A Timeless Treasure
High School Art

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Since the beginning of time, art has been part of our world through painting, drawing, sculpture, dance, theater, architecture, and more. Though the style has changed dramatically over the centuries, artists have created beautiful and interesting works of art. This course will cover the major periods in art from the fifth century BC—ancient Greece—to 1870—the years directly preceding Impressionism. Discussion of each style will include painting and sculpture, as well as architecture since buildings were created to exemplify the prominent style at the time. Students will be introduced to artists, where applicable, and will have an opportunity to practice each style on their own. Additional activities will be provided for further learning.

- Classical
- Romanesque
- Gothic
- Renaissance
- Baroque
- Rococo
- Neoclassical
- Romantic
- Realism

Note, the dates of each movement are approximate as different sources use different dates.

Parents’ Note: It is recommended students not be permitted to search on their own for artwork. Various images will be provided in this lesson. If students would like to search for more, consider searching for them and allowing them to look once you have found an image that is acceptable.

Pieta, Michelangelo, 1498-1499
What comes to mind when you think of ancient Greece? Perhaps you think of the Greek gods and the temples built to them. Maybe you think of people wearing white togas. How about the Olympics? Do you think much about the importance of art or what art looked like in ancient Greece?

Compared to modern art, ancient Greek art seems relatively simplistic. Based on the artifacts unearthed and the ruins that remain, we tend to believe Greek art was rather dull or lacked imagination. This could not be further from the truth.

Ancient Greek art has been divided into four periods: 1) Geometric, 2) Archaic, 3) Classical, and 4) Hellenistic. The classical period of ancient Greece spanned the 4th and 5th centuries BC and included pottery, sculpture, paintings, and architecture. During the Archaic period,
human figures appeared somewhat unrealistic, and the images on pottery were black on a background of red/orange. During the Classical period, Greeks felt the human form was the most important subject for its art, so humans were more realistic, Greek gods were shown in human form, and physical imperfections were never shown.

The best surviving works of art from ancient Greece are the sculptures and pottery. Paintings were created, but they were most often painted on wood and walls that no longer exist; they have decayed over the centuries.

During the early part of the Classical period, the painting of pottery was an art form. Designs and depictions were painstakingly crafted. The color scheme changed from the Archaic period of black on red (as seen above) to red on black (to the left). The colors used in pottery in ancient times were limited to black, white, red, and yellow because of the firing process that prepared the pottery for use. As the period wore on, however, less pride was taken in the painting done on pottery. It was mass produced and traded all over the known Greek world.

Sculpture also changed as the Archaic made way for the Classical. Sculptors learned better methods (lost-wax casting), and their improved skill was evident in their creations. Humans were shown in more natural poses; they were seen relaxing and fighting. Not only were statues freestanding, but they were placed in friezes and on pediments of buildings. They served a utilitarian function as public memorials, offerings to the Greek gods and goddesses for their temples, and grave markers.
A model representation of what the Parthenon might have looked like when first built. Notice the statues in the pediment and the frieze.

It was during this time that individual sculptors were identified. Phidias was responsible for the Parthenon. Praxiteles created the Statue of Zeus and Statue of Athena. Both statues were stolen by the emperor of the Byzantine Empire and taken to Constantinople where they were, unfortunately, destroyed by fire.

It would probably be safe to say that when most people think of Ancient Greece, they think of either the mythology or the Parthenon. The Parthenon sits atop the Acropolis, so it is an obvious example of the architecture, but there are, or were, many structures built in the same style. Particular elements of this style still exist today in our buildings. One of the predominant features is the columns.
In Greek architecture, there are three different types of columns—Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian.

What do you notice about these different columns? Their capitals (tops) are different—Corinthian being the most elaborate. A website is included in the activities that explains the differences between the columns further.

There is one last thing to discuss in this lesson, that is, the use of color. From what we’ve seen so far, you might be led to believe the only colors used by the ancient Greeks were black, red, white, and yellow. Statues and buildings appear white. There couldn’t possibly be any color, could there? Excavations have unearthed