

ATTIC INSCRIPTIONS: EDUCATION

ANCIENT ATHENIAN INSCRIPTIONS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS: TEACHERS' NOTES

The majority of the inscriptions to which we refer here are funerary monuments and would originally have been displayed in family funerary enclosures (*periboloi*) located in cemeteries outside the city walls or alongside roads. They are monuments that not only communicate information about the people that they commemorated or depicted but also expressed the emotions of those who had been close to them in life. High quality monuments would have been created bespoke; cheaper monuments would have been 'off the shelf' stock representations. You can watch videos about Athenian funerary monuments in the [AIO Youtube channel](#).

Other stone inscriptions surviving from Athens took the form of dedications or gifts made to the deities which would have been given in anticipation of some form of divine favour or a thank-offering for its dispensation, perhaps as a fulfilment of a vow. Of course, many of these contexts are now lost but when considering inscriptions we have to do our best to envisage the context within which they would have been viewed during antiquity.

We have inserted links to our website, which gives more information and discussion about individual inscriptions, into the set of slides.

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1. KS 1/KS 2 Restoring colour activity: [1a slides](#) + [1b worksheet](#)

This activity contributes to the KS 2 **History: Greeks>achievements, life, legacy, influence on the Western World**. It is intended to be a more visual activity than the word-based activities later on in the series (see below). It does, however, aim to

elucidate the meaning of the word 'ancient' and use of prefixes (e.g. 'disappear' and 're-appear!'). It is relevant to **art and design** at KS 1.

Learning objective: To learn about the Ancient Greek world and their use of colour. For KS 2, perhaps emphasise the written inscriptions on later slides? The inscription on the final slide probably bore the name of an individual, Ermos (or Hermos), which was (perhaps one generation later) deleted and a new name, 'Kollion', added. This was one way in which ancient Greek grave monuments were recycled: by deleting names and adding new ones!

This activity emphasises that the ancient Greek world was a colourful one (polychromatic, if you like) and that many ancient Greek statues, buildings and sculptures would have been painted in bright colours. This is in contrast to those modern views of ancient sculpture and buildings which to emphasise the 'whiteness' of the marble, an impression reproduced on many modern Neoclassical buildings. The slides can be shown to pupils and there is a worksheet with two colouring exercises to be used conjunction with it.

Over the past couple of decades teams of art historians have now devised a method, using various methods of UV and X-ray imaging, of restoring the lost colours on ancient statues. In the case of the Leeds inscription, the names of the people commemorated on it were probably interrupted by the now-lost painting.

Water-jars were commonly depicted on grave monuments in Athens: as they were important in marriage ceremonies, it may have been the case that they were used to commemorate those who had died before marrying.

Perhaps the teacher could ask the pupils why the Greeks seem to portray people in everyday poses in interaction with others (a baby reaching up to an adult; adults shaking hands): one view is that they did this as a way of demonstrating an everlasting bond between humans that would be unbroken by death.

The children should use their imagination to help them decorate the vessels as they see fit: the alternative restored colour schemes of the German team demonstrate that there is debate about the 'correct' colour scheme!

Perhaps also draw attention to the elaborately-carved elements at the top of the grave-markers: in imitation of the natural world, they imitate foliage and tendrils.

2. KS 1/KS 2 ancient Greek inscriptions animals activity

This activity contributes to the KS 2 History: Greeks > **Life, Achievements and Influence on the Western World** but is relevant to KS 1 **science>animals** topics.

Learning Objective: to think about the way in which ancient Greeks depicted animals and their meanings to them. Some of the images have stories behind them which can be explained; others are stock depictions. For KS 1, the activity may be used as part of a project on animals and the natural world.

Slides 3-4: Timarete holds a bird in her hand on a funerary monument as the child reaches up to it. It might have been a gift or a plaything for a child or may have been symbolic, representing the flight of the soul after death.

Slide 5: Two doves perched on the rim of a water-jar, probably drinking from it. The dove's association with Aphrodite might mean that it is shorthand for 'love' (like a 'heart' symbol in modern times).

Slide 6: this scene has a lot going on. In the clouds above are the God Pan, who has pointy ears. Beneath him are 5 worshippers and a small figure (probably a slave) leading a quadruped (a sheep?) towards an altar where it will be sacrificed. They walk towards four figures who represent Hermes and the Nymphs. At the right end there is a head, probably representing Acheloos the river-god. Discussion point is animal sacrifice: why would Greeks sacrifice animals to their deities? The simple answer is to please the deities. But there are other aspects too: the meat would have been divided up between the population and the skins would have been sold for leather to raise money for the temple.

Slide 7: This is a chunky Herakles. He is reclining after celebrating the accomplishment of his deeds. He is leaning on a lion-skin. He has slain the Nemean lion which until this point could not be killed with mortals' weapons as its golden fur was impenetrable. Its claws were sharper than mortals' swords and could cut through any armour. Herakles killed it by stunning it with his club and then strangling it with his hands.

