



Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art

Start with Art

Ancient Greece

Arts Integration Educator's Guide for Teachers and Parents

IT'S GREEK TO ME!

About Ancient Greece:

The ancient Greek civilization had a long initiation—the Minoans and later the Mycenaeans had prosperous civilizations in the same location from the 20th century through the 12th century B.C.E. However, most historians point to the formation of city-states (poleis) in the 8th century and the beginning of the ancient Greek civilization. Many of Greece's most notable monuments, particularly those on the Acropolis (Athens), were erected in the 5th century B.C.E. At the heart of Grecian civilization were strong city-states such as Athens and Sparta, which were located in present day Greece. However, Grecian culture reached far and wide through colonies established in Europe, Africa, and Asia, in areas surrounding the Mediterranean and Black Seas that were close to trade routes. The ancient Greeks were accomplished artists, scientists, politicians, and philosophers. Many of the fundamental art forms and ideas that exist in the world today were founded on knowledge gleaned from the ancient Greeks.

About the Museum's Greek Lekythos:

The *Vase with Black Figures*, the *Jug*, and the *Vase with Goose* are likely lekythoi. Shaped on a potter's wheel, these flasks were used by the ancient Greeks for storing and pouring oil. The *Jug* and *Vase with Black Figures* are both black-figure vases. Black-figure painting originated around 700 B.C.E. in Corinth. It was the prevalent type of ceramic decoration until approximately 530 B.C.E., when Athenian artists discovered red-figure painting, as seen on the *Vase with Goose*.

To create the black silhouettes, motifs, and areas in black-figure painting, artists painted the designs onto the ceramics with slip made of clay thinned with water. When creating the details, artists used a sharp tool to scratch through the slip-painted surface, revealing the clay beneath. For red-figure painting, the process used to create black-figure painting was reversed. The ground and the details were painted with the slip. The shapes of the figural and decorative motifs were left unpainted so they would remain the color of the clay.

The ceramics were then fired (heated to a high temperature in a kiln), causing the clay to harden. During the three-step firing process, the artist controlled the amount of air that came in contact with the clay. Though the slip and the vase are made of the same iron-rich clay, oxidization caused the clay to turn reddish-orange and the slip to turn black. Because it was thicker, the clay retained more oxygen during the firing process, allowing the iron in the clay to rust, thus creating its reddish-orange

color. The slip turned black because it was thinner—the heat of the kiln removed the oxygen from the slip, causing it to turn black.

POINT-OF-ENTRY:

Create a Black-Figure Lekythos:

OK PASS (listed for sixth grade but applicable to additional grade levels): VA 2.1, 3.1-5, 4.1-3

Supplies: Red-Orange Air-Dry Clay or Oven-Bake Polymer Clay (1 lb. per Student)
Black Acrylic Paint, Paint Brushes, Palettes or Foam Plates, Water
Black Permanent Markers (Regular and Fine Tip)
Clay-Forming Tools or Plastic Utensils & Toothpicks/Skewers

1. Observe and study the classical pottery at the Museum.
2. Visit <http://www.mgmoa.org/lesson-plans> to see step-by-step photos of this project.
3. Knead the clay on a clean, dry surface to soften. Caution! Some red clay stains clothing and surfaces. Aprons and paper-covered surfaces are recommended.
4. When clay is soft, divide in half. Set one half aside.
5. Divide one-half into two parts (roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ pound). Roll each part into a ball.
6. Create a pinch pot from each ball by inserting your thumb into the center of the ball and pinching the sides while rotating the ball. We recommend that the walls and bottom of the pot are $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick. The bottoms of the pots should remain rounded—do not flatten. Both pots should be about the same size.
7. With a tool, score the top of each pot (the lip) and moisten with water. Press the two pots together to form a hollow container or ball. Score the joint, moisten with water, and smooth so the joint disappears. This is the body of your pot—it should feel firm and air-tight. Check for and repair any weak areas.
8. You will use the remaining clay to form a base, a spout, and handle(s). The base and handle should be formed by rolling out coils (snakes). The spout should be formed in the same manner as a pinch pot, except that you poke your thumb all the way through the ball.
9. Score and moisten each element and attach to the body, smoothing away all joints.
10. Use a pointed tool to poke through the spout into the body. Smooth the walls and joint to create a seamless transition.
11. Air dry your pot or bake according to the clay manufacturer's directions.
12. Use paint and markers on your lekythos to create Greek designs inspired by objects in the MGMOA collection and Greek mythology.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:

