

FROM THE RENOWNED BENAKI MUSEUM, ATHENS

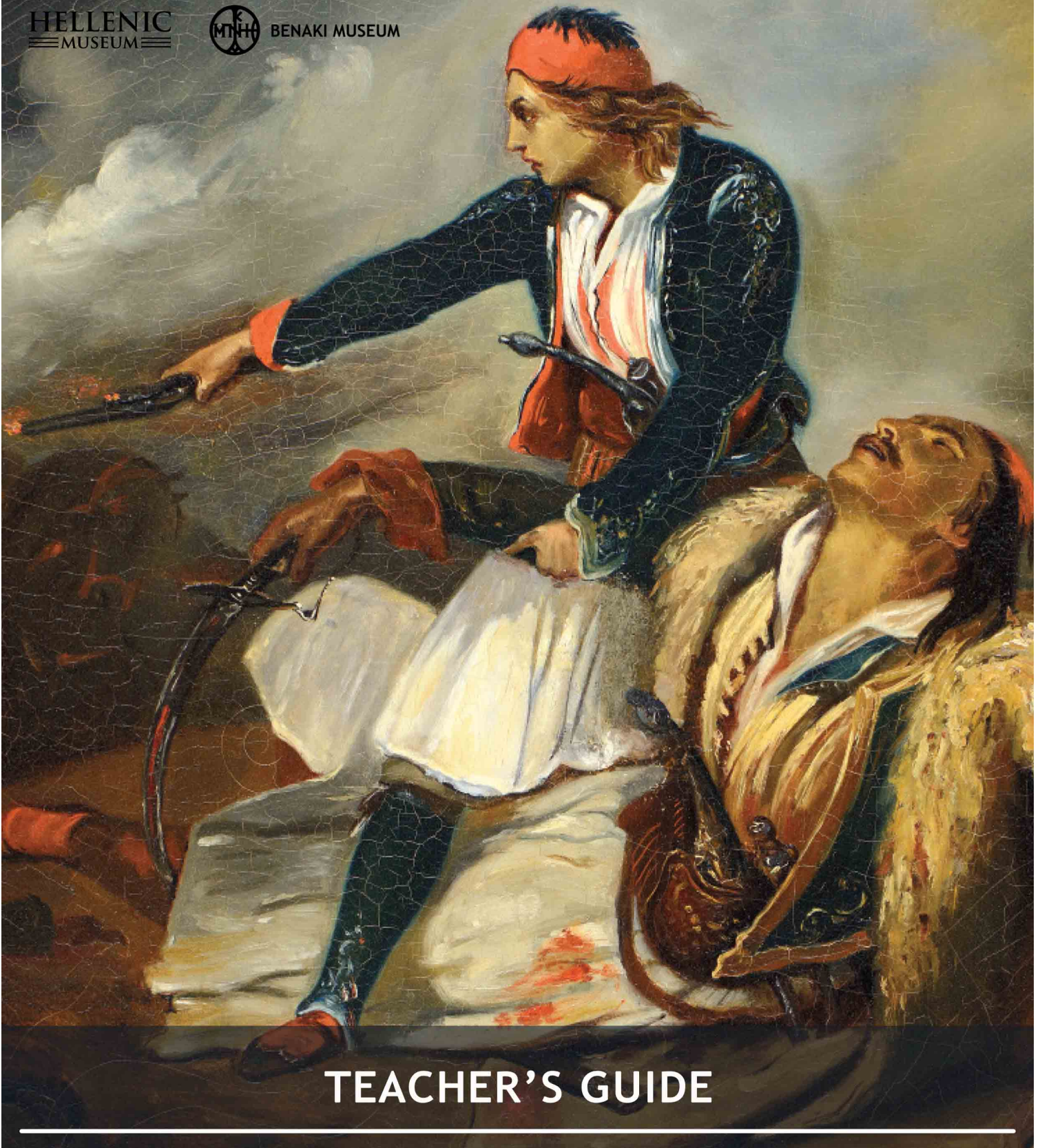
GODS MYTHS & MORTALS

GREEK TREASURES ACROSS THE MILLENNIA

HELLENIC
MUSEUM



BENAKI MUSEUM



TEACHER'S GUIDE

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Introduction to the teacher's guide

There are many ways in which students can engage with the *Gods, Myths & Mortals* exhibition at the Hellenic Museum. With interesting exercises geared towards the requirements of the curricula for different age groups, this guide provides teachers with different ways in which students' time at the museum could be most usefully spent. A short introduction to each period represented in the collection provides sufficient background information, while suggested questions guarantee an engaging experience for everyone. Additionally, there are exercises which ensure that discussions about the collection can continue, even when back in the classroom.

