Ancient Greece: Everyday life

White-ground jug
Woman spinning wool
Athens, Greece 490 BC

Visit resource for teachers
Key Stage 2
Ancient Greece: Everyday life

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Ancient Greece: Everyday life

Before your visit

Background information

Warfare
The different city states of ancient Greece were almost constantly at war with each other. Most local wars were to do with boundaries of territory or with trading issues. In most city states, the bulk of the fighting was done by heavy armoured infantrymen called hoplites, whose equipment was based around a helmet, shield and spear. Hoplites fought in ranks, which required considerable training and cooperation among soldiers. Cities did not have uniforms as such, though the Spartans had more standardised equipment and shield symbols. Much warfare consisted of raids on other states' crops and agricultural land, some of which developed into full scale battles. Death in war on behalf of one’s city was seen as the most glorious death for an ancient Greek man.

Farming
Greek cities relied on the farmland around them for the bulk of their food supplies, though cities with good trade links could add to their local produce by importing food. Grains (barley and wheat) were the most important crops, with beans, vegetables, olives and grapes (for wine). The Greeks ate relatively little meat except at large festivals where sacrificed animals provided the meat for feasts for the people.

Woodworking
The ancient Greeks practised many different crafts including pottery, metalworking and woodworking, shoemaking, weaving, tanning. Crafts could be carried out by free citizens, who would probably have slaves to help, but crafts were generally regarded as inferior work and so were very frequently practised by resident foreigners, especially in mercantile cities such as Athens. Workers in particular crafts often congregated in areas of the city - in Athens, for example, the potters were in the Kerameikos district at the edge of the city. Every object that survives from ancient Greece is a craft object and the processes and people involved in making it can be explored.
Children

Of course the emotional bonds between parents and children were as strong in ancient Greece as they are in the modern world. However, children were seen and treated differently. Childhood was not seen as a phase with its own value, but as a stage in the process of becoming an adult and therefore able to take on the roles prescribed for them by society. These were different for boys and girls - boys were seen as being the means of continuing the family, while girls could build connections between families through arranged marriage. Childhood was short for girls - they could be married as young as 13. Boys had to go through certain stages in becoming a full citizen. Child mortality in ancient Greece was very high.

Material evidence

Objects survive from the past for a range of reasons to do with the properties of the material they are made from, the nature of the environment in which they were made or put and the practices of the people who made or used them. In general, organic material survives less well than inorganic, but in cultures where practices are carried out such as burying grave goods for use in the afterlife many organic objects can survive. Materials also allow us to consider the trades and crafts that occurred within a society and where the society got its raw materials from.

Women

In ancient Greece women had the responsibility for looking after the home and for producing children. They had important roles in some aspects of religion. Practices varied in different city states - in Sparta, where the production of pure-blood Spartan children was vitally important, women were expected to engage in physical exercise in order to become fit for childbirth. It is important to try where possible to distinguish between what is said about women (usually by male writers or male artists) and what was the reality. It was certainly believed that keeping women at home, away from public life as much as possible was the ideal, but we can reasonably expect that in poor households women probably had to take a wider role in helping the family to survive. There were also differences between free native women, immigrant women and slaves.
Greek houses

Greek domestic buildings were far less impressive than public buildings. They were usually built of mudbrick, if possible on a stone foundation, with wooden frameworks and terracotta roof tiles. The house was arranged around an inner courtyard with few windows on the outside both for security and to limit heat from the sun and from hot air. Rooms were often given specific purposes as in modern houses and some rooms may have been reserved for use by the different sexes.
Resources

British Museum websites

Teaching history with 100 objects
Free online resources to support teachers working in the new history curriculum through object-based learning. Access information, images, and video as well as teaching ideas for lessons at Key Stages 1-3.
www.teachinghistory100.org

Books

For adults

For children
Gallery information

Room 69 explores the daily life of both the ancient Greeks and Romans. The cases are displayed in themes covering the major aspects of everyday life. As some of the cases display both Greek and Roman objects encourage your parents, carers and students to read the labels in order to distinguish the Greek objects. The cases are numbered and their theme title is clearly displayed. Cases in the centre of the room concentrate on everyday life. The cases along one wall display crafts and on the other mythology.

What is it like to visit this gallery?

Room 69 is a very popular gallery with schools and can become very crowded. There is a small pool and fountain in one corner of the room. A balcony/upper level runs across the east wall accessed by stairs next to the fountain. This level contains terracotta, lamps and glass vessels. The room has exits from either end. The north exit leads into a suite of galleries exploring the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. The south-eastern exit leads into the Money Gallery. In the west wall there is a small display area off the gallery used for temporary displays which contains changing exhibitions from the Coins and Medals Department.

Case Numbers

Please note that case numbers are usually small, white and high up on the glass.
Preliminary activities

General introductory activities

- Locate the area covered by the ancient Greek world in an atlas and look at the different modern countries in which the ancient Greeks used to live.

