

Black-Figure Neck Amphora



Black-Figure Neck Amphora, ca. 510 BCE

Greek

Terra-cotta, 16¼ in. high

Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 60.10

Object Information

The ancient Greeks were masters of painted pottery. This vase was made in Attica, the area including and surrounding the city of Athens. Athenian pottery is known for its distinctive clay, which is rich in iron oxides that turn a deep red when fired. The vase is painted in the black-figure technique, which originated in the city of Corinth (west of Athens) around 700 BC, but which Athenian artists began to use beginning about 600 BC. The large size of Attic vases gave Athenian painters more room to develop the technique and experiment with overlapping figures, the rendering of perspective, and the addition of other colors (also done in Corinth) such as the white on the game board and on Athena's face and arms in this example. In black-figure vase painting, figures and decoration were painted with a slip (liquefied clay) that would turn black when the pot was fired in a kiln. The background, which initially retained the natural color of the clay, was then lightened by applying a weaker slip to those areas.

The shape seen here is an amphora ("carried on both sides"). The many varieties of amphorae were used to transport liquids and solids such as wine, olive oil, grapes, and olives—natural resources that the Greeks traded throughout the Mediterranean world. Usually a potter made the vessel and a painter decorated it, although sometimes one person performed both tasks.

The scene on this amphora depicts two Greek warriors, Ajax and Achilles, taking a break from the action during the Trojan War to play a board game. Athena, goddess of war, stands over them. Athena appears extremely stiff and posed, which some scholars believe is an indication that the figure is a statue. Although Achilles and Ajax are playing a game, they both seem ready to jump back into action at anytime: they are still holding their spears. The scene represented here is not found in the *Iliad*, but it became a popular subject for vase painters. It is not known exactly what game they are playing; it could be one similar to chess or a game involving dice. Scenes with gods, goddesses, and heroes were extremely popular subjects for Greek vase paintings. Although we only see one side of the vase here, both sides of most vases were painted. The other side of this vase shows an older man with two warriors. It may or may not relate to the scene of Ajax and Achilles.

Concept

Students will study the culture of ancient Greece and learn about its painted pottery.

Map

Have students view a detailed map of the Mediterranean area and locate the Mediterranean Sea, the Greek peninsula, and some of the surrounding islands.

Observation and Discussion

Use the following suggested questions and discussion points while looking at the *Black-Figured Amphora*.

- What natural material was used to make the vase?
- What do you think this vase held?
- Do you think the person who made the vase would have painted it too? Do you think there were specialized professions like potters and painters?
- How can you tell that the two men on this amphora are warriors? How can you tell that the figure in the middle is the goddess Athena?
- What type of game do you think they were playing? What board games do you play?
- Greek vases usually had scenes on two sides. What would you have painted on the other side of this vase?

Resources for Grades K–5

Activities: Myth Writing and Amphora Decoration

ACTIVITY 1

Have the students write or read a story or myth about a Greek god or goddess. For a writing extension, they can also create a new myth or retell one they have heard before

ACTIVITY 2

Print out copies of the amphora outline (page 5). Students can decorate the vase with a scene from the myth they read or wrote. Have them add decorative patterns with orange, red, and black crayons or markers to duplicate the colors used by the ancient Greeks.

ACTIVITY 3

Students may also want to decorate with Greek motifs and figures they have studied, such as grapes and olives or athletes, gods, and goddesses. They can even add architectural details, such as columns and pediments.

Closure

Encourage the students to share their ideas about their amphorae and the details they have chosen.

