

Greek Discus Replica (G-DISC)

A Greek discus replica artefact to support and enhance your learning about Ancient Greece.



Questions you could ask children about the artefact

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 does the object tell us about life in Ancient Greece?** *This last question can be returned to at the end of the investigation.*

All About the Artefact

Discus

In ancient Greek athletics throwing the discus usually featured as part of the five event pentathlon and not as an event in itself. The other four events were the long jump, javelin, running and wrestling. If there was a winner after the first three events, the final two did not take place. Although there was a connection between athletics and training for battle, the discus seems not to have been directly relevant to combat, unlike the javelin or wrestling and boxing.

Ancient discuses come in a range of sizes. This bronze discus is quite small, measuring 16.5 - 12cms in diameter and weighing 1.25kgs - the average weight was 2.5kgs. Ancient discuses were much larger and flatter than the ones we use today and probably weighed almost twice as much.

There is little evidence of the distances thrown. A throw by Phaullus from the early 5th century BC seems to have been very impressive, but measured, only 30m compared with the current Olympic record of 69.4m and world record of over 74m. In contrast, the current world long jump record is 8.95m while ancient jumps are recorded at more than 16m. You could ask children how they can account for these differences. What seems to be at issue here is the nature of the event. The discus material, weight and athlete's technique along with the strength, skill and precision of the throw will all reflect the outcome.

We have to look to paintings on pots and one or two sculptures to get any idea of how the discus was thrown. There is evidence that the thrower bent his body low into the swing, but we have no indication that the spinning movement characteristic of modern discus throwers was ever used.

Most of our scenes of athletics are actually from Athenian pots. The 'Discobolus' by Myron is the most iconic representation of an ancient Greek discus thrower.

This replica is of a discus that dates from the 6th century BC. The inscription, which is written right to left, reads:

Exoidas dedicated me to the twin sons of Great Zeus, Kastor and Polydeukes.

Children could do a rubbing of the inscription and try to identify some of the Greek letters and perhaps even the names.

Athletic competitions were held in honour of the gods because they were believed to bestow athletic talent upon men. The Olympic Games began as part of a festival to honour the Greek god Zeus. An olive wreath would have been awarded as a prize for winning. What does the prize of an olive wreath tell us about ancient Greek values?

Activities to try

- Discuss the Olympic Games and compare the Games today with those in Ancient Greece. Find out the importance of sport for the ancient Greeks and which sports were part of the ancient Games. Find out when events were added to the Olympic Games and make a list of events at the latest Olympics. What things are similar and what has changed?
- Learn how to throw the discus and set up own mini-Olympics.
- Bury the artefact in sand and create your own class archaeological dig. Make it clear that artefacts are fragile and need to be excavated with care. Plastic pallet knives and paint brushes are ideal for this activity. When they have found the artefact task them to fill out an 'artefact report' where they draw the artefact and describe its features and likely uses. Encourage them to do further research and then report back what they have found out, labelling and displaying the artefact.

For more ideas and inspiration on ways of using the artefacts see our Learning with Artefacts free download.

Reference Websites:

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

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