something incredible hidden under a hill in France — paintings that were 17,000 years old

True Stories | A2 Level | ~12 min read | 5 Quiz Questions

Level	A2 (Elementary)
Age Group	Teens (11–16)
Skill	Reading
Topic	History & Culture
Duration	~15 minutes
Vocabulary	15 words with definitions
Quiz	5 multiple-choice questions

Article

It was 12 September 1940 in the south of France. A group of four teenage boys were walking in the woods near the village of Montignac. Their names were Marcel Ravidat, Jacques Marsal, Georges Agnel, and Simon Coencas. Marcel had a dog with him. The dog's name was Robot. Suddenly, Robot disappeared. Marcel called the dog, but there was no answer. Then Marcel noticed something on the ground — a small hole between the rocks and trees. Robot had fallen down the hole. Marcel looked into the darkness. He could hear the dog far below. The boys decided to go in. What they found that day changed our understanding of human history forever.

Going Into the Dark

The boys made the hole bigger. Then they climbed down, one by one. They used a small **torch** to light the way. At the bottom, there was a **tunnel**. The tunnel was narrow and dark. They moved slowly and carefully through the tunnel. After a few minutes, the tunnel opened up into a large **cave**. The boys held up their torches. And then they saw them. On the walls of the cave, there were **paintings**. Hundreds of paintings. Animals of all kinds — horses, deer, bulls, and bears. The paintings were big, colourful, and incredibly beautiful. The boys stood in silence. They could not believe what they were seeing.

What Did the Paintings Look Like?

The **paintings** covered almost every wall and ceiling of the **cave**. There were more than 600 paintings in total. There were also nearly 1,500 drawings and **symbols** carved into the rock. Most of the **animals** in the paintings were horses — about 364 of them. There were also stags, bison, ibex, bears, and even a rhinoceros. The colours were still bright after thousands of years. The **ancient artists** used red, yellow, black, and brown. They made their colours from natural materials — rocks, soil, and **charcoal**. Some of the animals looked like they were moving and running. The artists were very skilled. Even today, modern artists find it hard to paint animals as well as this.

Telling the World

The boys went back the next day. And the day after that. They kept their **discovery** secret for a few days. But soon they told their teacher, a man named Léon Laval. Léon Laval was amazed. He contacted a famous **expert** called Henri Breuil. Henri Breuil was an **archaeologist** who knew a lot about **prehistoric** art. He visited the **cave** and immediately understood how important it was. He said: 'This is the Sistine Chapel of prehistory.' The Sistine Chapel is one of the most famous rooms of art in the world. It was a very big compliment. Scientists came from all over France and Europe to see the cave. Everyone agreed: this was one of the greatest discoveries in history.

How Old Are the Paintings?

Scientists wanted to know: how old are these **paintings**? They used a scientific method to find the answer. The method is called carbon dating. Carbon dating can tell you how old something is by looking at atoms inside it. The results were incredible. The paintings were about 17,000 years old. This means that **prehistoric** people painted them around 15,000 BC. At that time, humans were hunters. They did not have farms or cities. They lived in small groups and moved from place to place. They hunted the same **animals** that appear in the paintings — horses, deer, and bison. The **cave** paintings show us that these **ancient** people were creative and intelligent. They were real **artists**.

Why Did They Paint?

This is a difficult question. Nobody knows for sure. Scientists and **archaeologists** have several ideas. Some **experts** think the **paintings** were a kind of magic. Before a hunt, people painted the **animals** they wanted to catch. They believed this would help them in the hunt. Other experts think the **cave** was like a school. Young people came here to learn about the animals around them. Another idea is that the paintings told stories. The **ancient artists** wanted to share information about the world. Some scientists also think the **symbols** on the walls could be an early type of writing. We do not know the true answer. But one thing is clear: the people who painted Lascaux were not simple or primitive. They had feelings, ideas, and a strong desire to create.

Closing the Cave — and Opening It Again

The Lascaux **cave** opened to visitors in 1948. Thousands of people came to see the **paintings** every year. But there was a big problem. The breath and body heat of so many visitors was damaging the paintings. Green and white fungus started to grow on the walls. The **ancient** colours began to fade. The **fragile** paintings were in danger. So in 1963, the French government closed the cave to the public. Today, only a very small number of scientists can enter, and only for a short time. But people still wanted to see the art. So a team built an exact copy of the cave nearby. It is called Lascaux IV and opened in 2016. You can visit it today and see every painting, every **symbol**, and every colour — exactly as the four boys and their dog Robot saw them on that September day in 1940.

Vocabulary

These 15 words appear in the article. Learn them to help your reading.

Word	Definition
cave	a large hole in the side of a hill or cliff, or under the ground
painting	a picture made with paint on a surface such as a wall or paper
ancient	very, very old — from thousands of years ago
discover	to find something for the first time
torch	a small light that you hold in your hand and carry with you
tunnel	a long hole under the ground or through a hill, big enough to walk through
animal	a living thing that is not a plant or a human, such as a horse, deer, or bear
artist	a person who makes paintings, drawings, or other works of art
expert	a person who knows a lot about a particular subject
protect	to keep someone or something safe from danger or harm
archaeologist	a scientist who studies the past by finding and examining old objects and buildings
prehistoric	belonging to the time before humans had writing or recorded history
charcoal	a black material made from burned wood, sometimes used for drawing
symbol	a shape or sign that represents an idea, object, or feeling
fragile	easily broken or damaged; needing careful handling

Comprehension Quiz

Choose the best answer (A, B, C or D) for each question.

1. How did the boys find the entrance to the cave?

- A. They read about it in a book at school
- B. Their dog Robot fell into a hole in the ground
- C. A farmer told them about a hidden tunnel
- D. They found a map in the village of Montignac

2. Approximately how many paintings are there inside the Lascaux cave?

- A. About 60
- B. About 600
- C. About 6,000
- D. About 60,000

3. What animal appears most often in the cave paintings?

- A. Bears
- B. Bison
- C. Horses
- D. Deer

4. Why did the French government close the cave to visitors in 1963?

- A. Because the cave became too dangerous to enter safely
- B. Because the owners of the land wanted it back
- C. Because too many visitors were damaging the fragile paintings
- D. Because scientists needed the cave for their experiments

5. What is Lascaux IV?

- A. The fourth section of the original cave, discovered in 1963
- B. A museum in Paris that displays objects found in the cave
- C. An exact copy of the cave built for the public to visit

D. The name of the scientific team that studied the paintings

Answer Key

#	Answer	Correct Option
1	B	Their dog Robot fell into a hole in the ground
2	B	About 600
3	C	Horses
4	C	Because too many visitors were damaging the fragile paintings
5	C	An exact copy of the cave built for the public to visit