Name_____Date_____

Choose **True** or **False**

Early Art

In 1994, three cave explorers in southern France felt warm air coming out of the side of a cliff. They followed it and discovered a cave that had been hidden for thousands of years. They were amazed by what they found there. All around them in the cave were beautiful drawings of animals. The drawings were made with black, red, and yellow colors and they were so lifelike that they seemed to move. Realizing that they had discovered something important, the explorers notified the French Culture Ministry of their discovery.

Today, the Chauvet Cave, named for one of the cave's discoverers, is considered one of the most important, best preserved, and unusual prehistoric discoveries of the 21st century. The cave, which is about 400 meters long, contains more than 300 paintings and **engravings**. On the floor are the bones of cave bears, a species that died out about 12,000 years ago. Marks on the cave's walls and footprints on the floor suggest that the bears **hibernated** there before humans came along. According to cave art expert Jean Clottes, **radiocarbon dating** indicates that most of the images were drawn between 30,000 and 32,000 years ago. Some people came back between 25,000 to 27,000 years ago and left marks on the ground, along with a child's footprint.

Cave paintings are not unusual in Europe—there are more than 300 prehistoric caves already discovered. But what makes the Chauvet Cave unique is the type and quality of the images. Most cave paintings depict animals like deer and horses that people hunted for food. But while some of those animals do appear in the Chauvet Cave, more than 60 percent of the drawings are of lions, bears, and even a leopard—powerful, dangerous animals that ancient people feared. "My **hunch** is that the artists came to this cave and found the bear skeletons," Clottes has said. "Perhaps they were impressed by the skeletons and considered the cave to be full of the bears' spirit, a powerful cave. They may have thought that, by painting some bears and other dangerous animals, they were capturing the animals' spirits, adding power in their own lives." According to Clottes, the Chauvet paintings may represent the earliest examples of human religion.

For decades, scholars had theorized that art had developed in slow stages, from primitive images to lively, naturalistic pictures. Before the Chauvet paintings had been dated, prehistorians were sure that the subtle shading, clever use of perspective, and elegant

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lines of Chauvet's master works placed them at the highest point of development in prehistoric art. When the paintings' age was scientifically established, however, the prehistorians were suprised. The images were about twice as old as the art in previously discovered caves. They represented prehistoric art's earliest known beginnings, yet they were much more advanced in technique than more recent cave art. We are left to wonder who these prehistoric artists were. Were they the Da Vincis and Michaelangelos of their age? We may never know.

* **Engravings:** images made by cutting into the surface of something. **Hibernated:** spent the winter sleeping. **Radiocarbon dating:** a technology that indicates how old something is. **Hunch:** guess based on available knowledge.

1. The Chauvet Cave paintings were discovered by Jean Clottes.

2. The entrance to the cave had been hidden for thousands of years.

3. Scratches on the walls of the Chauvet Cave along with animal bones suggested that humans had used it as a shelter during winter.

4. The Chauvet Cave paintings were the first examples of prehistoric art discovered in the 21st century.

5. The cave paintings' animal theme may be evidence of early religion.

6. The art in the Chauvet Cave was much older than prehistorians had expected.

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