Excursion planning

- Groups of up to 20 students can be catered for but may be divided into smaller groups
- School groups will be briefed on arrival at the museum
- There will be space available for students to store their bags
- There is a courtyard area that can be used for lunch

Engaging with the curriculum

The *Gods, Myths & Mortals* exhibition can be applied to several areas of the curriculum, in both primary and secondary schools. The exhibition encourages students to investigate the role of the items as a tool for personal and cultural communication. Accompanied by questions and exercises, the guide encourages the articulation of students' understanding of meanings and messages contained within historical works.

The material can be used to show primary students objects of art and creativity spanning 8,000 years of Western civilization. It can also be drawn on for its historical content to help them understand the religion and everyday life of the past.

Secondary students can utilise the objects to contribute to their understanding of various periods in history, as well as the nature of cultural interaction and conflict. Students can engage with the objects to gain a deeper understanding of ancient history and the developments of ancient Greece.

The *Gods, Myths & Mortals* exhibition at the Hellenic Museum is a collection of objects from various periods in Greek history. It is a partnership between the Hellenic Museum and the Benaki Museum in Athens.

This collection is significant in its preservation of the past, as well as its contribution to our understanding of how we live and the world around us today. Exploring the role of gods, the ideas within myths, and the achievements; the exhibition has an emphasis on the progression of Hellenic culture and its resounding impacts today.

The *Gods, Myths & Mortals* exhibition has been divided into four chronological periods spanning nearly 8,000 years: the Pre-historic, Greek and Roman Periods; the Byzantine Period; the Post-Byzantine Period; and the Neo-Hellenic Period. Each era was one of change, conflict and achievement.

The Pre-Historic, Ancient Greek and Roman Period

After a transition from nomadic cultures to a sedentary lifestyle in the Neolithic Period, populations were able to exploit agriculture, domesticate animals and eventually construct cities. Surplus food, jewellery, metals and luxury goods were traded with other populations, beginning an increasingly complex trade network and cultural exchange. By the Bronze Age, writing developed as a means of record keeping and later as a form of communication. Eventually myths, legends and religious beliefs were recorded in various epics, histories and plays such as Homer's *The Iliad* or Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, influencing writers from Shakespeare to David Malouf. Beliefs and values were also represented in various art forms, with pottery being the most common form that remains today. Artistic developments in the Archaic and Classical Periods resulted in a variety of styles used on pottery, indicative of the time and place in which it was created. By this time, Greece was distinctly divided into rivaling city-states, competing for hegemony. The threat of the Persian Wars (499-449 BCE) unified the city-states, and naval victories left Athens in a position of power.

The 'Golden Age' of Athens followed, characterized by artistic, architectural and intellectual achievement as well as the introduction of an early form of democracy, peaking around the 5th century BCE. Rivalry between Athens and Sparta for power led to the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) and Athens' eventual decline and surrender.

The conquests of Alexander the Great spread Hellenic culture west as far as Egypt, and east as far as India. However, the following period of wars between his successors caused such decline that the Romans - increasing in power - were eventually able to take over the Hellenic world. The Romans maintained an interest in Greek culture and intellectual debate, preserving it until the Roman Empire collapsed in the 5th century, leaving Greece in the eastern Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantine Period

Continuing from the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire encompassed a fluctuating region from North Africa, around the Mediterranean, and to Turkey. It differed from the Roman Empire with two key characteristics: it championed Greek culture more heavily than the Latin adopting the Greek language; and made Christianity the official state religion. Greece at this time was a largely agricultural region and very prosperous, participating in the spread of Christianity and artistic revival from Constantinople. Manuscripts played an integral role in this, preserving the classical texts of the pasts and recording the gospels. The adoption and spread of Christianity led to the construction of new churches such as the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, ornamented with ritual objects displaying skill and wealth.

There is a lack of icons lasting from this period due to the debate around Iconoclasm - a state policy that destroyed many icons and persecuted those who worshipped them. This period was also characterised by the East-West schism between disputing branches of Christianity: the Catholic west and Orthodox East. Political factions within the Byzantine Empire and the threat of external powers made this a tumultuous time.