Activities to support gallery activities

- Look at examples of objects from ancient Greece. Discuss what these can reveal about life in the past.

- Discuss what activities the ancient Greeks would have undertaken each day.

- Talk about a typical day in the life of an ancient Greek person. Discuss housing, food, jobs, religion and climate.

- Investigate the typical layout and design of a Greek home. Discuss how the home was used and whether men and women used the space in similar ways.
During your visit
Gallery activities: introduction for teachers

The gallery activities are a set of activity sheets which can be used by students working in Room 69. The sheets can be used as stand-alone activities or you may wish to develop work around particular sheets as suggested in the before and after sections of this resource.

- Where case numbers are indicated on a sheet, these are usually to be found marked in white numbers high up on the glass of that particular case.

- You are welcome to select the activities which are most appropriate for the focus of your visit and adapt sheets to meet the needs of your students.

- Each activity is designed to support the students in looking at, and thinking about, objects on display in the gallery.

- Individual activity sheets may be undertaken by single students, in pairs or as a small group.

- Where space is provided for recording this may be undertaken by the student or an adult helper as is most appropriate for the students involved.

- Familiarise the students and accompanying adults with the chosen activity sheets at school before the day of the visit. Make sure students and adults know what they are to do and are familiar with the vocabulary used on the sheets or which they may encounter in the gallery.
Gallery activities: briefings for adult helpers

Gallery activity: Farming

- Ancient Greek farmers grew a variety of crops although much of their choice depended on the type and condition of the soil around them. Crops grown included olives, grapes and grain.
- This activity promotes students’ understanding of farming in ancient Greece through study of farming tools and art.

Gallery activity: War

- Ancient Greek weapons and armour were fairly consistent across city states. Evidence of this is derived not only from finds of actual objects, but also from ancient Greek images.
- This activity encourages the students to study objects and draw inferences from what does and does not remain.

Gallery activity: Shipbuilding and woodworking

- Shipbuilding was important in ancient Greece because many city-states had access to the sea and this was used for communication and trade.
- This activity uses visual observation and recognition skills.

Gallery activity: Children

- Many toys and equipment for children that are used in the modern world have counterparts from ancient cultures. Styles and materials used change but the aim or use of the object remains similar.
- This activity uses students’ knowledge of childhood to compare and contrast with objects used in ancient Greece.
Gallery activities: briefings for adult helpers

Gallery activity: Material evidence
- This gallery comprises objects from both Greece and Rome. Encourage the students to use objects from Greece.
- This activity asks children to categorise objects and their materials.

Gallery activity: Women
- Women had key roles within ancient Greek society. They were responsible for the day to day running and management of the household and all within it.
- This activity uses visual observation.

Gallery activity: Greeks at home
- The Greek house was divided into rooms and areas with specific functions, much as modern houses are today.
- This activity encourages the students to discuss the functionality of objects.
Farming

- In case 15 find the drinking cup which shows two tiny men ploughing and sowing seed. What animals are pulling the plough? Circle the right answer.

  horses  oxen  donkeys

- In this case is a large pot which shows men gathering olives. Look at the pot and the drawing below. Spot the differences. There are 11 all together. Circle each one on the drawing when you find it.

- Now look in the case to find other types of food.
War

- Find Case 15. Study the drawing of a warrior. Find objects in the case which the warrior in the drawing is wearing or holding. Label them on the drawing. You may only be able to find parts of some of them!

- Some of the objects in the case have bits missing. Which parts of which objects have disappeared?

- Why do you think these parts have not survived?

- Now think about what design may have decorated the warrior’s shield. Look at the pots showing warriors in wall cases 12, 13 and 14 for ideas.
Shipbuilding and woodworking

• Find Case 26

• Find the large clay slab shown here. It shows the building of a ship.

• Look at the slab in the case and find each of the following. Tick the box next to each one when you have found it.

Athena (she wears a helmet) □
Athena’s shield □
a man using a hammer and chisel □
the sail of the ship □
a rope around the ship to strengthen the hull □
Athena’s owl keeping an eye on the work □

• Now look in the case for other items used to work wood.
Children

- In case 8, find the ancient Greek versions of the modern objects below. When you find each one think what material it is made from. Write your answers in the space provided next to each picture.

• Find the little clay pig. Use the label on the case or ask a grown up to find out what it is and finish this sentence: The pig is a .................................
Material evidence

Objects are very valuable in helping us to find out about ancient Greece. Which objects survive over time depends on what material they are made of.

- Choose three cases in the room and fill in the sheet below with the number of objects made from each material.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of material</th>
<th>Tally of objects made from this material</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>earth material: stone, pottery, terracotta, clay, bronze, iron, gold, silver</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>animal material: wool cloth, ivory, leather, skin, bone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plant material: linen cloth, wood, flowers, reeds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Circle the type of material that has survived best.

  earth  animal  plant

- Circle the type of material that has survived worst.

  earth  animal  plant

- What reasons do you think there are for this? Discuss your answers with your group.
Women

Women in ancient Greece had jobs and activities to complete. The objects which survive from ancient Greece help us understand what tasks women were responsible for.