Slide 8: A scene which suggests a feeling of harmony between man and animals, as a man leads a horse by its bridle with a slave-boy and two dogs. One thing worth noting is that in ancient Greek funerary monuments like this, horses seem to be rather smaller than we would expect them to be these days. This might be because they were a different breed of horse which were actually smaller, or because the Greeks liked to represent horses as smaller than they are in real life.

Slide 9: this shows a man riding a horse. Horses were a sign of wealth. The man is dressed with a helmet which suggests that he is a cavalryman. On this occasion we think that the man was involved in a competition between cavalry-riders and made a dedication of this image to commemorate his victory.

Slide 10: another horse, again suggesting wealth. But on this occasion the lack of military gear (and the inscription) suggests that this is horse-riding in a non-military context

Slide 11: Philodemos and Lysimache were probably man and wife, depicted with horse (see above on Slide 9). Above them is a siren: see below...

Slide 12: Pantakles' monument has a siren at its top. A siren is a mythical creature with wings, birds' feet and human torso. Odysseus encounters the sirens in the 12th book of the Odyssey. When he left Circe, she warns him of the dangers of the Sirens: their seductive song lures sailors to approach them and smash the ships on the rocks. Circe advises Odysseus to put beeswax in his sailors' ears so they are not distracted by the song of the sirens. Odysseus orders them to do this, but he is curious to hear the song but has himself tied to the mast, so that he can listen to the siren songs.

Sirens were often depicted on those who died at sea or prematurely as young people in ancient Greece.

Slides 13-14: A double-bodied sphinx appears at the bottom of this monument. It was a mythical creature usually with the head of a human, the body of a lion and with the wings of an eagle. Sphinxes were known in Greek mythology; in the story of Oedipus the entrance to the city of Thebes was guarded by a sphinx who asked this riddle: 'Which creature has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?'. She devoured those who failed to answer. Oedipus solved the riddle by answering: 'Man, who crawls on all fours as a baby, then walks on two feet as an adult, and then uses a walking stick in old age.' Sphinxes often appeared on grave monuments as guardians of tombs or shrines.

Slides 15-18: real and mythical images appear on this Roman-era sarcophagus (a chest into which the body of the deceased was placed): in the middle there is the winged Eros, which suggests prosperity or perhaps someone who had died young. There are also two faces with pointed ears, horns and tufts of beard: these depicted Satyrs, who were figures of fun in the ancient world. On the corners are bulls' heads, perhaps representing strength.

3. KS 1/KS 2 ancient Greek inscriptions people activity

This activity contributes to the KS 2 **History: Greeks > Life, Achievements and Influence on the Western World**. It is relevant also to KS 2 **Growth and Development of Humans** and KS 1 projects on **Animals, including Humans**.

This activity asks children to look at images and think about what the people represented did. It encourages them to think about the ancient Greek world and also how the ancient Greeks represented human beings.

Learning objective: To learn about Ancient Greek daily life and the ways it was depicted.

General points to make: how do their clothes compare to those the children see around them today? How did ancient Greeks distinguish between adults and children and between men and women? You might ask students in pairs to discuss a particular example ask if they can compare it to any modern statues or images.

What types of employment did ancient Athenians have? What jobs do we have now did they not have (virtually everything involving automation, technology, transport, communication)? How did they divide up jobs between men and women (women were excluded from most aspects of public life, e.g. politics, but were widely involved in religion as priestesses; they played a role in household management, raising children and other income-related activities, e.g. retail)? Why did the Athenians organise society in the way that they did?

Most of the representations in this activity are from funerary monuments (though the image of the doctor and patient may be actually a dedication to the healing deity

Asklepios). I tend to leave this aspect of it up to the teacher's discretion, but the fact that these people are being commemorated after their death is a significant factor in the way that they are represented.

Worth reminding the children that originally they would have been painted in bright colours (see the **restoring colour** activity, above).

Additional suggestion: this might work as a sorting activity, if the images could be made into cards or similar and sorted according to what they depict (to go alongside the Powerpoint)

Notes on individuals:

Slide 3. Erasippos: perhaps the stick was used to symbolise old age?

Slide 4. Xanthippos: depicted holding a shoemaker's last. Note that he has a smaller figure next to him, probably a child or slave, perhaps a helper in a workshop. He may have worked as a cobbler or owned a shoe-making business.

Slide 5. Aristokles: the fact that he is depicted with a horse suggests he may have been a cavalryman and presumably wealthy. In the ancient Greek world horses were expensive to maintain and probably required ownership of scarce flat land.

Slide 6. Family group: a woman holding a baby is presumably a midwife or servant; the seated woman holds a box: possibly a jewellery box?

Slide 7. Archeades and Polemonikos: they held shields and are wearing helmets. It is quite likely that they are soldiers: it is hard to say whether they died in combat, as it was the expectation that all citizen men would fight for their city-state at some point in their life. Ownership of a shield and spear anyway says something about their wealth.

Slide 8. Chorine: the key symbolises her role as a priestess or the overseer of a temple. Religious roles are one of the few in which women were depicted in classical Athenian grave monuments (though they were widely depicted as parents). Women were closely associated with the home in ancient Greece. Depicting a woman with a key to a temple may have been thought to be appropriate given that the temple was thought of as the 'home' of the Gods.