The Post-Byzantine Period

The capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453, and later of Athens, meant that Greece was then under Ottoman rule. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, the post-Byzantine period in Greece coincided largely with the Renaissance in Western Europe. Despite Islam being the state religion, most Greeks remained Orthodox Christian and the role of ritual objects in displaying prestige and skilled craftsmanship continued through the post-Byzantine period. The Bible was a prominent source of artistic inspiration, with iconography being a common form of expression in this time.

Ideas of the Renaissance, spread with the aid of the printing press, led to artists adopting new techniques and materials to depict biblical scenes.

Nature and landscapes were also commonly represented, reflecting the contemporary interest in science based on observation of nature. The coinciding Scientific Revolution influenced the Enlightenment and in turn political movements including the French and American Revolutions, separating Church and State.

The ideas of early modernism impacted not only the artistic domain but also political and social debates. In the lead up to the 19th century many Greek intellectuals had immigrated to other parts of Europe where nationalism was becoming a prevalent topic of discussion.

Neo-Hellenic Period

After several centuries of being Ottoman subjects, the Greek War of Independence - from 1821 to 1832 - re-established Greek identity, both politically and culturally. Whilst it was not the first revolt of Greeks against the Ottomans, it was the most coordinated and successful.

A Greek nationalist movement grew, influenced by ideas of the Enlightenment and nationalism spreading through Europe at the time, and inspired by writings of Greek emigrants. A sense of Greek nationhood and Hellenic identity had lasted through the Ottoman Empire, supported by the Greek Orthodox Church.

Intellectual documents from antiquity as well as images of Athens circulated, evoking nostalgia and support for the Hellenic world of the past, known as Philhellenism. Images of battle victories and scenes of revolution were also used, drawing support from many western Europeans and furthering the cause of nationalist Greek merchants and intellectuals. The support of Russia, France and England in the war against the Ottomans and Egyptians contributed to the resulting victory and Greek independence.



Gold Kylix 15th - early 14th c. BCE



Virgin of Tenderness 16th c.



Gunpowder Case Late 18th - early 19th c.

The more your students know in advance, the better their museum experience will be. To build excitement for your trip, familiarise your students with the museum through asking them some simple questions.

- Ask your students to define a museum. Look up the definition in a dictionary and discuss the meaning.
- Why do people visit museums?
- Can you think of different types of museums?
- What is the main purpose of a museum?
- What kind of things do you expect to see in the museum?

Another way to make the visit as interesting for students as possible is to give them a few guiding questions, which they can keep in mind when investigating different objects. This allows them to not only engage with items before finding out more about them, but also broadly compare different styles and periods.

- What is the use of this object?
- When was it made?
- How was it made?
- Can you think of an object in today's time that is similar?

Before visiting it might also be useful for students who are not yet familiar with the Ancient Greek world to locate the area it covered in an atlas. By doing this, they will see firsthand all the modern countries in which Greeks have lived.



*Part of a painted wooden panel, influenced by the Italian Renaissance,
Late 17th c.*

Who was the most powerful god? **Zeus**

Which two city-states were the most powerful? **Athens & Sparta**

Who is Herakles/Hercules? **A Greek hero and the strongest of the mortals**

What is the capital of Greece? **Athens**

What does democracy mean?

A. rule of the few

B. rule of the leaders

C. rule of the people

D. rule of the powerful

Could everyone vote in the Ancient Greek democracy? **No, only free men**

Greek myths were stories that explained...

A. what things the Greek people most valued.

B. why natural or historical events happened.

C. why humans should worship the gods.

D. why humans or animals behaved like they did.

E. all of the above

Who was the Greek god or goddess of war?

A. Artemis

B. Ares

C. Zeus

D. Hermes

The Parthenon is a famous Greek...

A. painting.

B. vase.

C. poem.

D. building.

The many achievements of ancient Greece were important because...

A. they helped Greece become a military power.

B. they showed the curiosity of the Greek mind.

C. they strongly shaped Western civilization.

D. they encouraged people to use reason.

Art was very important in ancient Greece. What did the Greeks usually paint on?

