

Reliable evidence?

Suitable for students of all age groups.

How reliable are sources like paintings and descriptions as evidence of the past?

Tell students the story of the Kongorou painting ageofrevolution.org/200-object/the-kongouro-from-new-holland-kangaroo/ -

When Captain Cook and his crew voyaged to Australia in the late 1700s, they saw 'alien species' – animals and plants they had never encountered before. They brought back drawings and descriptions to show people in Europe what they had seen. Joseph Banks, one of the scientists who went on the trip, asked the artist George Stubbs to paint a picture of a kangaroo to show other people what it looked like. George Stubbs had never seen a kangaroo in his life (and never did)! He painted the picture from Joseph Banks' description and from studying a kangaroo pelt that Banks brought back with him.

Choose an object from the collection. Working in pairs or groups, one student describes the object while their partner, or the rest of the group, draws it from the verbal description their partner is giving them. Only when they have finished drawing can they see the object that was being described.

How accurate is their drawing?

What other information would have been useful?

How useful would their drawing be as a piece of historical evidence?

How useful to people living in Britain in the late 1700s was The Kongorou by George Stubbs as evidence of Australian wildlife?