Language Arts:

OK PASS (listed for sixth grade but applicable to additional grade levels): **R/L 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1b, 4.4a-c, 5.1-2; W/G/U&M 1.1-5, 6.7; OL/L&S 1.1, 1.4, 2.1-3**

Have students select a classical myth to study. They should decorate the lekythos with images inspired by the myth. Then, student should write summaries of the myths to display with the lekythosi. Students should also create outlines of the myths to use as they share the myths via oral presentations.

In *research papers, have students compare and contrast an Egyptian myth to a classical myth. How are they alike? How are they different? Do they have a similar purpose? How are the characters alike or different? What do they think explains the similarities or differences?

**Students should examine the history and culture of ancient Greece and Rome and ancient Egypt as preparation for this activity—this could be treated as a cross-curricular activity with Social Studies (please see below).*

Social Studies:

OK PASS (listed for sixth grade but applicable to additional grade levels): **WS 1.1-3, 3.1-3**

After creating their lekythosi, students should examine a map of ancient Greece and Rome, deciding on a location where the artifact was “discovered.” Students should then “crate” their artifacts, packing them carefully in a box and “shipping” them to “historians” for study (students exchange artifacts). Visit <http://www.mgmoa.org/lesson-plans> to download worksheets to accompany this activity. The “historian” examines the artifact and uses library resources to discover more about the historical and cultural context of the artifact. The “historians” should write an *essay describing the artifact (including how it was likely created and from what media) and discussing the possible purpose of the artifact. The essay should also examine cultural information such as the social structure, customs and daily life, language, arts, sports and entertainment, and religion of the ancient Greek/Roman cultures.

After the lekythos is returned to the artist, the student should examine the information provided to him/her by the “historian” and summarize this information to write a didactic label to accompany the artifact when it is displayed.

**This activity could be treated as a cross-curricular activity with Language Arts (please see above).*

Science & Math:

OK PASS (listed for sixth grade but applicable to additional grade levels): **SP&I 4.1-5; MCS 5.1-3**

After creating the lekythosi, students should discuss ways that a historian would provide a date for an artifact discovered in an archeological dig. Some correct answers include: comparing the artifact to other artifacts with known dates created by the same culture; looking in visual and written records for

references to this type of artifact; and examining other objects found in the soil with the artifact. Explain to students that many ancient artifacts can not be dated with the scientific process of carbon dating—but organic matter discovered with the artifact can be carbon dated.

Using a container (or area) of soil that has been “seeded” by the teacher, students should dig for organic matter to “carbon date” in an effort to determine an approximate age for their artifacts. Visit <http://www.mgmoa.org/lesson-plans> for activity details and worksheets.

OK PASS (listed for sixth grade but applicable to additional grade levels): **MCS 3.3**

Students should design geometric borders for their lekythosi. Using a pencil on a piece of paper, students should experiment using basic transformation on objects and figures by reflecting, rotating, and skewing shapes and repeating the design to create a pattern. Then, the pattern can be copied onto the lekythosi.

WEB RESOURCES:

Visit www.mgmoa.org/collections/old-world-antiquity/ for more information about the ancient artifacts from in the MGMOA collection.

To learn more about Greek and Roman mythology, visit www.mythweb.com.

There are many types of Greek pottery in addition to the lekythos. To see a variety of other pottery shapes, visit www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/pottery/shapes/default.htm.

Get more information about ancient Greek culture at www.ancientgreece.com.

NOTES: