

Year 5

History:

How did people living in the Shang Dynasty show their religious beliefs?

Monday

Religion in the Shang Dynasty was based on two important beliefs:

animism - the belief that all objects in the natural world have souls or spirits

veneration of ancestors- the belief that the spirits of deceased relatives continued to be present in the family and had influence over the living world

[A Shang Story to explain the power of the ancestors](#)

and read through the story together to discover some of the ways that Shang people tried to please and worship their ancestors, asking them to intervene in situations for them.



Shang Worship Cards

Match the situations with the way that Shang people might have responded by worshipping their gods.

It is nearly spring time and Shang farmers are hoping their crops will grow well this year.

We will offer sacrifices of food and wine to our ancestors so that they will stop the floodwaters.

There has been a flood and a Shang craftsman is worried that the water might destroy his workshop.

We will hold a special festival to honour the gods. We will use special bronze vessels and have food and music in their honour. Then they will give us good luck this year.

A powerful Shang warrior has become ill. The king needs him to be well again before it is time to go into battle.

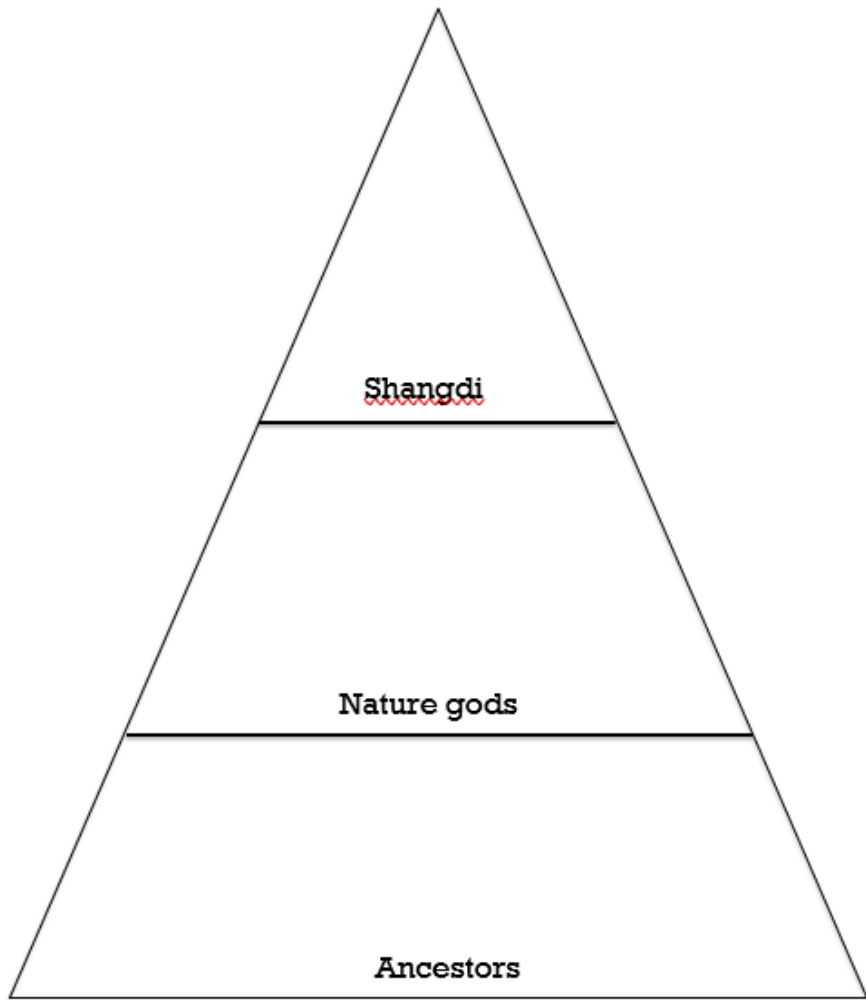
We will make human sacrifices and ask our ancestors to plea to Shangdi on our behalf to ask for good luck in times of war.

Can you explain why you made the decisions you did?

In addition to ancestors, Shang people also worshipped different gods. There was the supreme god, called Shangdi, who was believed to have ultimate control over human destiny and forces of nature. There were also a number of other gods, usually nature gods, such as the gods of the moon or sun, and mythical creature gods like dragons who ruled rivers or lakes.