- A. Clothing
- B. Vases**
- C. Floors
- D. Walls

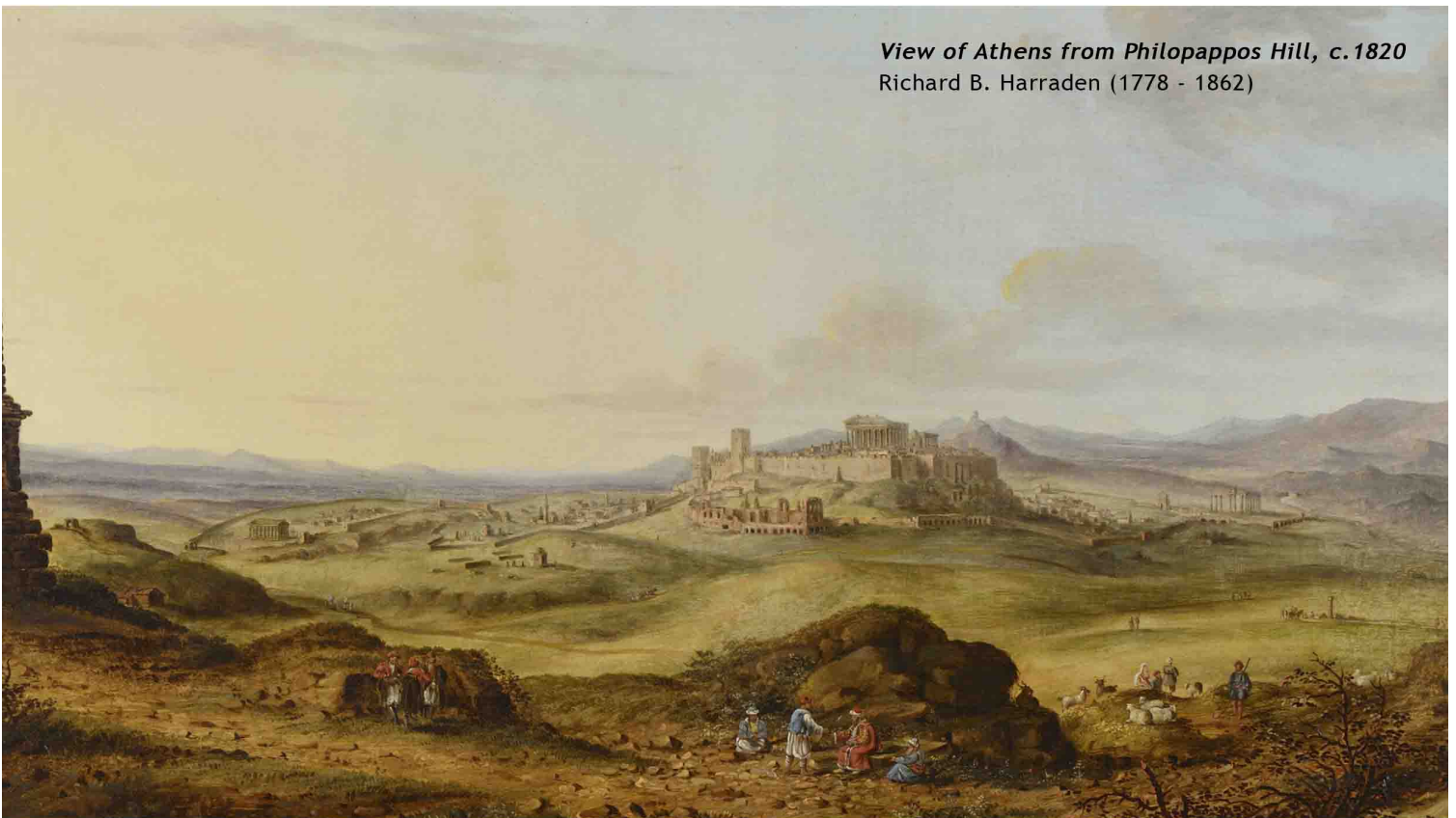
The ancient Greeks performed plays about their gods and heroes. What were these plays called? **Tragedies**

Slaves played a major role in Ancient Greek civilisation. What part of the population was considered to be a slave?

- A. 1/2
- B. 1/3**
- C. 1/4
- D. 1/8

At what age were children considered to be adults in Ancient Greece? **13**

The Greeks invented a way of thinking deeply about the world and the meaning of life. What did they call it? **Philosophy**



View of Athens from Philopappos Hill, c.1820
Richard B. Harraden (1778 - 1862)

The Benaki program encourages students to discuss traditional and contemporary art works using appropriate arts language to describe the content, structure and expressive qualities of works from a range of disciplines and forms. Guided by interesting questions and activities they are pushed to interpret and compare key features of art works made in a range of times, places and cultures.

