

Ancient Greek Amphora Project (Estimated time: Two Class Sessions)

Materials:

1. A roll of natural-colored bulletin board paper
(brown mailing paper may also be used,
or pieces cut from grocery-weight paper bags)
2. Tempera craft paint: orange, yellow, brown and black
3. Brushes
4. Fine point and ultra-fine point black Sharpie markers
5. Template of Greek Amphora (see note)

Note on templates:

Many styles of ancient Greek urns can be found online and copied free of charge. Sixth grade educator Holly Dye chose the amphora for this project because of its historical significance and visual impact. “I shared with the class the actual size of the amphora, which would be close to a slightly younger child’s height,” Holly explains. “A vessel of this type would be filled olive oil—the liquid gold of our time. It was the top prize for winning an Olympic event.”

Instructions:

Session I—Cutting Out and Painting Templates

After cutting out the templates, mix a small amount of orange into the yellow tempera and paint half of each vase vertically—this, the lightest color, is painted first, representing the way natural light would strike the amphora.

Mix a small amount of brown into the orange tempera and apply vertically to the urn’s mid section, taking care to “feather” the darker color into the lighter orange-yellow section. Feathering is a technique that uses a dry brush (stroking left to right) to blend darker painted areas into lighter ones.

Add more brown tempera to the second mixture and paint the last vertical third of the urn, taking care to blend the darker color into the urn’s mid-section, using the feathering technique. No lines of color should be visible if the feathering technique is correctly used. The final color mixture can also be dry-brushed over random sections of the amphora to give it an aged appearance.

To diminish curling, either press the dried templates between books or iron them without steam on the unpainted side. Note that heavier paper curls less—something to keep in mind when selecting your materials.

Session II—Adding Decorative Elements

Use an ultra-fine Sharpie marker to outline the chosen design, then fill in as needed with a thicker marker. Authentic designs can be selected from online resources (for example, typing the keywords “Greek Black Figure Vase Painting” and selecting Google Images), or students can make up their own designs based on a favorite Greek myth.