

A Level Classical Civilisation

An A level exploring ancient Greece and Rome through literature, mythology, philosophy and politics. You will develop your critical thinking skills through learning about themes such as heroism, war, justice, love, home-coming and the role of the gods, as well as gaining an understanding of how literature and culture reflect the values and issues of ancient society.



You will analyse information, pursue your interest in history and different cultures, develop problem-solving skills and debate a range of perspectives in response to a wide range of sources from the ancient world.

The following information and tasks are designed to introduce you to ancient Greek society, culture and religion. These tasks will provide the foundation to studying the ancient world at A level.

Ancient Athenian society:

Religion, mythology and women

... men grappled with exactly the same issues that we do: life, death, gods, sex, love, family, children, education, the nature of the world, our origins and development, the past, money, health, status, other cultures, friendship, power, patriotism, politics, law, crime, justice, empire, war.

Peter Jones on life in Ancient Greece, 'Taking the Long View'



Watch this excellent, detailed (and fast paced!) overview of ancient Greece in 18 minutes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFRxmi4uCGo>

Listen carefully to the information on the video and answer the following questions in as much detail as possible:

1. Describe the culture and society of the Cretans 3000 years ago.
2. Who was Heinrich Schliemann and what did his excavations of Mycenae reveal?
3. Describe the Greek Dark Ages and the Bard/poet, Homer.
4. What can we learn about Mycenaean society from Homer's stories?
5. Why was there no such thing as the country/nation of 'Greece'?
6. Describe the society+people of Sparta and Athens
7. What did a Greek tyrant do?
8. Describe ancient democracy and explain why it's different to modern day democracy?
9. Who was the first Historian?
10. Who were Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes?

Religion and mythology:

In ancient Greece, religion was an extremely important aspect of daily life. The exciting mythological stories you might know (**Perseus and Medusa; Hades and Persephone, Labours of Heracles**, for example) involved the figures of Olympian gods, whom the Greeks believed were real.

A desire to stay on the good side of these gods, receive support from them and avoid punishment of yourself, your family or city, compelled the ancient Greeks to worship the Olympian gods daily, in many different ways.

How do we know how the ancient Greeks worshipped their gods?

Well, we have ancient sources which have survived for thousands of years in the

forms of ancient artefacts, literature, official city records and buildings, to name just a few types of evidence.

Worship through animal sacrifice:



Sacrifice of a lamb from a panel. From city of Corinth, 540–530 BC

The quotes below come from a poem composed almost 2,800 years ago, which mention sacrificing animals and animal parts to the gods:

The good-hearted swineherd remembered the gods, and threw bristles from the white-tusked boar's head into the fire as a first offering....

Eumaeus, the swineherd, you replied: 'Eat, my pious guest, and enjoy whatever is here. The god it is who gives us one thing, and holds back another, since he has the power to do as he wishes.' With this, he offered the first portion to the eternal gods....

Homer, The Odyssey, translated by A.Kline

Click on these two links and read the information about worship in ancient Greece:

<https://greece.mrdonn.org/worship.html> and <http://www.religionfacts.com/greek-religion/practices>

In your own words, use the information you have read to sum up (in 4 or 5 bullet points) how the Greeks worshipped the gods in each of the following different ways:

Temples:

Votives:

Sacred animals:

Festivals:

The Olympian Gods

Watch this brief description of the ancient Greek pantheon (group of gods):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ri-AoKE42rw>

Below are names and symbols of 7 ancient Greek gods and goddesses. Research each one, noting down the following information:

- Who are their parents? How were they born? (Some gods have very bizarre birth stories!)
- What special skills or areas of daily Greek life was each one in charge of?
- Find out at least two interesting mythological stories about each of the 7 figures below and write down what you have found out, writing no more than 2 pages of lined paper, for all 7 of the gods and goddesses.



The Greek god Hades is not usually included in lists of the Olympian gods-why?

Click on this link to discover more about Hades:

<https://www.ancient.eu/Hades/>

Add any information you discover about Hades to your sheet of A4 lined paper on the 7 gods and goddesses.

Click on the link below to discover one of Hades most famous myths-The Abduction of Persephone and the origin story of why we have 4 seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter).

<https://www.ancient.eu/persephone/>



Gods and mythological women:

In ancient Athens (the city from which most of the surviving evidence about the ancient Greeks comes from), women had no rights at all, almost no freedom and were legally the property of their father (or nearest male relative), before becoming the property of their husband.

Women had no role in the **polis** (public city life) and therefore, were not involved in the running of the city and its politics. A woman's role completely revolved around the **oikos** (the household) where their domestic duties would include running the household slaves, teaching their daughters how to be good women/wives and weaving.