- Below is a list of tasks that women did. Look in cases 5 and 6 and see if you can find objects that show these tasks or were used during them. Put your findings as notes or sketches in the boxes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>grinding wheat to make bread</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collecting water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looking after the children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weaving cloth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cooking food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making clothes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- What else might women have been responsible for?
**Greeks at home**

- Scan the gallery for objects that would have been used in the home. Select between 6 and 10 objects of different types. Discuss with your group where in the house each object would be used. (Use the labels to check that the objects you have chosen are all Greek!)

- Record each object in the grid below placing each one into the correct room. Record your findings on the objects as notes or sketches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Objects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>store-room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entrance hall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men’s dining room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kitchen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women’s work room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After your visit
Follow-up activities: introduction

These activities aim to encourage pupils to reflect on the work undertaken in the Ancient Greek galleries during their Museum visit.

- Some of the activities draw directly on the information gathered at the Museum while others encourage the pupils to draw on personal experience or undertake additional research in the classroom.

- Each activity includes a suggestion for classroom work and also an outcome which may be in the form of a written piece, drama presentation or artwork.

Follow-up activity: Farming

Curriculum links: history, literacy, geography
Skills: investigation, analysis, discussion

- Discuss the objects the students remember seeing in the Farming case.

- Research food that the ancient Greeks farmed. Look at the climate and terrain and how this affected what could be grown.

- Extend research into trade. What foodstuffs or items could the ancient Greeks not grow or make? Who did they trade with? Explore ancient Greek trade routes and create maps showing these and what items were traded between areas.

Follow-up activity: War

Curriculum links: history, literacy, citizenship
Skills: discussion, analysis, observation, investigation
• Ask the students to recall the objects they saw in the War case during their visit.

• Explore the equipment that Greek soldiers wore and used. Discuss the materials that they were made from and why some of this no longer remains.

• Distribute the worksheets they used during the visit. Project images of ancient Greek equipment onto a whiteboard or distribute printed images to the class. Ask students to compare the worksheet warrior’s equipment with the equipment in other images. Ask them to write a list of equipment that differs in images and to research this equipment and its uses.

• The topic could be expanded by looking at warriors and armour through to the modern day.

Follow-up activity: Shipbuilding and woodworking

Curriculum links: history, geography
Skills: discussion, investigation

• Discuss the objects the students saw during their visit that related to shipbuilding and woodworking.

• Using a map of Greece ask the students to list reasons why ships were important to the ancient Greeks. Discuss trade routes and what they may have been trading. Explore the objects, materials and foodstuffs that would have been stored aboard the ships.
Follow-up activity: Children

Curriculum links: history, geography, art & design
Skills: analysis, observation, practical design

- Ask the children to recall the objects they saw in the Children case. What toys did they recognise?

- Discuss the similarities and differences between the toys that ancient Greek children used and the types of toys used today. Distribute the worksheets used during the visit and ask students what materials those toys are made out of today. Discuss how technological advances have changed some aspects of toys.

- An extended project could ask the children to design and make their own toy using ideas and techniques from the ancient and modern world.

Follow-up activity: Material evidence

Curriculum links: history, literacy, science
Skills: investigation, analysis, observation

- Review the list of materials the students were asked to find during the visit. Re-examine the three categories of materials (earth, plant and animal). What materials survived and why?

- Explain that depictions from ancient Greece can tell us more about everyday life because they show things that have not survived. Show the children some pictures of vases, paintings, sculptures and ask them to point out what may no longer survive, (for example clothes and food).

- Ask the students to explore their classroom and find an object made out of each of the categories of materials. Ask the students to write a report on each object, what it is made out of, what it looks like now and how well it may survive into the future.
Follow-up activity: Women

Curriculum links: history, geography, citizenship, ICT
Skills: analysis, investigation

- Discuss the responsibilities that women had in ancient Greece. Review the findings recorded during the visit. Write a group list of the objects or notes the students recorded.

- Discuss the objects that revealed the tasks women performed. Ask the students to think of objects that are used today and how they reveal activities.

- Explore objects that are used for the same purpose in different areas of the world. Use water and water collection as an example. Compare and contrast the availability of water around the world. Visit the Water Aid website to illustrate differing access to water.

Follow-up activity: Greeks at home

Curriculum links: history, ICT, art & design
Skills: investigation, group work, art and design

- Provide the students with a plan of a typical ancient Greek home. Ask them to discuss the objects they recorded during the visit and where they would be located on the plan.

- Work in groups to create a display or a model of an ancient Greek house. Use photos, notes close observational drawings and house plans to furnish the Greek house.