- Try to identify some principal gods and goddesses and heroes on the pots (resist looking at the label):

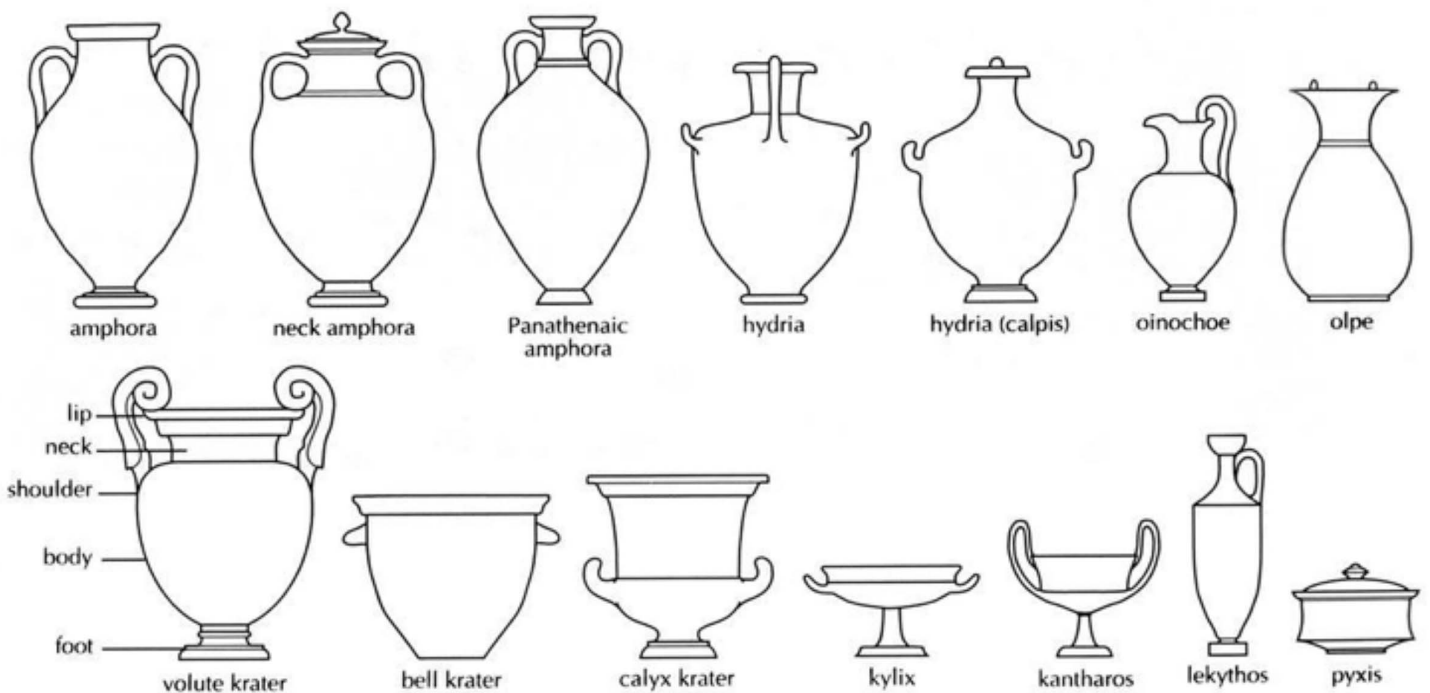
Dionysos - carries a high handled cup; often surrounded by vines; attended by satyrs

Athena - a female, but wears a helmet; carries a spear; wears the snake-fringed breastplate or shield around her shoulders

Herakles - carries a club; wears a lionskin

- There were a fairly limited number of vase shapes (around 20) from which a Greek potter would choose. The form of the Greek vase was directly related to its function. For example, the krater was well-suited for mixing water, wine, and other liquids. In contrast, the psykter ('cooler') was employed for cooling wine, while the tiny alabastron, which could be tied to the wrist, was used for carrying perfumes and oil.

Can you identify at least four different shaped vases in the collection?



- This necklace has a two headed eagle on it, an important symbol of the Byzantine Empire. Can you find other objects which have the same decoration?