Shang gods

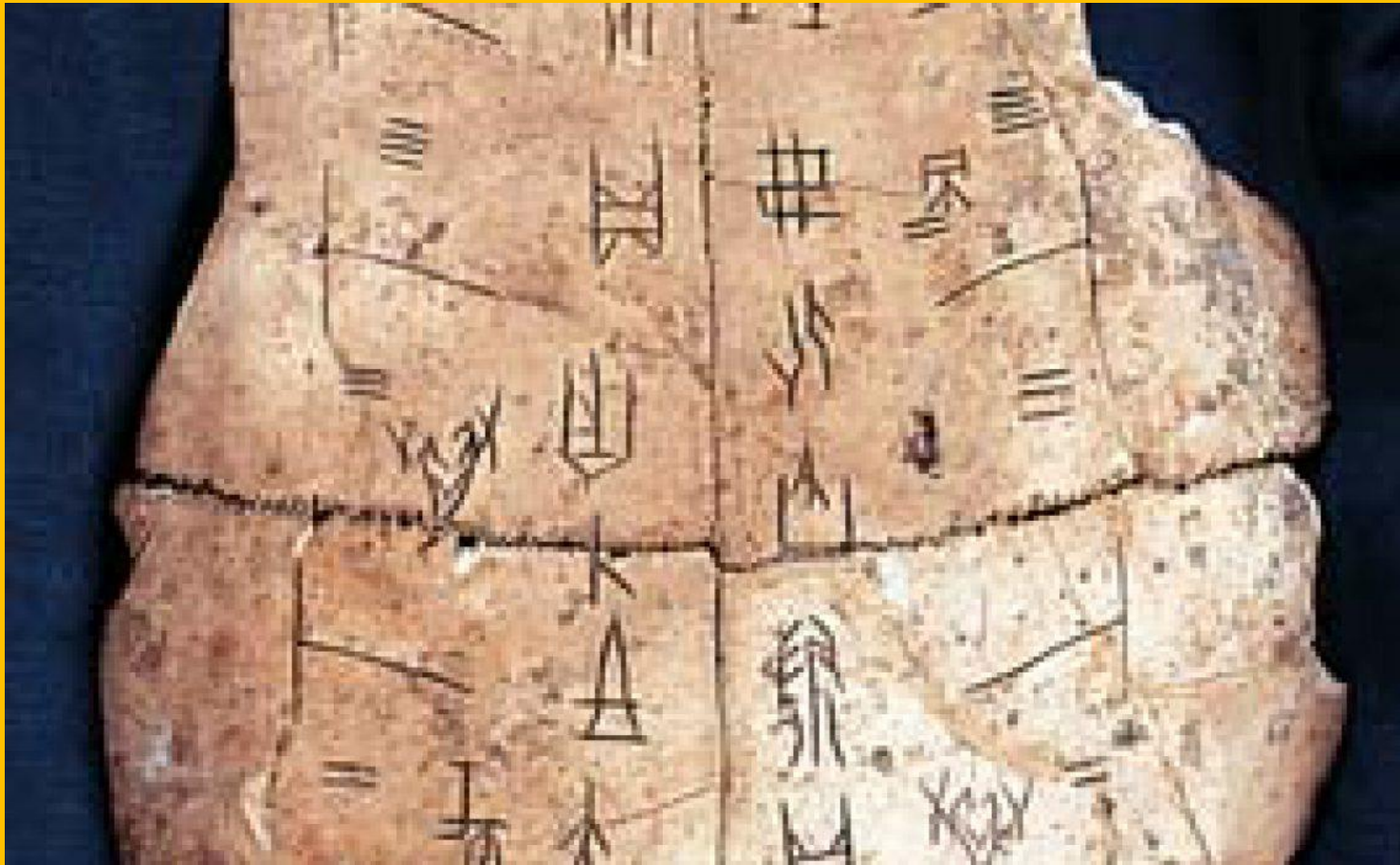
Draw pictures of the different types of gods worshipped by the Shang.



Research images of Shangdi – there are only images of him but use your imagination to draw representations of some of the other gods as people only tended to make statues and images of Shangdi, so archaeologists have no images of the others.

Imagine a situation for a Shang peasant, such as a flood, a drought, a war or time for new crops to be sown. Imagine what they might do to call on the gods or their ancestors for help, such as sacrificing an animal, holding a festival or appealing for their ancestors to intercede with Shangdi on their behalf. *Use the link below to help you.*





Year 5 History


What system of writing did the Shang have?

