Paint Your Own Petroglyphs

From the deserts of the American Southwest to the African Sahara and even the Australian outback, ancient peoples left behind the stories of their lives, painting pictures in reds and blacks, yellows and whites onto rocky outcrops and inside caves. In this activity, your 5th grade artist can pay tribute to the art of these ancient peoples by creating his own petroglyphs on a sheet of rough sandpaper. The granular surface of the sandpaper approximates the texture of rock, creating an authentic look in the finished piece.

What You Need:

- Rough grit sandpaper
- Broken crayons in colors that will contrast with the sandpaper

What You Do:

1. Explain to your child that ancient peoples, and even more modern Australian aborigines, created art not on paper or canvas but on large rocks. They created this rock art, called petroglyphs, by painting on or chipping into the rocks. They recorded the things that they saw around them and things that were important to them, such as animals, people, and abstract images.
2. What would your child paint on a rock, given the same opportunity? The night sky? Animals? People? Or something more abstract? Would he tell a story or record a single event? Explain that although he doesn't have a giant rock to paint, the same effect can be created on a sheet of sandpaper.
3. Give your child a piece of sandpaper and the broken crayons and let him create his own petroglyph masterpiece.

Extension Idea: Do an Internet search on "petroglyphs" + "(fill in your state)". You may find a local site that has Native American rock art that you and your child can study together.

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