Democracy. The Olympic Games. Plays of comedy and tragedy. All of these concepts and ideas originated in ancient Greece. The best evidence of the activities of the ancient Greeks, both historically and culturally, has been provided by archaeological finds of pottery.

**Geography**

Geography is very important to Greece. Greece consists of a peninsula that is very mountainous and many, many small islands. Ancient Greece was approximately the size of modern-day New York or Mississippi—about 50,000 square miles. Mountains cover approximately seventy-five percent of Greece. People generally settled in the valleys and on the small plains. With only twenty-five percent of the land usable for farming, the population of ancient Greece remained small. The mountains separated many of the settlements and eventually led to fighting between rival communities.

Greece is surrounded by water. The Aegean Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and Ionian Sea provided access to different people and cultures. The sea played an important role in the development of Greece, just as the location of water did in ancient Egypt, India, and China. The Greeks used the sea to trade many goods including timber, precious metals, and pottery. Many harbors were built along the coastline of Greece. As Greek civilization expanded, the Black Sea became part of Greek territory.

The climate also influenced Greek civilization. Temperatures ranged from the high 40s during the winter months, to the 80s during the summer. With a temperate climate, outdoor activity was popular. Public gatherings were possible year round. The mountains, sea, and climate all play an important role in the history of Greece.

**The Minoan Civilization**

The Minoan civilization lived on the island of Crete between 2700 and 1450 B.C. They are named after King Minos, a leader of the Minoan people. The largest archaeological evidence of the Minoans was discovered during the early 1900s. A palace was found in the city of Knossos. The Minoans were a Bronze Age civilization. This means that they made weapons out of bronze, rather than iron. Archaeological evidence at Knossos shows an elaborate palace. The
kings of Minoa lived in the palace and its many rooms. The palace was decorated with paintings, vases, and ivory sculpture. The Minoans were excellent sailors. They traded with many other groups around the region. Sometime around 1450 B.C., Minoan civilization ended. Scientists are not sure why, but most historians believe they were invaded by the Mycenaean.

**The Mycenaean Civilization**

The Mycenaean civilization is considered to be the first Greek city-state. It was based on the mainland of Greece, not on an island like the Minoan civilization. Mycenae was one of the city-states that was part of the Mycenaean civilizations. The civilization existed between approximately 1600 and 1100 B.C. Similar to other civilizations, Mycenaean Greeks were ruled by various kings. Each king lived in a palace that was located on the top of a hill. The palace was surrounded by farms and villages where the common people lived. The king and his family were buried in tombs known as *tholos*. Many of these still exist and provide valuable evidence about the civilization.

They Mycenaeans eventually took control of much of the area surrounding Greece. Their pottery has been found as far away as Syria, Egypt, and Italy. Many of the wall murals painted by the Mycenaeans contain images of battle. The most famous of their battles was recorded by Homer, the famous Greek poet. Homer wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* between 750 B.C. and 700 B.C. These epic poems tell the story of the Trojan War.

According to Homer, in approximately 1250 B.C., King Agamemnon led the Mycenaean Greeks in a war against Troy. Troy was a neighboring city-state. The Mycenaeans believed that the Trojan prince Paris had kidnapped Helen, Queen of Sparta and the wife of a Greek king. Led by Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, Mycenae launched a ten-year campaign against the city of Troy in order to eliminate their powerful rival.

Homer’s epics tell a great deal about life in ancient Greece. Homer wrote his poems hundreds of years after the Trojan War based on oral history. Due to the lack of writing during the Dark Ages, Homer’s poems fill a gap in Greek history. They tell about the political, economic, and social life as well as religious beliefs and practices. Homer stressed that certain ideals, or values, were important such as strength, skill, and valor. Homer’s poems stress this importance of human excellence. In the *Iliad*, Homer describes the clash between the Greeks and the Trojans. He glorifies heroic valor and physical prowess against the background of divine
intervention of human affairs. In the *Odyssey*, Homer tells of the adventures of Odysseus as he wandered back to Greece after the fall of Troy.

The city of Troy occupied a strategic position on the straits between the Black and Aegean Seas known as the Hellespont. From this vantage point, Troy could command both the sea traffic through the straits and the land caravans that traveled between Asia and Europe. For years, scholars thought Troy existed only in Homer’s epic poems. A German archaeologist believed otherwise.

In 1870, Heinrich Schliemann began excavations at the legendary site of Troy. He found several cities built on top of one another. The 7th city he excavated turned out to be Homer’s Troy.