Wednesday

Imagine what life would be like if you couldn't write anything. What would the consequences be for the way we organise our society? Explain that many societies from the time of the Shang Dynasty had not developed a system of writing. However, the Shang Dynasty was famous for creating one of the oldest writing systems in the world. It was based on a series of characters, called *ideograms*, that represented ideas or objects.

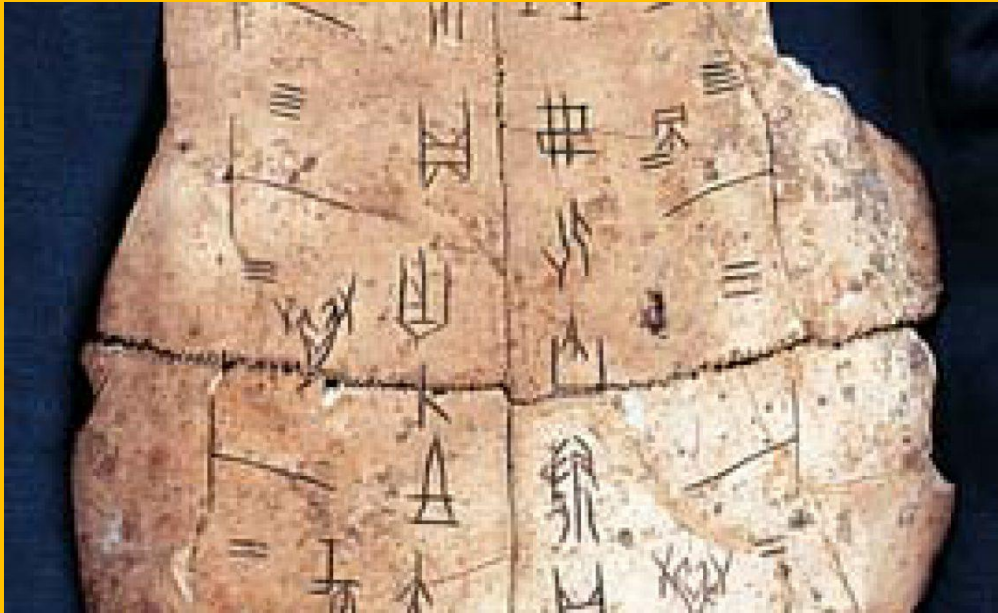
Modern Chinese writing
has evolved from this early
writing. Play the symbols
games from see if pupils
can guess what some of the
ideograms meant. [Game](#)

As part of the Shang religion, the king would ask questions of the gods and ancestors using oracle bones to predict the outcome. Questions like- “Will the queen have a healthy son?” were carved onto the bones by the priest and then he would hollow out a number of dips. Next he took a heated rod and inserted it into the hollow dips. Cracks appear which were then inter[reted by the priest. He recorded the answer on the front of the oracle bone.



Would you have liked being the priest who was interpreting what the gods replied?

Before the discovery of the oracle bones, Shang history was buried and practically unknown. With the bones, excited historians started to piece together royal life and found the earliest examples of Chinese writing. Paper was not invented until the second century BC but silk, wood and bamboo were used to write on as well as the bones. Why do you think that these don't survive today?



Research Shang Writing

Use the website www.ancientchina.co.uk/writing to make notes in the boxes below.

Notes about the story of the 'dragon bones'

Notes about different objects found with writing on

Notes about different characters or symbols

Other Notes

Shang Ideograms

Use the ideograms below to make your question.