- Find the statue of the goddess Athena. What is she holding?
- What are the similarities and differences between the costumes and what you are wearing today?

- Mermaids were one of the most traditional themes for needlework in this period. Can you see any pieces on which they are visible?



- Traditionally snakes were seen as a symbol for keeping away evil. Can you find any items with snakes on them?



Gold Bracelet
3rd c. CE, Egypt

In line with the expected standards for level 7 to 10 students, the education program for the Benaki exhibition explores the students' ability to develop, discuss, express and support opinions on art elements, principles, skills, techniques, processes and materials. It asks them to compare, analyse, evaluate and interpret the content, meaning and qualities of selected artworks in our collection. Through discussions about their different social, cultural and historical contexts students are encouraged to articulate their understanding of the collection using appropriate language.

- Many of the items in the collection have symbols on them which are related to specific myths or superstitions. Investigate the decorations on at least three items and assess whether they carry any specific messages or meanings.
- How do the selection, combination and manipulation of art elements, principles, skills, techniques, media, materials and technologies construct these meanings?
- Can you identify an evolution in the use of technology?

Compare, for instance, the manuscripts to books and eBooks today.

What technologies have developed to explain the changes?

- Assess the influence of different social and cultural contexts on at least two items.

Is there any sign of religion?

Would the people who used it have been from a rich background?

- Describe how representation of the human form changed in antiquity.



Red-Figure Amphora
5th c. BCE



Clay Figurine
Late Minoan Period



Terracotta Figurine of Athena
5th c. BCE

- Look for William Cole's watercolour *The Parthenon*.

What did the building mean to the ancient Athenians?

What issues have surrounded it in recent centuries?

Why would an artist in the Neo-Hellenic period have chosen to paint this particular scene?

- The head that once belonged to a statue of Herakles had an odd smile on his face. This was typical for statues of the 6th century BC, but can you think of any reasons why?



The Parthenon, 1833, William Cole



Head of a Cypriot statue of Herakles 6th c. BCE

SECONDARY ART STUDENTS AT THE MUSEUM - YEAR 11 & 12

The education program recognises that students in years 11 and 12 are expected to identify art as a tool for cultural and personal communication. As such, questions focus on the interplay between context and meaning, as well as encouraging students to further their analytical skills through discussion. Rough frameworks allow students to contrast and compare elements of selected exhibition piece.

- Compare and contrast the use of art to convey messages in different periods. In what ways could objects be used to express an opinion or belief?
- The Greek War of Independence coincided with the rise of the Romantic Movement. As a result classical elements, for instance ancient ruins, often feature in representations of the struggle.

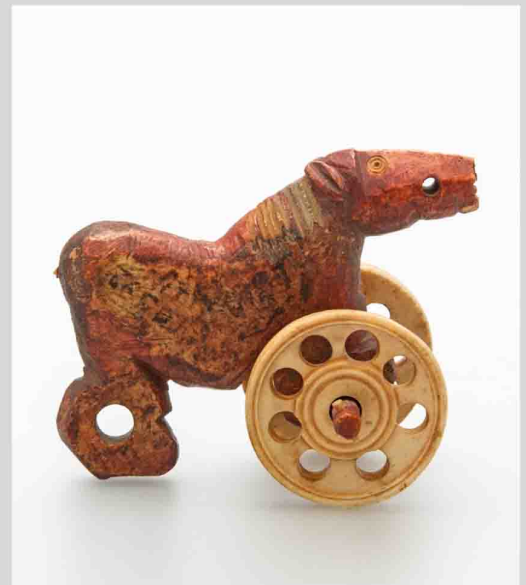
Discuss the influence of the Romantic Movement on the pieces relating to the Greek War of Independence.

Can you identify specific stylistic elements?

- When designing an item people often used their decorations to express their beliefs. Discuss the influence of religion on at least three items in the exhibition
- Assess whether there are items made with techniques we still use today.
- Discuss how material and design can reveal the social standing of those who used an object. Think, for instance, about the detail of the decorations or the strength of the material.



The Oath Being Taken by Lord Byron at Missolonghi, 1850
Ludovico Lipparini (1800 - 1856)



Toy: Bone and paint
Egypt, 5th - 7th c.

The education program for primary history students focuses on developing skills of historical enquiry: developing research questions and questioning resources. Emphasis is placed on the use of historical language and concepts, and presenting historical understanding in a range of forms.