SOLs

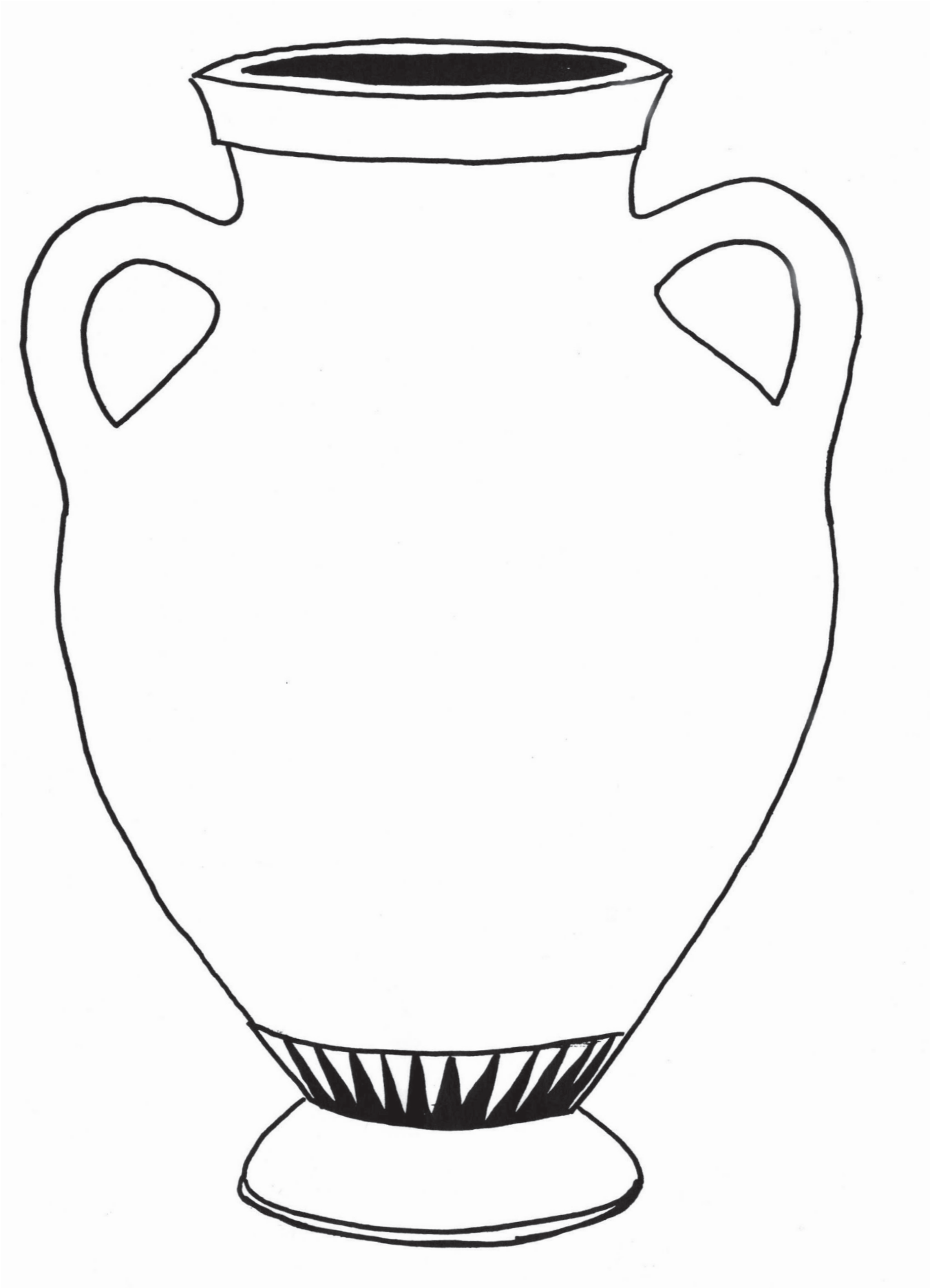
Visual Arts K.1, K.2, K.3.4, K.3.5, K.4, K.8, K.11, K.12, K.13, K.14, K.16, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3.4, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.8, 1.12, 1.13, 1.17, 1.20, 2.3,, 2.4.3, 2.5, 2.19, 2.21, 2.22, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.13, 3.16, 3.17, 3.19, 3.25, 3.26, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, 4.8, 4.18, 5.1, 5.3, 5.5, 5.6, 5.9, 5.26

English K.1.α, K.2.b-g, K.3.α-f, K.8.α,b,c,d, K-11, 1.1, 1.2.α-e, 1.3,α-d, 1.8, 1.9, 1.11, 1.12, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.7, 2.8, 2.11, 2.12, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 4.1 b,e, 4.2, 4.4, 4.7, 4.8, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.8, 5.9

History K.3, K.4.b, K.4.c, 1.4.b, 1.4.d, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8

Math 1.17

Decorate the vase with a scene from a myth. (See activity 2 on page 4.)



