

Chatsworth Elementary School
Art Appreciation Spring 2012
Parent Volunteer Orientation 1 March 2012
ANCIENT GREEK POTTERY

Introduction:

The Art Appreciation Committee seeks to present projects to the Chatsworth School students so they may become acquainted with a variety of artists and have the chance to experience many artistic methods and materials.

In the past two years for example we have looked at the development of photography as an art form (Fall, 2010: Alfred Stieglitz using a view finder and charcoal on paper), late 19th century Post Impressionism-Pointillism (Spring, 2011: Georges Seurat: using paint and q-tips) and 20th century American modernist-“pop art” (Fall, 2011: Stuart Davis: using paint and collage).

For Spring, 2012 the Art Appreciation Committee has planned a program focusing on Ancient Greek Pottery.

Why Greek Pottery?

Because: As Ancient Greece civilization emerged approximately 3000 years ago, developed through the 2nd century BC and was later incorporated by the Roman Empire, it provided a profoundly influential basis for our modern world especially in the West. Foundational approaches to science, philosophy, art, architecture, literature, drama, sports and of course democracy have been its legacy.

Introducing students to the importance and richness of ancient Greek culture could be a confounding task given the complexity and breadth of the subject. As our “way in” we will be studying Ancient Greek pottery which tells us much about ancient Greek society, culture and art and allows us to explore many of its aspects.

By looking at several examples of ancient pots spanning over 900 years (c. 1300-450 BC) we can see the development of Greek culture and talk about its influences on us today.

The children will also be making pots from reddish clay and then painting them with black acrylic paint. This will allow them to have yet another type of fun and tactile art making experience as well.

Talking Points:

(The information below is inclusive and is geared more toward the older children; Parent Volunteers can decide which items to discuss depending on the grade level.)

In talking to the children as an introduction to the project we can say that Ancient Greece is so important to us today because it provided much of the basis for our daily lives-how we learn, how we think and communicate through books, art and theater and even how our government works. Many of the things we take for granted originated in ancient Greece; some of these are in fact described by Greek words. Some examples are: (Note: “See #” corresponds to the numbered posters we will be presenting to the children)

- **Alphabet:** is the set of letters we use to form all our words. The alphabet we use is based in a large part on the alphabet the ancient Greeks invented approx. 2800 years ago. *Alpha* is the first vowel and *Beta* is the first consonant in the Greek alphabet. (See #5A)
- **Democracy:** The practice of citizens voting and having a say in important decisions originated formally in Greece 2500 years ago. The kind of government we have today is based on this system. *Demos*: Greek for “people; *kratos*: Greek for “power, rule”.

- **Heroes:** Greek poetry and drama introduced the hero into our artistic and storytelling heritage especially through the Homeric Epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey. *Hero* is a Greek word. (See #7)
- **Science or Natural Philosophy:** Ancient Greeks asked important questions in a systematic way about how the world, nature and the universe actually worked and sought logical answers that did not rely upon superstitions or the influence of the “Gods”. Philosophy is from the Greek words *philo* (loving) + *sophia* (skill, wisdom).
- **Athletics:** Organized games that brought athletes together from many different places in order to compete were important to the Ancient Greeks who started the Olympic Games nearly 2800 years ago (776 BC). The modern Olympic Games will be held this summer in London, England. The English word athlete is based on a Greek word. (See #6)
- **Music:** The ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras who lived approx. 2500 years ago helped set the musical scale we use today. He established basic principles of music theory used now by musicians such as Adele and Bruno Mars. Music is from the Greek word *mousike*- “the art of the muse” ; goddesses who inspired the creation of literature, science and the arts. (See #9)
- **Architecture:** The methods, materials and styles of building developed in ancient Greece inspired many of our important buildings. The word is from *arkhi* (first/principal) + *tektōn* (build). Features of this type of architecture include columns with decorated tops (capitals), decorated lintels, pedimented (triangular) roofs, elegant balance, symmetry and proportion. These elements can be seen: (See #5B)
 - In Larchmont:
Public Library, Larchmont Temple Entrance
 - In NYC:
Federal Hall, Grant’s Tomb, Metropolitan Museum of Art
 - In Washington DC:
The White House, the US Capitol Building, the Supreme Court Building, the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials

Greek Pottery History:

The Greek Pottery that we will discuss with the children, developed between approximately 3300 and 2400 years ago on the island of Crete and on Mainland Greece. Specific information for each example will be attached to the back of each presentation poster.

There are great resources to view and study Greek pottery and art in our area:

- The Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC has a wonderful collection of sculpture, jewelry and pottery from ancient Greece. They also have published guides for children that are a valuable tool for any visit.
- The Museum of Arts and Culture at New Rochelle High School “goes Greek” in March as part of a national initiative to celebrate Ancient Greek culture and remind us of the importance this culture has had on us. The celebration, March 8 – April 5, is called Greeks/Modern Lives at New Rochelle High School. (see: <http://theloopny.com/blog/greek-influences-in-modern-life-at-new-rochelle-museum/>)
- The Chatsworth School Library will be featuring books on Ancient Greek Stories and history.
- The Larchmont Children’s Library will also be featuring books on Ancient Greek Stories and history. The Librarian will create a pertinent reading list to be posted on our website the week of March 5th.
- Larchmont Bookstores have been notified of our spring project and will make books about Ancient Greece available.
- George O’Connor, the author/illustrator of a projected 12-book series retelling the Greek Myths in graphic novel format will be at the Voracious Reader on Friday, March 9th at 6:30pm. He has already completed four books (Zeus, Athena, Hera, Hades) which are said to be geared towards grades 4-6.