- Can you think of a way in which the development of technology has made our life easier compared to those of people living in the pre-historic era?
- Pick an item. How are our daily rituals different from those of the people who used these items?
- Identify and find examples of the different types of historical sources: written, graphic and physical.
- Identify one object from each represented period; Pre- Historic, Ancient Greece, Roman, Byzantine, Post- Byzantine, and Neo-Hellenic.
- What can objects tell us about the society from which they came? Were the people religious? Did they have superstitious beliefs?



Stone Axe
Early Bronze Age (4500 - 2000 BCE)



Pilgram Flask of St. Menas
Clay, 6th - 7th c.

The guide for history students in years 7 to 10 aims to consolidate already existing historical knowledge with physical resources. It further invites students to focus on improving historical enquiry skills, such as framing questions and evaluating a range of sources. For year 7, investigating the ancient past is a compulsory study which focuses on the nature of historical inquiry. Experiencing the Benaki collection at the Hellenic Museum fits well within this framework. Students can explore some of the important features and events of the ancient period, and how these have shaped the modern world.

- Define the difference between secular and religious art. Find two examples of each in the exhibition.
- The ancient civilizations represented in the exhibition all had certain characteristics in common. For instance, religion, written language, and social structure. Can you link any of these to an object in the collection?
- Jewellery has been worn by people throughout the ages. Do you think the items in our collection had the same purpose for the people who wore them as they would have for us now?
- Identify and explain the processes used for conserving the remains of the ancient past visible in our collection.



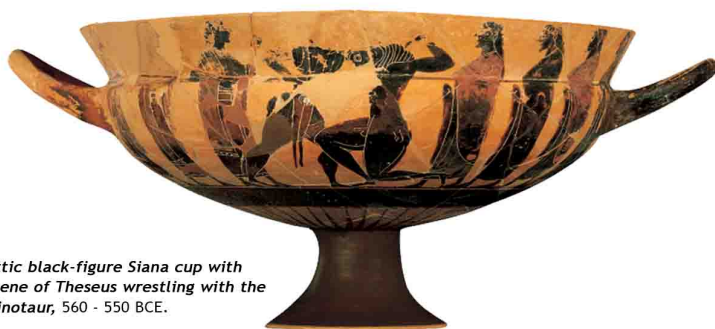
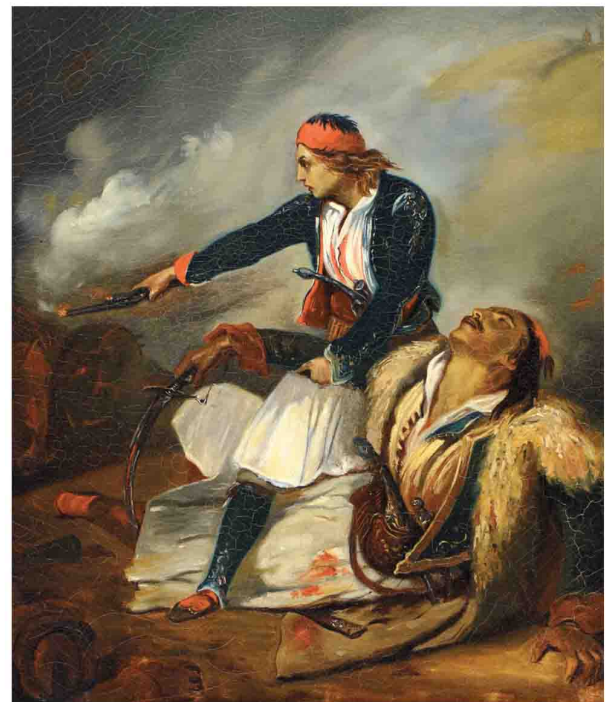
Conservators, Eleftheria & Naoum - Benaki Museum



Neck Ornament
Thrace or Macedonia 18th c.

At this stage the education program for the Benaki collection encourages a move towards more active interaction with pieces from the collection. As visual evidence often pre-dates written material it is important in the study of history for students to develop the skills necessary to analyse visual records. Through challenging pre-existing knowledge our questions seek to extend students' cultural, economic, social and political awareness while developing analytical skills and using imagination.

- Looking at the Young Greek Boy Defending his Wounded Father **[right]**, can you identify the details introduced by the artist? How have these created a Romantic atmosphere? What does the painting tell us about the Greek struggle?
- Looking at the black-figure cup **[below]** (6th century BCE), can you identify the scene here? What details from the myth has the artist reproduced?



