

Teachers' notes and discussion sheets: Exploring Ancient Greece and Persia

These materials have been created as a way of exploring galleries about two empires from the same age, through linked themes. They focus on selected Greek and Persian objects from the Museum: they are not prescriptive, but offer a suggested focus and ideas for activities to be used as appropriate to the language level(s), educational background, and study skills of your students. The materials are aimed at students with Entry 3 oral and literacy skills, but can be adapted for lower or higher levels.

Pre-visit preparation

Look at the maps and background information on *Ancient Greece and Persia* and discuss the value of comparing objects from these two civilisations.

Use the website <http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting.aspx> to find the main galleries on the map and plan the best way to navigate around the museum during your visit. (Which objects/galleries will students go to first, Greek or Persian? Where will you meet at the end?)

The Persian objects are in Room 52 - Level 1 (first floor).
The Greek objects are in Rooms 15, 17 and 19 - Level 0 (ground floor).

Using the suggested discussion points / sheets

There are four themes to explore and one object from each civilisation has been selected for comparison. The discussion points can be printed on A4 and folded to make an A5 booklet.

It is recommended that students work in small groups or pairs to explore one of the following themes:

- **Buildings and Power**

Why were some of the greatest buildings constructed? Were they built for practical or protective uses? How can a building record an event or person? What is the value of this? Can you describe a building in your country that relates to the history of a person? How would you decorate/design a building?

- **Gifts to honour a king or a god**

Why do people give gifts to powerful people? Can you think of an example of this in your country of origin? Can you think of another word for this type of 'gift'? Why did people honour gods in this way? Why do people give gifts now?

- **Democracy and Monarchy**

How is a monarchy different from a democracy? Can the two systems be combined? Can you think of an example of this? Can you think of any other forms of government? Which form do you think is best - monarchy or democracy - and why?

- **Nationality and dress**

Why do different nations have differing forms of dress? How do people in your country of origin dress differently from people the UK? What do you choose to wear? Why? What does national dress tell us about the people of a particular nation? In what other ways do people show their nationality or ethnic origin?

In the museum encourage students to read the information **and** look carefully at and explore the actual objects, while considering the stimulus questions in each box.

Plenary

Re-visit the Discussion points, and any other questions or comments which may arise from exploring the objects. Can the representation of history be unbiased?

Background Information

Ancient Greece and Persia - Sixth to Fourth centuries BC

	Greece	Persia
Size	Greek states covered the area of modern day Greece and parts of western Turkey	Persia stretched from Turkey to India
Population (estimated)	10-13 million	30-40 million
Leadership	the Greek States were individually ruled either as democracies or monarchies	Persia was a monarchy
Languages	Greek	'Persian' with local native languages (such as Median)
Regional importance	The Greeks controlled the eastern Mediterranean	Persia controlled Asia Minor, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf
Strengths/weaknesses	The Greek states often warred with each other and were over-run by Alexander of Macedon in the 4th Century BC	Persia was constantly in conflict with Greece and her other neighbours, but survived as an entity into the modern world.

Ancient Greece and Persia

The ancient civilisations of Greece and Persia were neighbours.....



Greece was in the west....



..... Persia was in the east.

What are the modern names of the countries that were part of these ancient places? Are any of the names the same?

There were wars between the two countries during the 6th to 4th Centuries BC.

The Greeks won these wars and they destroyed much of the Persian civilisation.

The Greeks called the Persians 'barbarians' (because they thought the Persians said 'bar-bar-bar' when they spoke).

History in Europe is mainly taught from the Greek perspective, not from the Persian point of view.

Does this make a difference? Can history be unbiased?

Buildings and Power The Nereid Monument –Greece - Room 17

pediment column



Why is this building called the Nereid Monument?

Where is it from?

What kind of building is it, and for what purpose?

Look carefully – what do the decorations show?

The Nereid Monument is a tomb, which looks like a temple. It was built for Arbinas (also spelled Erbinna), ruler of Xanthos in the 4th Century BC. He is shown with his family in the pediment. It is decorated with sculptures and has tall Ionic columns. There are statues of Nereids, sea-nymphs, between the columns. It is from Xanthos, south-west Turkey, which was part of ancient Greece.

Why are museums and monuments built to look like Ancient Greek temples?

Buildings and Power King Darius's Palace – ancient Persia - Room 52



What building is this object from?

Where is it from?

What kind of building is it, and for what purpose?

What do the decorations show?

Find more objects from other palaces.

This painting of a royal guard on glazed bricks is from the palace of Darius I King of Persia, in the city of Susa in south-west Iran. It dates from the late 6th century BC.