Women were viewed with suspicion by men (which may explain the tight control they were kept under!) and below are a few extracts from ancient sources, describing women:

‘... Woman is a violent and uncontrolled animal, and it is useless to let go the reins and then expect her not to kick over the traces. You must keep her on a tight rein...’
(*Hippolytus* by Euripides)

‘You surely don’t suppose that it is sexual desire alone which leads men to beget children, when the streets and the brothels afford ample opportunities for gratifying that. It is clear that we consider what sort of women would give us the best child, and then unite with them to produce children’.

(Xenophon)

‘Courtesans we have for pleasure and concubines to satisfy our daily bodily needs, but wives to produce true- born children and to be trustworthy guardians of the household.’
(Xenophon)

‘Plainly we look for wives who will produce the best children for us, and marry them to raise a family. The husband supports the wife who is to share in the production of his family’

(Socrates)

‘Surely of all creatures that have life and will, we women are the most wretched. When for an extravagant sum, we have bought a husband, we must then accept him as possessor of our body.

This is to aggravate wrong with worse wrong. Then the great question: will the man we get be bad or good? For women, divorce is not respectable; to repel the man, not possible.

(*Medea* by Euripides)

What impressions do these sources give us about women in ancient Greece?

What different types of women can you see in these sources?



A vase depicting women weaving- 560-550BC

Greek mythology often depicts women as victims and/or villains. The sufferings they undergo (as well as their punishments and tragic fates) would have served as moral tales about the dangers of improper behaviour.

The myth of Medusa

Below are 3 versions of the myth of Medusa. Ancient mythology was flexible in the plots and endings, depending on the intended audience.

Version 3 of Medusa's tale is the traditional myth and a warning before you watch the summary-it involves difficult and upsetting subject matter, namely rape and victim blaming.

However, this myth is an excellent example of the way the ancient Greeks viewed not only women, but the gods as well and the dangers associated with upsetting the gods.

Read version 1 and 2, then watch version 3 and answer the questions on the next page.

Version 1:

Medusa was a monster, one of the Gorgon sisters and daughter of Phorkys and Keto, the children of the Earth and Ocean. She had the face of an ugly woman with snakes instead of hair; anyone who looked into her eyes was immediately turned to stone. Her sisters were Sthenno and Euryale, but Medusa was the only mortal of the three.

She was originally a golden-haired, fair maiden, who, as a priestess of Athena, was devoted to a life of celibacy; however, after being wooed by Poseidon and falling for him, she forgot her vows and married him. For this offence, she was punished by the goddess in a most terrible manner. Each wavy lock of the beautiful hair that had charmed her husband was changed into a venomous snake; her once gentle, love-inspiring eyes turned into blood-shot, furious orbs, which excited fear and disgust in the mind of the onlooker; whilst her former rosy hue and milk-white skin assumed a loathsome greenish tinge.

Seeing herself transformed into such a repulsive creature, Medusa fled her home, never to return. Wandering about, abhorred, dreaded, and shunned by the rest of the world, she turned into a character worthy of her outer appearance. In her despair, she fled to Africa, where, while wandering restlessly from place to place, young snakes dropped from her hair; that is how, according to the ancient Greeks, Africa became a hotbed of venomous reptiles. With the curse of Athena upon her, she turned into stone whomever she gazed upon, till at last, after a life of nameless misery, deliverance came to her in the shape of death, at the hands of Perseus.

<http://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Creatures/Medusa/medusa.html>

Version 2:

In Greek mythology, a gorgon is a female monster (also known as a Gorgo.) Medusa was the most famous gorgon. She was a beautiful, young women with magnificent long, silky hair. Guys even lined up to date her. One day, while she was in Athena's temple, she fooled around with Poseidon (Neptune,) which of course angered Athena. Athena was so mad she changed Medusa's beautiful hair into hissing serpents and made her into a horrible looking gorgon. She was so horrible that any living thing that looked upon her would turn to stone. <http://www.kidzworld.com/article/1792-medusa>

Version 3:

PART 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aln9nhJg98>

PART 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTbnYxPIVoo>

Questions to answer:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the 3 versions of the myth?
2. What is the point of the Medusa myth? What messages and lessons do you think the ancient Greeks may have learned from this myth?
3. What does this myth tell us about how women were viewed in ancient Greece?
4. What impressions are we given of the Olympian gods Poseidon and Athena?

The myth of Medea

Another very famous mythological woman is Medea, a non-Greek witch, who helped the hero Jason on a quest to claim the Golden Fleece.

Click on this link to learn about Medea:

<https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Mortals/Medea/medea.html>

The myth of Medea is a good example of the flexible nature of mythology, where poets could change details to suit their own purpose. The traditional version of the myth was that Medea's children were killed by the townspeople of Corinth in revenge for the murder of their King.

