

Remains of Ancient Greece Capsule (BSP5)

This collection contains a variety of Ancient Greece replica artefacts to engage and inspire children's curiosity and questioning about life in Ancient Greece.



Contents: -

1. 1x Spinning Top
2. 2x Greek Theatrical Masks
3. 2x Wax Writing Tablet and Stylus
4. 4 x Ancient Greek Coins
5. 1 x Oil Lamp
(Contents may vary)

Questions you could ask children about the artefacts

Initial Discussion

- What is this object?
- Does it resemble anything the children have seen?
- What do you think the item was used for and by whom?
- Does anyone know what it is called?

Collect any other questions the children might have about the artefacts and display them as you try to find the answers through your learning sessions.

Other questions to consider:

- Where does the object come from?
- Who might have made this object? And how were they made?
- Why were they made?
- **What do the objects tell us about life in Ancient Greece?** *This last question can be returned to at the end of the investigation.*

All About the Artefacts

1. Spinning Top

Webster's dictionary defines the top as "a child's toy shaped somewhat like an inverted cone, with a point at its apex upon which it is spun, usually by unwinding a string." But there are a number of references to tops that do not include use of a string.

Greek pottery was decorated with scenes showing top spinners, some of which include women playing with tops. Whilst tops for play are likely to have been made of wood, clay tops could have been used for religious purposes, to honour the gods. Some may have also been a sign of affluence and at times were placed in tombs as an item to be taken into the afterlife. The Greek top would have been spun by wrapping a piece of leather around the ridges.

2. Masks

The history of European theatre begins with the Greeks, whose annual festivals in honour of the god Dionysus included competitions in tragedy and comedy. According to tradition, the first of these dramatic forms evolved from choral songs concerning the death and resurrection of Dionysus. Thespis won first prize in the initial tragedy competition held at Athens in 534 BC and is also credited with the introduction of masks. He wrote a play, giving the storyteller the task of speaking in dialogue. To make it easier for the audience to tell which character was speaking at a particular time, the narrator used different masks to represent the various characters.

These plays were performed in natural amphitheatres on the hillside and, to make the narrator's voice travel over the whole area, the masks were given large funnel-shaped mouths like megaphones. The Greek word for an actor is 'hypocrites'. So, our word hypocrite is derived from the fact that an actor wore a mask and was 'two-faced'.

Masks were afterwards used by all actors in the Greek theatre. Most of the people in the auditorium would not be able to see changing facial features so the large masks exaggerated facial features and emotions. They covered the whole head, and included hair, with two eyeholes and a mouth slightly open. The mouths were always open, so that the actors' voices could be heard. Very few masks have survived because they were usually made of linen or cork. Images of masks survive on sculptured friezes and statues.

Even after the plays ceased to be directly about the joys and sorrows of Dionysos, they were still performed at his festivals - the Rural and City Dionysia respectively. New dramatic presentations were first performed at the City Dionysia, where there were competitions for the best plays. The Rural Dionysia would see repeat performances of the plays in areas outside of Athens. People would travel from all over to witness these competitions. They lasted for almost six days, and included processions, songs, dances, and feasts. After Alexander the Great brought Greek culture to the places he conquered, no city was complete without its Greek theatre.

Children could be presented with a description of a Greek mask: "The large masks exaggerated facial features and emotions. They covered the whole head, and included hair, with two eyeholes and a mouth slightly open". They could then compare the description with the replica artefact. Does it match the description? If not, why not? What is missing? What about the materials used to create the replica mask? They could design their own mask for someone who is 'sad', 'angry', 'happy' ... Children could look for evidence of masks in pictures of Greek sculptures and statues. How do they compare with the description, the replica or their designs? Then could then make masks using appropriate material [useful link with Design and Technology] and use them to retell a Greek myth.

3. Wax Writing Tablet and Stylus

Temporary work was executed on a wax tablet, scraped with a pointed bone or metal styli. These beeswax tablets were thought to be the first objects used to record thoughts. The Greeks bequeathed a rich literacy legacy for today's world, including the forerunner to the alphabet, as well as some of the most enduring poetry, drama, epics, history and philosophy of any time.

4. Coins

The standard silver coins were called drachma; one drachm was worth six obols. The larger silver coins were the tetradrachm which were worth more. The Greeks didn't write a value on the coin. The value was determined by the material the coins were made of and by the weight. A gold coin was worth more than a silver coin which was worth more than a bronze one. A heavy coin would buy more than a light one. The images on coins give us information about Greek life and culture.

5. Oil Lamp

This lamp would have been made on a potter's wheel, with a hole cut through the side and a nozzle stuck on. You can see that the clay has gone black where the wick burned. The small hole at the top helped to stop the oil evaporating and kept mice and insects out of it. Oil would be poured into the central hole, and a piece of string or linen would be dipped into the oil and as this soaked up a steady flame would produce light. Pupils could use clay to create their own oil lamps.

Reference Websites:

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/learn/schools/ages-7-11/ancient-greece>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/greeks/>