

# Ancient Greek Art

## An Instructor's Guide

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM



**Introduction** | The Worcester Art Museum has a small but distinguished collection of ancient works in its Greek and Roman galleries. The **Greek Art** gallery, specifically, features large-scale marble reliefs, black- and red-figure pottery, sculpture, and coins.

*This gallery offers students the opportunity to explore, learn, and formulate ideas. As an instructor, this guide will aid to summarize important curriculum frameworks; this guide will also help to show how the art in the gallery can be used to enrich classroom learning. An instructor will benefit most when he or she*

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*can visit the Museum before bringing students, as this will allow the chance to look around and plan ahead.*

**Visit Preparation** | Prior to visiting, talk with students about the gallery or galleries you plan to see on your trip to the Worcester Art Museum. What do they already know about **ancient Greece**? Brainstorm a list of questions that you would like to find the answers to (some of the questions might evolve from reviewing this document). Connect these questions to different school subjects, **for example**: connect the scenes depicted on the painted pots to history class lessons of Grecian mythology or connect English class poetry lessons to the Greek gallery's discussion of the early poet Sappho.

**Relevant MA Curriculum Frameworks** | *The standards are specifically aimed at students in grades 6-12; however, everyone is encouraged to make use of this guide.*

*Arts 6.3* | Students will interpret the meanings of artistic works by explaining how the subject matter and/or form reflect the events, ideas, religions, and customs of people living at a particular time in history.

*Arts 9.2* | Students will identify and describe examples of how the discovery of new inventions and technologies, or the availability of new materials brought about changes in the arts in various time periods and cultures.

*History 7.32* | Describe the myths and stories of classical Greece; give examples of Greek gods and goddesses, heroes, and events, and where and how we see their names used today.

*ELA Grades 6-12 College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening* | 2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

*ELA Traditional Literature Listings* | Students in grades 5-8 should be familiar with: Greek, Roman, or Norse myths; Students in grades 5-8 should be familiar with: A higher level re-reading of Greek mythology.

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**Guiding Questions** | (1) What do you think about this gallery? (2) From this gallery, what can you learn about the society where this art was created? (3) Pick one piece from the gallery: what do you think its purpose was? (4) Who made it and why do you think they made it?

**Deeper Questions** | (1) Many of the artifacts in this gallery tell stories: why do you think it is important to tell stories? (2) What was one reason artisans made sculptures in ancient Greece? (3) What role did women play in ancient Greece? How were they depicted in art?