sacrifice



meat



go out



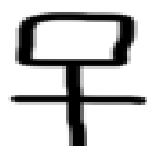
south



no / not



mountain



child



big



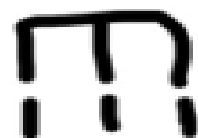
water



north



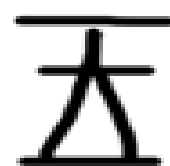
sun



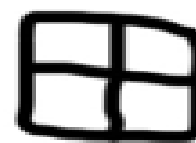
rain



human



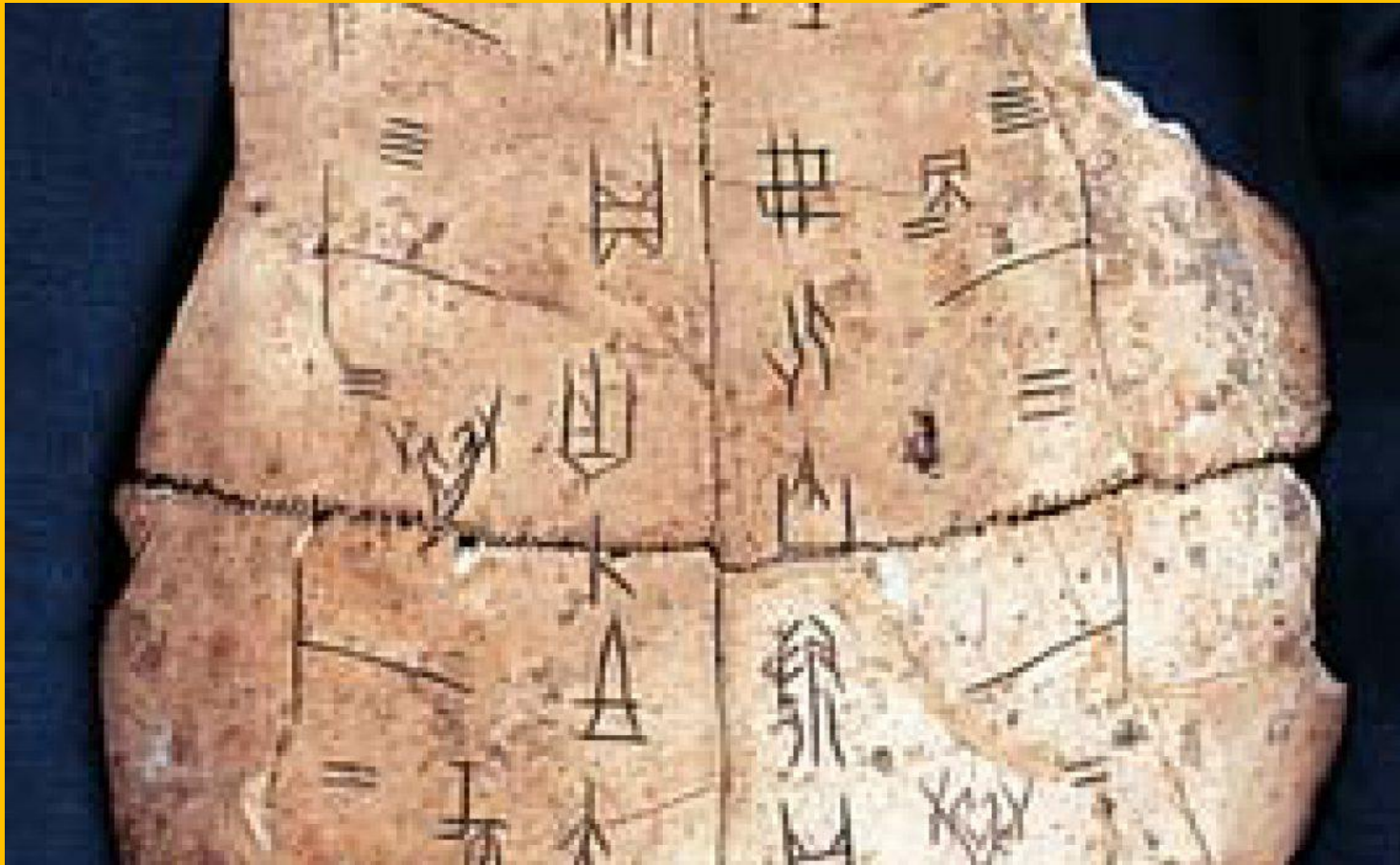
king



field

Try these questions, or think of your own ideas:

- Will it be rainy or sunny?
- Will the king have a child or not?
- Should the king go out to the north or the south?
- Should we sacrifice a human or animal (meat)?
- Will the water be found on the field or the mountain?



Year 5 History

What system of writing did the Shang have?

Thursday

To make salt dough oracle bones

2 cups of flour

1 cup of salt

1 cup of water

Sharp pen or pencil to make marks

Put flour and salt in a bowl and mix.

Add the water gradually (a table spoon at a time)

Mix until combined and smooth

Knead for 10 minutes

Preheat oven to 250

Rest for 20 minutes

Shape into oracle bones shapes (Give it jagged edges for authenticity)

Mark with shang writing symbols and cracks with a sharp pen or pencil

Place in the oven until cooked and hard (about 2 hours)

Define writing with permanent black marker