Attic black-figure Siana cup with scene of Theseus wrestling with the Minotaur, 560 - 550 BCE.

- White Lekythos vases like these **[right]** were made exclusively in Athens and destined only for funerals. When somebody died in the family, the women prepared the person's body for the funeral. They cut their hair short, wailed and sang laments, scratched at their bodies and beat their heads. Usually the women were also the ones who visited graves to make offerings of oil, water and special cakes.

Looking at the Benaki lekythos (5th century) think about the differences between funerals now and those in Ancient Greece. What are the key characteristics of each?



This resource looks at conservation in the museum environment in order to introduce students to this important aspect of the exhibition. The exercise is easily adaptable to the curricula of both primary and secondary students.

All around us there is evidence of materials changing: rotting wood, rusting steel and weathered buildings. In a museum, the decay is less extreme than outside, but over time even our objects are affected.

The term 'conservation' means to both preserve and restore. Preservation usually revolves around controlling factors such as light or humidity that might gradually damage an object. When this happens it may become necessary to carry out restorative work.

Restoration sometimes requires parts to be replaced or added. In a museum, the aim is not to make the item look new, but to ensure that they will survive.

To help students engage with these issues, ask them if they have any treasured possessions that they treat with care. Ask them how long they would like their special objects to survive. How do they care for them? What precautions do they take when handling or using them, and how do they store them when not in use? What sort of places or under what conditions would they not keep their object, and why?



Wooden shutters or cupboard doors, 5th-7th c.
Egypt

The dry climate of Egypt ensured that pieces made of perishable materials such as wood and cloth survived to our day, whereas this was not the case in other areas of the Byzantine world. Egyptian finds therefore allow us to study aspects of ancient material cultures, otherwise only known from literary sources.

Now that you are back in the classroom, start out by asking students what their expectations were for the museum beforehand and compare this to their understanding after the visit. Discuss something new that students may have found out during their visit and discuss how that differs to what they knew or believed before the visit.

Continue discussion with the students in the classroom using these discussion prompts.

- Go over a few of the Ancient Greek myths that students were introduced to at the museum. Do they remember any? Ask them to draw a scene from their favourite one.
- Talk with the students about the different types of pottery they saw at the museum. Ask them to cut out the outline of a pot and decorate it with animals and people.
- Use clay to make a simple pot or bowl. Discuss with the students all the different purposes these items might have served in Ancient Greece.
- Bring any object from home. Why have you chosen it? What would people 2000 years ago have thought it was?
- Research an ancient Greek myth and make a poster showing the story, with images. Are there any similar themes in films or television shows today?
- Do you know any English words that might have come from a Greek term?
- Write a short passage about how it felt to see the objects in the museum, or about your favourite object.
- Divide the students in groups and ask each group to report on one activity they completed.

After your visit, continue discussion with the students in the classroom using these discussion prompts.

- Discuss the change and continuity of the religion of the Greeks under different political powers.
- Use the objects of the exhibition to discuss how the human form has been represented in art over time. Draw, paint or sculpt a person in the style of any period.
- Choose a development in technology that has influenced the exhibition and discuss its impact on your life today. For example, agriculture, writing, the pottery wheel, the printing press, or gunpowder.
- Choose an object from home and discuss how it will look in 2000 years. Will it have lasted? Why or why not? What will people think it was?
- Choose an object on display at the exhibition and compare it with a similar one from a different culture. For example the bridal costumes, the pottery, or the religious imagery. What are the similarities and differences?
- Discuss why these objects have lasted until today and how they went from being made, used and later discovered and exhibited.
- Choose a contemporary artist or designer of any sort. Discuss any similarities or differences between their work and the objects on display. You may want to mention how they depict the human figure, what materials they use, what it is used for, and which artistic periods appear to have influenced them.

Primary and secondary students can use our online image bank to further explore the objects of the exhibition after their visit. Questions asked during the exhibition can be revisited in the classroom, with students having had a chance to research the answers.

- What is the use of this object?
- When was it made?
- How was it made?
- Is there a modern equivalent?

TOURS

Planning a visit with your class? Please contact the Hellenic Museum in advance to ensure you get the most out of your trip.

To book a class tour, please email info@hellenic.org.au or call 03 8615 9016