However, in the famous ancient Greek Tragic play *Medea*, the playwright Euripides changed the ending so that Medea kills her own children in revenge against her husband leaving her for another woman.

In most versions of the myth after Euripides' play, Medea kills her own children and is very much a complex villain.



An ancient Greek vase depicting Medea's dead children, a mourning slave and Medea's escape from the city of Corinth.

Concepts of masculinity and heroism



The main responsibilities of men in ancient Athens were as follows:

- Ensure he maintains his household (**oikos**) and that his wife carries out her duties in running the house.
- Provide a dowry for any daughters
- Act as guardian for any of his brother's daughters if their father died
- Ensure he marries and has a legitimate child—preferably a male who would inherit his property
- See that any unwanted children born into the oikos were exposed (left to die)
- Ensure his family observe any religious rituals/ceremonies/festivals
- Take an active part in the running of the city (**polis**)

Athens was just one city in ancient Greece and although most of our evidence comes from this city, we still have sources which inform us about life in other cities.

Sparta

Click on the link below to watch a documentary on Sparta, which was a far more military focused society than Athens, which was more well known for its arts and culture.

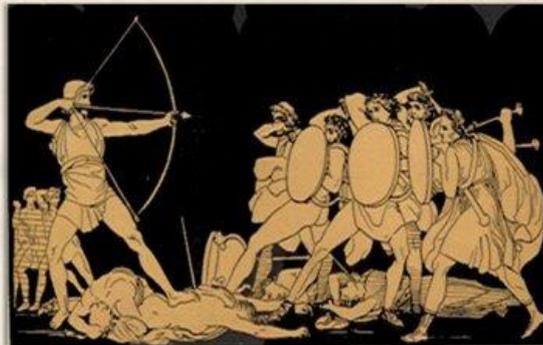
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piAEzVOqHHU>



Mythology gives us a very good indication of what were considered positive and negative characteristics in strong, brave men, specifically heroes and leaders.

The Ideals of the Heroic Age

- In ancient Greece, men were judged by *arete*, not by birth and could achieve a higher social status by thoughts and deeds.
- Three major “sins” in Greece were:
 1. Blasphemy against or disrespect towards the gods
 2. Treachery or betrayal of a host or guest
 3. Shedding or spilling the blood of relatives



Greek Ideal – The Hero

- **Arete** – highest virtue
 - Manliness, courage & excellence
 - Man of action
 - Pursuit of life of glory
 - Seize power & glory for oneself
- Images and depictions found everywhere in Greek art, literature and mythology
 - Herakles, Theseus, Odysseus



What makes a Greek hero?

Use the following resources to find out about the mythological Greek heroes, Herakles, Theseus and Achilles.

Herakles/Heracles:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0qkSTvRQa8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hezM-oHIUTM>

https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/The_Myths/Labours_of_Heracles/labours_of_heracles.html

Theseus:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theseus>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xP3x-Yy_G2g

Achilles:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAW9I5DXbrk>

<https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/achilles>

In your own words, write a paragraph explaining why these three figures were considered such great heroes. Consider their births/origins, relatives and the deeds they achieved throughout their lives.

Theatre, mythology, worship, religious cults and art

*Tragedy is a blessed art in every way, since its plots are well known to the audience before anyone begins to speak - **a poet need only remind**. I have just to say 'Oedipus' and they know all the rest: father, Laius; mother Jocasta; their sons and daughters; what he will suffer; what he has done. **Comic poet Antiphanes, in 330 BCE***

Culture and the Arts: Greek Theatre

Greek Theatre was an annual event in Athens, involving the performance of tragic and comic plays to entertain the audience and to worship the god of Theatre-Dionysus.

Our first unit in Classical Civilisation A level, will focus on Greek Theatre, ancient Athenian society, politics and war with Sparta, as well as some of the most famous Greek myths.

To prepare for this, you should complete the following tasks:

Watch these documentaries and short clips:

- An introduction to Greek Theatre: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSRLK7SogvE>
- An introduction to Greek Tragedy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSr6mP-zxUc>
- Performance and Historical Context for Greek Tragedy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrFeODLxSoc>
- Greek Tragedy and Suffering: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUqgZKGOQvM>
- Euripidean Tragedy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdLJ9JybBFs>
- Greek Tragic Chorus https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ7N6lj_1u0
- Why is Aristophanes called "The Father of Comedy"? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arQ6U3ev5ic>

Click on this link and read the information: https://www.ancient.eu/Greek_Theatre/

Make sure you understand what Greek Tragedy and Greek Comedy were (characteristics of each genre/types of plays performed) and the origins of the genres.