It shows one of eighteen guards, perhaps the 'Immortals' who made up the king's personal bodyguard.

Most of the ancient buildings were highly coloured like this example. What difference does colour make to the way we view ancient buildings now?

Gifts to honour a king or a god Persian jewellery - Room 52



Where and when was the bracelet made?

Why was it made?

Who made it? Who wore it?

Why are there two griffins on the bracelet?

This gold bracelet has two griffin heads, and the hollow spaces on the bracelets were filled with glass or semi-precious stones.

It is from modern Tadjikistan (north of Afghanistan), which was part of the ancient Persian Empire. It dates from the 5th-4th Centuries BC. There were many other bracelets like this worn by rich Persian people at that time.

Bracelets like this one were given as a form of tax to the Persian King at his palace in the capital city of Persepolis.

What other gold objects can you see in this gallery?
How is gold used as a symbol of power and wealth?

Gifts to honour a king or a god Greek sculpture - Room 18

The Acropolis



What story does the whole frieze tell?

Why was the Parthenon decorated with these images?

What colours do you think the frieze was originally?

Who is the most important figure in the frieze?

This sculpture is part of a 'frieze' from Parthenon, a temple to the goddess Athena, on the Acropolis at Athens. It dates from 5th Century BC. It was built to celebrate the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks.

On the left a bearded priest and a child offer a sacred folded cloth to the goddess Athena, who is sitting on the right,. The holy cloth has been carried in a procession though the streets of Athens. The procession was part of a religious festival held in Athens every four years.

Why did the Athenians make a special cloth to give their goddess Athena as a gift?

Democracy and Monarchy

Democracy is a Greek word meaning 'rule by the people'. The first Democracy in the world was in Athens more than two thousand five hundred years ago: but only men could vote. This was at the time of the Athenian leader Perikles.

'Democracy' Room 15 - Case 1 – 4th Century BC



What is Athena doing?

Do you think Odysseus or Ajax tried to cheat?

Why do you think the painter wanted to show this scene?

This painting shows the story of soldiers voting for Odysseus or Ajax to receive the arms of the dead Achilles. The goddess Athena checks that the voting is fair. Odysseus and Ajax were heroes from the Trojan War (14th Century BC) – nearly one thousand years before the vase was made.

Statue of Perikles - Room 15 - 5th Century BC



Can you find Perikles's name in Greek on the statue?

Why did Perikles need to be a good public speaker?

Perikles was a citizen and a soldier. He made speeches to the Assembly of all the men citizens of Athens and they were able to decide things by voting.

Democracy and Monarchy

Monarchy comes from the Greek meaning "rule by one" and it refers to any system where political power is concentrated in the hands of one person, whether that person is called a king, prince, emperor, or president.

The Cyrus Cylinder - Room 52



Why did King Cyrus have this cylinder made?

Why is it in the form of a **cylinder**?

Why has the cylinder been called a charter of human rights'?

This clay cylinder is from Babylon - modern Iraq - and dates from the 6th Century BC.

The writing on the cylinder tells us how the Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylon. It also explains how King Cyrus made life better for the people of Babylon, by giving back their religious statues, repairing their temples and sending the people back to their own homes. Some of these people were the Jews from Palestine.

This cylinder has sometimes been described as the 'first charter of human rights'.

Nationality and dress

Sculpture from the Parthenon, Athens -Room 18



Who is shown as half man half animal?

How are these sculptures Greek propaganda?

Do you think the sculpture was originally just one colour?

This sculpture from the Parthenon in Athens dates from the 5th Century BC. It shows a Lapith - a mythical Greek warrior - fighting a Centaur - a half man half horse creature.

The sculptures show the Greek view of the war with Persia: the Lapiths represent the 'civilised' human Greeks, and the Centaurs represent the 'barbarian' foreign Persians. The sculptures celebrate the recent Greek victory over the Persians.

Why do you think these sculptures are considered to be some of the most beautiful Greek works of art?

For more information listen to the podcast
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/9DWj8vP7RSmAqiuIbW4X8w>

Nationality and dress

Persian military clothing - Room 52



What do you think the man is holding in his hand?

Where is he from?

How do we know this from his clothes?

How do we know he is also Persian?

This Wall decoration is from Persepolis, south-west Iran, and it dates from the 4th Century BC.

It shows a servant of the King of Persia who is from Media – a part of the Persian Empire. He is wearing 'Median' clothes - a cap with ear-flaps, a tunic down to the knee, and tight trousers. These clothes are different from the usual Persian costume, but his sword is a typical Persian short sword.

What other nationalities can you find in the gallery?

Why decorate the palace with images of people from different places?