For those Art Appreciation Parent Volunteers, Parents and Teachers who are interested in reading additional basic background information, please continue below:

Fortunately, as with many ancient civilizations, large amounts of pottery have survived from ancient Greece. Because pottery is (by design) a highly durable material and can be pieced together when broken, it is one of the most important sources of evidence for ancient Greek culture. Approximately 100,000 vases have been recorded by scholars.

Because so little of ancient Greek painting survives, the study of Greek pottery “provides us with the best guide to the customary life and mind of the ancient Greeks”.¹ Through them we can trace the development of social and artistic values, proportional relationships, and a movement towards pictorial realism, improved technologies and the emergence of the individual, self identified artist. We are also able to determine the extent of trade throughout the ancient world, and document the exchange of artistic and cultural influences.

The forms of Greek pottery tended to depend upon utilitarian and practical purposes, the basic uses being storage and transport vessels, jugs and cups for mixing, and vases for oils, perfumes and cosmetics.

The six basis types of pottery were:

1. Oinochoe wine pitcher with 1 handle
2. Hydria water jar with 3 handles
3. Amphora large jug with 2 handles and a cover for grain storage
4. Kylix flat shaped drinking cup with 2 handles
5. Krater large open jug often with volute handles for mixing wine and water
6. Lekythos long narrow necked flask for pouring oil

Scholars tend to divide Greek pottery into distinct periods:

- **Minoan Culture** (17th – 13th centuries BC): This Bronze Age, palace based, maritime culture produced pottery with geometric and marine decorations on the island of Crete. The Minoans subsequently influenced mainland Greece.
- **Mycenaean Culture** (20th -11th centuries BC): This Bronze Age mainland palace based culture of the Homeric tradition produced pottery featuring geometric and rudimentary figural designs apparently representing aristocratic warrior and mythological narratives.
- **Protogeometric Period** (11th – 10th centuries BC): Pottery from this era represents the return of craft production after the collapse of Bronze Age cultures throughout the Mediterranean world and the ensuing Dark Ages. With resettlement of some population centers, pottery with new geometric motifs prevailed.
- **Geometric Period** (9th – 8th century BC): Corinth and Athens are primary centers of pottery production during this time. Decoration included abstract motifs until 850 with the reintroduction of rudimentary human figures (stick figures) alternating with bands of geometric decoration. At the end of this phase there appear representations of mythology, and poetic themes, probably at the time when the Homer codifies the traditions of Trojan War cycle in the Iliad and the Odyssey.
- **Orientalizing Period** (8th-7th centuries BC): Contact with Assyrian and Mesopotamian cultures through trade links to eastern Mediterranean introduced larger figural motifs of both realistic animals (lions, deer) and mythological creatures (sphinx, griffins).
- **Archaic Period** (620-480 BC): In the seventh century BC, Corinth was the leading producer and exporter of pottery, but was overtaken by Athens in the sixth century BC. Generally, potters owned the workshops while painters were either hired or were slaves. The Black Figure technique (black figures on an orange-red background) was established; and animal motifs gave way to depictions of heroes and Gods from mythology and the Homeric Epics as well as other human figures engaged in common activities including banqueting and sporting events,

¹ Mertens, J.; How to Read Greek Vases: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press

agriculture, cooking, weaving, baking, and the playing of musical instruments. Artistic standards governing proportional relationships, line and balance were developed in the arts and architecture and influenced pottery forms and decoration. The first extant pot signed by the painter Sophilos appears at this time (580 BC). Text was added to the vases by some painters as a testament to their literacy and bravado.

The Red Figure technique (orange-red figures on a black background) was invented c 520 by the painter in the pottery workshop of Andokides. This style saw increased naturalism because it freed the artist to draw “both the contours of forms and the interior articulation”² including more detailed renderings of figures, clothing, architectural details. This style quickly superseded the Red Figure style in Athens and throughout the Greek world.

- **Classical Period** (480-323 BC): Complex groupings of figures in naturalistic poses and increased attention to detail as seen in the Red Figure pottery of this time reflected the sculptural developments occurring concurrently especially as part of the extensive building program initiated by Pericles at the Parthenon in Athens (447-432 BC). Mythological and common subjects continued to be explored. With the flourishing of Greek colonies in Southern Italy, the production of red-figure vases began there with indigenous varieties of shapes and ornamentation.
- **Hellenistic Period** (323-146 BC) With Alexander the Great’s control of Athens, vase production ceased there around 330-320 BC. while vase production continued in Southern Italy. Although Greece was defeated by the Romans at the Battle of Corinth in 146 BC , Greek culture continued to influence Roman civilization through the 5th century AD.

Through the **Renaissance** of the 13th-16th centuries, the **Neoclassical Period** and the **Greek Revival** of the 18th and 19th centuries, Greek science, philosophy, arts and architecture inspired thinkers, artists, builders and politics profoundly. The manifestations of ancient Greek culture continue to influence and inspire us today.

² Ibid