**The Dark Ages**

Soon after the fall of Troy came the fall of the Mycenaean civilization. The Dorian Greeks (Indo-Europeans) invaded Greece and destroyed the major Mycenaean city-states. The next four centuries were known as the Greek Dark Ages. Very little is known about Greece during the Dark Ages. The population declined and writing seemed to stop. No written records exist for the 400 year period between 1150 B.C. and 750 B.C.

Many Greeks left the mainland during this period. Some settled in what is modern-day Turkey, and others settled on the various islands located around the mainland of Greece. During this time period, iron replaced bronze. This helped soldiers in battle, and farmers working the land. By having better farming tools, more land could be cultivated and more crops grown. This helped increase the population. Near the end of the Dark Ages, a new writing system was developed. The Phoenician alphabet was based on twenty-four letters. Reading and writing was now easier. It was shortly after this when Homer wrote his epic poems.

**The First Olympic Games**

The first organized Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece in 776 B.C. The Olympics were open to any freeborn Greek in the world. They were designed to honor the Greek father of the gods, Zeus. Only men could participate in the Olympic Games until 632 B.C., when games for boys were added. Women were not allowed to compete in the games.
The footrace was the original event of the Olympic Games. Overtime, the Greeks added longer footraces such as the marathon. The pentathlon and chariot races were added later. The pentathlon consisted of five events: discus, javelin, jump, running, and wrestling. Victors, or winners, received a crown made from olive leaves and were entitled to have a statue of their image created at Olympia. A victor’s success increased the fame and reputation of his home city in the Greek world and they were treated much like our modern day sports celebrities.

The Olympic Games ended in 393 B.C., when they were banned by a Roman Emperor Theodosius. He believed the games were pagan, and did not represent Christian beliefs. In 1896, Pierre de Coubertin brought the Olympic Games back to Athens, Greece. This was the first of the modern Olympic Games.

The Rise of Greek City-States

By 750 B.C., the polis, or city-state, became the center of Greek life. The term politics comes from this Greek term. Each polis surrounded a hill that had a fortified area on the top. This building was called the acropolis. The acropolis could contain temples or other building that were used by the citizens of the polis. Below the acropolis was the agora. The agora was an area that could be used for public gatherings or as a market. The largest polis during this time period was Athens. Neighboring Sparta was a military polis.

The citizens of a polis were divided into three groups: adult men were citizens with political rights, women and children were citizens but had no political rights, slaves and foreigners were not citizens. Over time, many different types of government were used in the different city-states. The earliest city-states were ruled by monarchs, or kings. Some were ruled by aristocrats. Aristocrats are wealthy residents. These aristocrats were able to overthrow the monarch and set up an oligarchy. An oligarchy is a state that is ruled by a few people.

By the 500s B.C., some city-states were ruled by tyrants. A city-state ruled by a tyrant was ruled by one person. Unlike the meaning used today, tyrants of ancient Greece were often fair and caring rulers. In time, however, Greeks began to dislike being ruled by one person. People wanted to have a say in how they were governed.

Democracy in Athens
Around 512 B.C., Cleisthenes gained control of the government in Athens. Cleisthenes is considered the founder of Athenian democracy. He established new rules for citizens. The government he created consisted of the Assembly and the Council of Five Hundred. The Assembly included all male citizens who were eighteen years of age or older. They could debate and pass laws, elect public officials, and make decisions about war and foreign policy. The Council of Five Hundred included 500 citizens who were chosen by lottery to serve for one year. Their responsibility was to prepare laws for debate by the Assembly, and carry out decisions made by the Assembly.

Cleisthenes also created a law court that included 6,000 citizens who served as judges and juries for both criminal and civil trials. Lastly, he created the Board of Generals. These generals were elected by the Assembly and were responsible for giving advice to the Assembly and leading the army and navy.
Map 1: Greek Expansion, circa 750–500 B.C.
The Oinochoai (Greek Drinking Vessel): A Brief History

900–700 B.C.

Art In History’s replica is an example of a drinking vessel from ancient Greece called an oinochoai. An oinochoai is an earthenware pitcher with one handle that was used to pour wine and water. This piece was made in the Geometric style between 900–700 B.C. Geometric style is characterized by shapes and ornamental bands that cover the entire pot. The designs include abstract patterns with occasional human and animal figures. Black bands decorate the surface and frame areas with rich and carefully drawn linear patterns.

The Geometric period of ancient Greece experienced a cultural revival through epic poetry and visual arts. During this time, Homer was writing the Iliad and the Odyssey. Artists began developing visual ways to interpret Greek myths and stories. Craftsmen also used the potter’s wheel. This improved the balance, elegance, and shape of their pots. Clay was cleaned, the soil was of very good quality, and the glaze was black and glossy.