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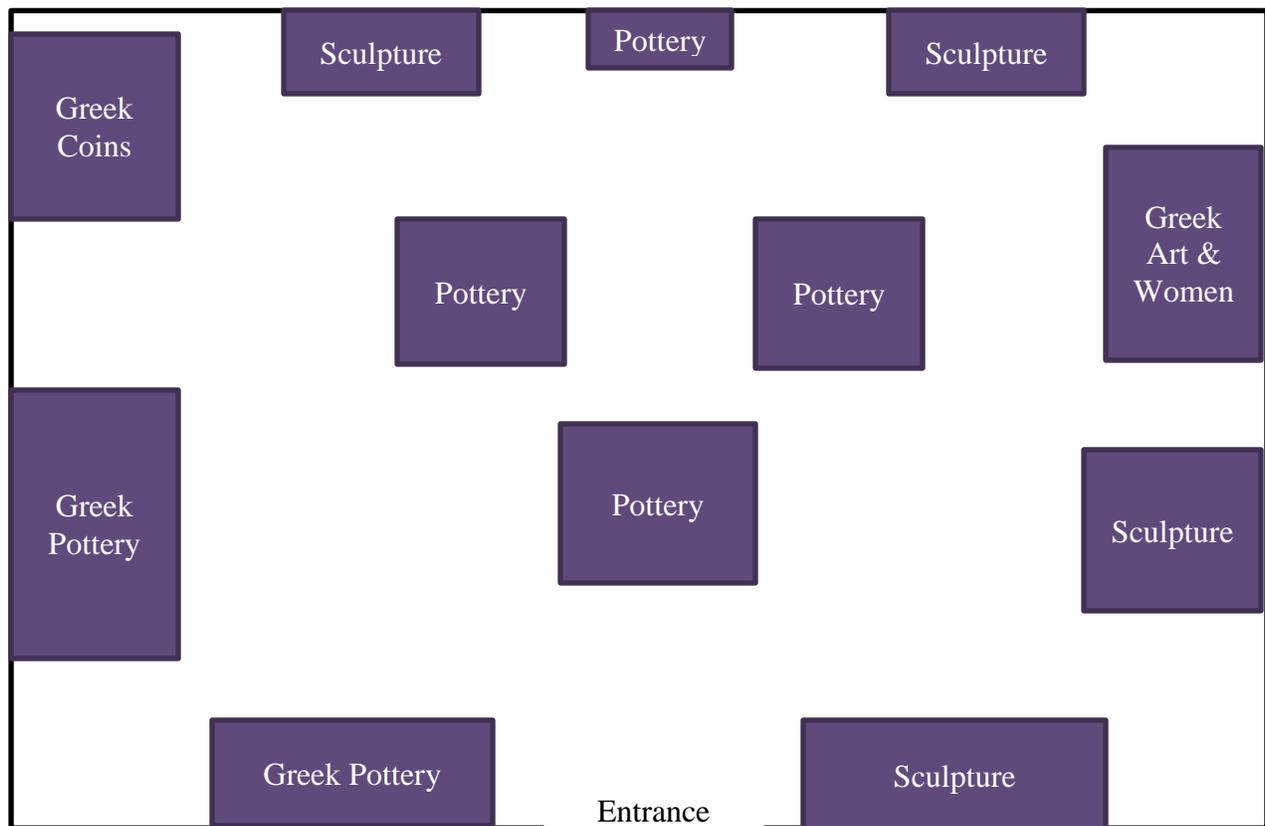
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**Gallery Layout** | *The Greek Gallery is located on the first floor.*



**Gallery Division** | The gallery is divided into **three** major categories: sculpture, pottery, and women in ancient Greece. The Worcester Art Museum has created a gallery guide for each theme, which can be found both at [www.worcesterart.org](http://www.worcesterart.org) and in the galleries. They are titled “Bronze Casting Technique,” “The Creation of a Painted Pot,” and “Women in Greek Art.”

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### Current Gallery Information | *On display.*

**Greek Art and Life (Main Display)** | The objects in this gallery were made between 3000 – 100 B.C. by people living in the Greek world. This world included the country we now call Greece, but also extended all around the Mediterranean Sea from Cyprus to Spain. These works of art offer a view into an ancient culture that continues to influence politics, philosophy, literature, art, and architecture today. / While looking around this gallery, try to imagine these objects in their original settings: in the temples and small shrines that dotted the Mediterranean landscape at the banquet tables of the wealthy, and in the tombs of Greek citizens. / Some of the objects date from the time of the Parthenon, the great fifth-century temple in Athens, but most were made in the Early Greek period (800 – 500 B.C.). During this period, images of the heroes of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus first found their way onto the objects of daily life.



**Greek Pottery & Ancient Society (Secondary Display)** | Greek houses were filled with painted pottery of many different shapes and sizes: dinner plates, wine cups, pitchers, storage jars, oil flasks, perfume jars. We can learn about life and customs from the painted scenes on Greek pottery because thousands have survived and many are intact as they were buried with their owners. Ancient painted pottery, like ceramics today, varies widely from the very modest to the most refined. At the highest level of production and craftsmanship, ceramic artists displayed the finest achievements of Greek drawing and painting. Some painters and potters proudly signed their works, unlike most other Greek artisans who remained anonymous. The very best were given as awards to victorious athletes, as gifts to friends, and as offerings to the dead. / Painted pottery was so popular that it was actively traded across the Mediterranean. The appearance of regional styles at many settlements, such as those in Central and Southern Italy and the Near East, attests to contact between diverse communities. / The earliest pottery in the gallery (8<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.) is decorated with spare geometric designs that accentuate the structure of the vessel. “Black figure” painting was popular in sixth-century Athens and it was used by artists to tell the adventures of their many gods. Towards the end of the sixth-century, Greek art shifted away from the world of myth and began to explore the world of the individual and everyday life. In this period, “red-figure” painting was invented and more complicated scenes were developed. Different pottery painting techniques are explained on the cards in the wall box.



