

**Pre- and Post-Visit Activities:
Ancient Greek Pottery and Archeology**

Overview:

These activities, which support the Staten Island Museum's lesson "Ancient Greek Pottery and Archeology," introduce students to Ancient Greek pottery and historical importance of its designs.

Background Information for Educators:

We know ancient Greek vessels as fine art objects that are displayed in museums, but most Greek vessels were functional objects that were used in everyday life. While large vases in archaic Greece were used as funeral markers much like tombstones, decorated pots of different shapes and sizes served a variety of functions, such as to store, transport, and drink liquids, or hold various oils and perfumes. Other pots were used much like fine china today: they were brought out during meals, ceremonies, and feasts. The general assumption is that decorated pots were the crockery of the rich, but this is open to debate. The upper members of society probably used metal vessels, and it has been suggested that black- and red-figure pottery was modeled largely after vessels made from silver. The glossy surface of pottery that came into fashion in Athens in the Classical period was probably intended to imitate the gleam of silver vessels. The numerous examples of this durable pottery that have survived thousands of years attest to its mainstream use and appeal.

The clay used for pots was of a very high quality, relatively fine and pure. The potter threw the clay on the potter's wheel, where the basic shape would be formed, with thin, even walls. The Greek potters' wheel was low to the ground and spun round by an assistant. In comparison, cooking pots and large storage vessels were often shaped by hand, were made from coarse clay, and had thick walls. When the basic shape was modeled, handles and other elements were added. The pot would be polished using a damp cloth to smooth the surface.

The kind of clay that the Greeks used was secondary clay, or clay that has been transported from one place to another by rivers and rain. As it is transported, this type of clay attracts other particles that stick to it, most notably iron. It is the iron content in the clay that gave Greek pottery its reddish color. Attic clay contained a lot of iron, and had a rich red-orange color. By contrast, Corinthian clay had less iron, and was more cream-colored.

Two main styles of Greek pottery decoration are black-figure and red-figure pottery. In black-figure pottery, which originated in Corinth c. 700 B.C., figures and ornamentation were drawn on the glazed black surface of a vase by incising (scratching) into the black, or by reserving unglazed areas, revealing

the natural red color of the clay. In red-figure pottery, invented at Athens about 530 B.C.E. is just the reverse of the black-figure style in that the reddish figures appear light against the black background of the pot surface. Details of the figures such as eyes and interior lines were painted on in black outlines. The red-figure technique allowed a more naturalistic and aesthetically appealing treatment of human figures, and the red hues contrasted the figures against the dark background.

Greek pottery and pottery fragments are some of the most valuable tools archeologists use for the study of ancient Greek history. Pottery in Ancient Greece was painted with conventional designs (also seen on Greek architecture), mythological figures, and realistic images depicting everyday Greek life. Ancient Greek paintings and structures did not survive as well as ancient Greek pottery, so paintings on jugs, vases and pots provide the majority of the information archeologists use to piece together what life, as well as art - especially drawing and painting -- was like during that time.

Vocabulary:

- Antiquities: objects belonging to ancient times, especially before the Middle Ages.
- Archeology: the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artifacts and other physical remains.
- Artifact: something that is made by people, used by people and changed by people.
- Conservator: A specially trained person who can restore and preserve objects to almost their original appearance.
- Decorative: adding to visual attractiveness, ornamental.
- Figuration: ornamentation derived by using designs and models of humans, animals and real objects.
- Kylix: Greek vessel with a broad, shallow body, two handles that is raised on a tall stem. It is used for mixing wine.
- Lekythos: Type of Greek pottery with a narrow body and one handle attached to the neck of the vessel; used for storing oil.
- Pattern: A repeated decorative design.
- Symmetrical: Something that is the same on both sides of a center point or axis.
- Skyphos: a kind of cup characterized by a deep bowl, two handles projecting horizontally near the rim, and resting on a flat base or foot. Used for drinking wine.
- Vessel: a hollow container used for holding liquids

Before Your Visit:

1. Create a mind map or word web with your students to understand their background knowledge.
 - a. What do you know about Ancient Greece?
 - b. What do you know about Greek mythology?
 - c. Can you find Greece on the map?

After Your Visit:

1. Design the other side of your vessel.
2. Create a myth to go along with the art.

Ancient Greek Pottery and Archeology

Name: _____

Date: _____



Pre Visit Thoughts	Post Visit Thoughts
What is this?	What is this?
Who made this?	Who made this?
Why?	Why?
What does it mean to you?	What does it mean to you?