Educational Media Resources

Recommended Films, Videos, and DVDs

Greek Mythology for Students

10 parts, 23 min. each | 2004 | VHS

Upper elementary

This cartoon video series renders many of the major Greek myths understandable for children. They will learn about the characters and dramatic situations surrounding ancient beliefs about the wonders of the universe. A narrator highlights the common themes throughout ancient culture and history and demonstrates the continuing power of myths today.

- The Gods of Olympus GRK-1**
- Perseus & Medusa GRK-2**
- Nature Myths GRK-3**
- The Journeys of Odysseus GRK-4**
- The Trojan War GRK-5**
- Constellation of Myths GRK-6**
- Jason & the Golden Fleece GRK-7**
- Defying the Gods GRK-8**
- The Labors of Heracles GRK-9**
- Theseus & the Minotaur GRK-10**

The Greeks

4 parts, 20 min. each | color | 1987 | FI | VHS

Elementary school through adult

This unusual series introduces some of the great stories of the world and one of civilization's richest heritages. The four programs are designed to fit easily into the curriculum and cover subjects including art, crafts, language arts, math, history, drama, and science. Each program tells a Greek story and then highlights a particular aspect of Greek heritage.

1. Athena's City GR-1

This first program introduces Greek gods and legends with the myth of Perseus and shows the significance of this ancient culture. By studying its architecture, we learn that Greek civilization left many visible marks on contemporary society.

2. Greek Pottery GR-2

The second program completes the story of Perseus and demonstrates how archaeology informs and enhances our understanding of the past. Archaeologists are shown excavating artifacts. Cultural contributions of the Greeks are also illustrated, such as coins and the beautiful pottery from which we derive much of our knowledge of Greece.

continued

Educational Media Resources

3. Women and Children GR-3

The ancient Greeks believed a woman's place was definitely in the home. This program looks at domestic life, living standards, and the role of women in ancient Greek society. The second half begins the story of the Golden Fleece.

4. Greek Schools GR-4

This final program completes the story of the Golden Fleece and takes the viewer to a reconstructed ancient Greek school to illustrate a typical day and the Greeks' contributions to language and science.

The Greeks: Crucible of Civilization series

3 parts, 60 min. each | 1999 | PBS | VHS | DVD

Middle school through adult

PBS produced this fine series recounting the rise, glory, demise, and legacy of the empire that marked the dawn of Western civilization.

Episode One: The Revolution ED-501

The troubled birth of the world's first democracy, Athens, is told through the life of nobleman Cleisthenes. In the fifth century BC, the Athenians struggle against a series of tyrants and their rival, Sparta, to create a new "society of equals."

Episode Two: The Golden Age ED-502

The Greeks' heroic victory against the mighty Persian Empire is told through the life of Themistocles, one of Athens's greatest generals. The elected leader, Pericles, oversees the building of the Parthenon and an extraordinary flourishing of the arts and sciences.

Episode Three: Empire of the Mind ED-503

The tragic descent of Athenian democracy is seen through the eyes of Socrates, Athens' first philosopher. The conflict with Sparta turns futile and even suicidal. As defeats mount, mob rule takes over, and the most vocal critic, Socrates, is put to death in a people's court.

Note: These and other audiovisual resources related to VMFA's collection may be accessed through our website:

http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Statewide_Programs/Films,_Videos,_and_DVDs.aspx

Educational Media Resources

Link to Related Works of Art at the VMFA

<http://www.vmfa.museum/Collections/Ancient/>

Links to Related Programs

Teen classes

<http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Teens/Teens.aspx>

Families and kids

http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Kids+_Families/Kids+_Families.aspx

Tours

<http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Educators/educators.aspx>

Teacher workshops

http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Educators/Teacher_Workshops/Teacher_Workshops.aspx

Please check <http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/> regularly to learn about new tours and other educational opportunities.



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