**Sculpture & Greek Religion (Secondary Display)** | Greek temples were filled with large and small sculptures. Some, like the small bronze statues in this case, served as votive offerings. Votive offerings were objects dedicated to the gods and placed in shrines in the hopes of gaining divine favor. The Greeks hoped to please their gods with the gift of these lively miniatures and to express their faith in divine intervention. / Each of

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these small figures (horses, warriors, an athlete and a musician) stands today as a record of one person's communication with the divine. While all significant events in Greek life (marriage, childbirth, harvest, athletic victory) were marked by some kind of votive offering, most of the objects in this case deal with military pursuits. Soldiers and cavalymen heading into battle vowed that, if victorious, they would make dedicatory offerings to the gods who enabled their success. / Workshops near religious centers produced votives in both bronze and terracotta (baked clay), the latter being less costly. These bronze figures were made by the lost-wax casting method (see cards on bronze techniques in the wall box).

 **Women in Greek Art (Secondary Display)** | “Someone, I say, will remember us in the future.” (Sappho, born in Lesbos in 630 B.C.) / The writings of Sappho, the Greek lyric poet whose genius was recognized in her own day, provide one of the few female voices from the ancient world that has survived to our day. Because of this, as we try to reconstruct women's lives from this period, we must rely on what does remain: the art and writings of men. / In this gallery, women appear as goddesses, mothers, mourners and revelers. Many of these objects were sacred. They invoke the power of women in the religious sphere, one of the few public areas of Greek society where women had an active role. Since the time of the earliest Mediterranean civilizations, images of the female body were connected with the life-giving power of the earth. Included in this gallery are images of fertility goddesses and deities such as Athena. Women's roles as priestesses and worshippers are also documented in the statues displayed here. / Women spent their days in the private domain, segregated from men except as family gatherings; they rarely left the house. Women ran the household and were expected to provide legitimate heirs. Because they spent most of their days indoors, women are depicted with white skin on painted pottery. Women were also responsible for spinning and weaving and often created masterpieces of the textile arts. When a member of her family died, a woman prepared the body for burial and led the funeral lament. Their care of the dead extended to repeated visits and offerings at the grave. / In real life, women were relegated to the household. In myths and the epics of Homer, women were heroines and goddesses. Greek authors gave powerful voices to women like Electra and Cassandra who speak with a forceful intelligence.

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**Key Artwork** | *All found in this gallery.*



**Colossal Female Head** | Cyprus, 550-500 B.C.E., Limestone



**Mother and Child** | Rhodes, Late 6<sup>th</sup>-Early 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E.,  
Painted Terracotta

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**Storage Jar (Amphora) – Leto Mounting the Chariot** | 515-500 B.C.E., Black-Figure Painted Pottery

*Amphora* = “to carry on both sides”; a vessel for storing provisions such as wine, corn, oil, or honey, with an opening large enough to admit a ladle and usually fitted with a cover.



**Storage Jar (Amphora) – With Geometric Designs** | Cyprus, 850-700 B.C.E. (Geometric Period/Iron Age), Painted Pottery

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**Assortment of Greek Coins** | Various Dates



**Abstract Female Idol** | Vicinity of Troy, 3200-2300 B.C.E.,  
Marble



**Grave Monument – Young Girl with a Jewelry Box** | 450-  
425 B.C.E. (Classic Period), Marble

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**Oil Flask (Lekthyos) – Depicting Two Women Carrying an Offering to the Dead** | Attributed to the Achilles Painter, Vicinity of Athens, 450-440 B.C.E., White-Ground Painted Pottery

*Lekthyos* = an oil flask with a long narrow neck adapted for pouring oil slowly, used chiefly in funeral rites.



**Drinking Cup (Skyphos) – Owl Between Two Olive Branches** | Vicinity of Athens, 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E., Red-Figure Painted Pottery

*Skyphos* = “cup”; a drinking vessel with a deep body, flat bottom, and two horizontal handles near the rim.

guide created by nicholas j. porcella

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