Slide 9. Jason: it is likely that he is a doctor. The smaller figure may be a child, but this is hard to tell: does he have a beard? Is his short stature simply relative to the doctor who may have been depicted as larger-than-life to emphasise his stature and social standing? It is possible that the ribs of the smaller figure are showing and his belly is swollen owing to illness. The cupping vessel to their right was of the type that were used by doctors to extract fluids from wounds etc. Like the modern stethoscope, it was the instantly recognisable symbol of a medical practitioner.

Slide 10. Archagora: this is a family group. Between man and wife stands a slave. The figures clasp hands in a gesture which suggested an ongoing link and solidarity throughout life and death.

Slide 11. Glykilla: likely the servant seems to take something out of a box. Possibly a jewellery box, which would have symbolised wealth.

Slide 12. Synphoron: a book roll in her left hand and an ivy leaf fan in her right hand, highlighting the education and elegance.

Slide 13. Kallimachos: the spear he is handed suggest that he may have been a soldier. The hood around his shoulders might suggest he was a cadet. His slave hands the spear to him, suggesting his status.

4. KS2 Shield-making activity. [4a slides](#) + [4b worksheet](#)

The slides offer an introduction to ancient Greek warfare. The fact that ancient Greece, politically, was divided up into hundreds of different city-states meant that rivalry between the city-states often developed into warfare.

Learning objective: To learn about the Ancient Greek Warfare, as part of the KS 2 syllabus on **Ancient Greeks**.

The slides place emphasis on the equipment. Perhaps emphasise how heavy the equipment was, and that it would have made mobility very difficult. That was perhaps why they tended to fight in the phalanx formation. In Greece only men went to war. The equipment was probably expensive and would have been passed down family lines or obtained in battle as booty. But there are other areas to discuss too: what type of people went to war? Usually adult males? It is important also that there was no difference between a 'civilian' and 'military' life: soldiers were called up from the ranks of citizens and there was no 'professional' army.

There is a suggested activity to make a mini-shield using a paper plate.

An alternative might be for the teacher to make a bigger shield on which the members of the class get to write their name (like the [cadets' shield from the British Museum](#)).

Slides 10 and 11 show Athena, and may be linked to a project on Greek deities (e.g. we recognise Athena from her helmet?).

[5. KS2 Reading and Writing](#)

This activity contributes to the KS 2 History: Greeks > **Life, Achievements, Legacy Influence on the Western World**.

Learning objective: To learn about how the ancient Greeks read and wrote and to highlight differences between their styles and our styles of doing so.

An activity that might go well with this would be to make a scroll. This can easily be made out of two kitchen roll tubes and sheets of paper. Other ideas include clay tablet making: see the example on the [Ashmolean Latin Inscriptions website](#).

Things to note about the inscription **on slide 20**: no letter spaces; all upper-case letters no lowercase letters. This is usual for Greek inscriptions, but in this case, the strict grid-pattern (*stoichedon*: **slide 21**) means that word- and syllabic breaks are ignored and words run over past line-breaks.

You won't need to explain it to your audience, but: links to other languages which write right-to-left (e.g. Arabic) might be introduced here.

6. KS 1 KS 2 ancient Greek inscriptions literacy and wordsearch activity. [6a slides](#) + [6b worksheet](#)

This activity contributes to the KS 2 History: Greeks > **Life, Achievements and Influence on the Western World**. It also contributes to writing>etymology.

Learning objective: To learn about the Ancient Greek alphabet and practice using it.

The session introduces the Greek alphabet and its use; there is a wordsearch activity.

Emphasise that the Greek alphabet was an important achievement which contributes to the alphabet we use today in English. It shows that there are some similar and some different letters in Greek and English. There are also some unfamiliar ones to learn: eta (η = long 'e' sound); theta (θ = 'th'), psi (ψ = 'ps'), chi (χ = 'ch') ω (omega = long 'o' sound).

7. KS 1 KS 2 ancient Greek inscriptions 'name tag' (*pinakion*) activity

This activity contributes to the KS 2 History: Greeks > **Life, Achievements and Influence on the Western World**. **But it is relevant also to literacy as a writing-based activity.**

Learning objective: To learn about ancient Athenian democracy and the practice of selecting office-holders.

This is an activity which explains an ancient Athenian institution which made use of a lottery for selecting both jurors and political administrators (really an ancient Athenian civil service).

It suggests that the children make their own 'name tag' (*pinakion*). Perhaps the children might keep their name tags and use them in class for other activities, e.g. for selecting from volunteers or for 'clocking in and out' of an activity.

A note on the first slide explains why we have called it the 'name tag' rather than *pinakion*.

It could be used as a follow-up to the wordsearch activity, but in that case, a list of the Greek alphabet should be provided.

Note for teacher: the Greeks called these 'name-tags' *pinakia*; modern scholars tend to call them 'allotment plates'. For obvious reasons we call them 'name-tags' here.

For a more challenging task, consider asking your children to write their name in the Greek alphabet.

For background and the *pinakion* in the Manchester Museum, see the [Classics and Ancient History Research Blog](#):