Greek vessels had many functions. The amphora was used for holding oil or wine; the hydria was for fetching water; kraters of various form were used for mixing wine with water that mixture would be poured from an oinochoai into a cup. Greek pottery as also used during funerary ceremonies. When people died, their graves were furnished with these objects. Relativesaced upon the graves, used them as grave markers.

Geometric pottery was decorated with geometric patterns and basic figure forms. Figures were shown as silhouettes, setting the body in its simplest form. Towards the end of this period, foreign elements began to change the traditional form of the Geometric style. Increased contact with other cultures brought eastern influences to ceramic artwork. This idea caused the end of the Geometric Style and ushered in the Black Figure and Red Figure Styles. Today, Geometric style pottery like this can be found in museums and galleries around the world. More information about Geometric pottery from this time period can be found in libraries and online.
SAMPLE MOTIFS

Finished Examples

Finished Examples
Funeral Scene

Horses, Chariot, and Geometric Designs

Horses, Figure, and Diamond Designs

Horse, Flower, and Geometric Designs

Circular Patterns

Meander Pattern

Horses, Figure, and Diamond Designs

Floral and Geometric Designs
Geometric Bands and Patterns

Design and Motif Codes
A. Art in History’s decorative motif examples are characteristic of the Greek geometric style circa 900–700 B.C. The designs include linear bands, shapes, geometric patterns, and basic figures. Black bands decorate the surface and frame areas with rich linear patterns. Between these lines are other decorative motifs such as the zigzag, triangle, and meander. Figures are shown as silhouettes, setting the body in its simplest form. These motifs are representative of early Greek patterns, shapes, myths, stories, and historical accounts. Students may choose from any of the provided motifs when decorating their replica.

B. Birds, animals, and human forms were introduced in a basic geometric style. Artists also developed visual ways to interpret Greek myths, stories, poems and historical accounts.

C. Geometric ornamentation was organized in a complex system of banded decoration, which characterized the pottery of the late-Geometric period. Geometric motifs such as triangles, meanders, diamonds, checkerboards, zigzags and chevrons were manipulated into a system of bands and panels that covered the surface of the vase, emphasizing its different parts.
STEP-BY-STEP PAINTING DIRECTIONS
(students can work in small groups)

I. APPLY THE BASE COLOR
1. Shake the colored stains. Pour a small amount of FRENCH VANILLA stain onto the palette. Using the sponge, apply one coat of FRENCH VANILLA stain on the outside of the replica so that it is uniform in color. Allow a few minutes to dry.

2. When the vessel is dry, students may write their name on the bottom.

II. PENCIL SKETCH DESIGNS ON REPLICA
1. Using a pencil and paper, students should draw their designs. Next, they may begin drawing their designs onto the replica. NOTE: Remind students before they begin drawing to SKETCH LIGHTLY on their pottery. Pencil lines are easily erased as long as they are drawn lightly. It is important to understand that the pencil lines will be a map, or guide, for applying the stains. Designs should be checked for accuracy before any painting begins.

2. To draw horizontal lines at the top and bottom of the replica, students should place the tip of their pencil where they want the line to appear. While holding the replica in their other hand, slowly rotate the replica, and press down lightly with the pencil. NOTE: A rubber band may also be used as a guide.

3. Next, divide the middle section of the replica into equal parts. The lines should go from the top line to the bottom line (created in the previous step). The replica should have equal square decorating areas that will be filled with the motifs.

4. Draw the detailed designs from their sketches into the middle sections on the piece.

III. PAINT ON THE REPLICA
Remember: Use cups of water to clean paintbrushes when changing paint colors.
After students are finished sketching designs on their vessels, they are ready to paint. Pour a small amount of BURNT UMBER stain onto the palette. NOTE: To create a thin paint line, dip brush in water first then in paint. This will thin the paint resulting in a more fluid flow.

1. Use the paintbrush and the BURNT UMBER stain for painting the motifs. NOTE: before applying paint to the replica, test the amount of paint on your brush by dabbing it on a piece of paper. Fix any mistakes and remove excess water with paper towels.

2. Suggest to your students that they experiment with different ways of holding the replica as they paint. Encourage them to turn the vessel upside down, put their hands inside it, brace it against the table, or whatever is comfortable for them.

3. Use the FRENCH VANILLA stain to cover any mistakes. Apply BURNT UMBER stain as needed. Allow the replica to dry completely.