

# Art and Architecture in Ancient Greece

By USHistory.org, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.01.17

Word Count **571**

Level **680L**



Terracotta bowl from 520–510 B.C. The scene shows the struggle between the hero Herakles and the god Apollo. Photo by: Metropolitan Museum of Art

The art of ancient Greece is famous for its beauty. It also tells us what Greece was like thousands of years ago.

Much of Greek art was meant to honor the gods. However, ancient Greek art also celebrated human beings. The gods were usually shown as humans.

Greek artwork was often put in public spaces so everyone could see it. It could be seen in many parts of the city. Greek citizens were very proud of their art.

Most cities had a special area for temples or palaces. This area was called the acropolis, and was usually on top of a hill. Many kinds of important events happened there.

## The Parthenon's amazing details

In the city of Athens, important temples were built on the acropolis. The most beautiful one might be the Parthenon.

The Parthenon was built to honor Athena. She is the Greek goddess of wisdom, and Athens was named after her.



The Parthenon has huge columns that show how powerful the Greeks were. It also has many smaller details that are hard to notice.

For example, each column is a bit wider in the middle than at the bottom and top. The columns at the corners of the temple are also closer to each other. In the middle, they are farther apart.

These details may seem like mistakes. The builders built it this way on purpose, though. The changes actually made the columns look straighter. They made the building look taller.

Today, the Parthenon does not look so majestic. In the 1600s, Turkish invaders used it to store bullets and cannon shells. One day, the temple blew up. It was left with no roof and was almost destroyed.

## **Naked human statues**

Ancient Greek statues were mostly made of either stone or wood. Very few of them survive today.

Most Greek statues were statues of human beings. Often, they had no clothes on. For the Greeks, the naked human body was beautiful.

Early Greek statues, called kouros, were not realistic. The figures were stiff and stood up very straight.

Over time, Greek statues took on a more natural, relaxed look. Figures stood with hips pushed to one side. Knees and arms were slightly bent, and the head was turned to one side.

## Statues of athletes



Other statues showed humans in action, especially athletes doing sports. A good example is the "Discus Thrower," by Myron. The discus was a flat, round disk, like a frisbee. At sports games, the Greeks saw who could throw it the farthest.



A statue of Artemis the huntress is another famous example. Known as "Diana of Versailles," it shows the goddess of the hunt reaching for an arrow.

The "Venus de Milo" is one of the most famous Greek statues. It was made 2,200 years ago, most likely by Praxiteles. The statue shows what features Greeks found most beautiful.

The ancient Greeks also painted. Very few of these paintings still exist, but what little does exist can mostly be found on ceramic pottery.

There were two major ways the ancient Greeks painted on pottery. One way painted red figures on a black background. The other way had black figures painted on a red background. Many of the pictures are taken from history or from stories of the gods.

## Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4] that explains where people in ancient Greece could view art?
- 2 Which sentence from the section "The Parthenon's amazing details" BEST helps the reader understand how the Parthenon looks?
  - (A) In the city of Athens, important temples were built on the acropolis.
  - (B) The Parthenon was built to honor Athena.
  - (C) The Parthenon has huge columns that show how powerful the Greeks were.
  - (D) The builders built it this way on purpose, though.
- 3 Read the paragraph from the section "The Parthenon's amazing details."

*Today, the Parthenon does not look so majestic. In the 1600s, Turkish invaders used it to store bullets and cannon shells. One day, the temple blew up. It was left with no roof and was almost destroyed.*

Which answer choice BEST describes the structure of this paragraph?

- (A) chronology
  - (B) cause and effect
  - (C) problem and solution
  - (D) comparison
- 4 Which selection from the article has a comparison text structure?
  - (A) The art of ancient Greece is famous for its beauty. It also tells us what Greece was like thousands of years ago.
  - (B) The columns at the corners of the temple are also closer to each other. In the middle, they are farther apart.
  - (C) Ancient Greek statues were mostly made of either stone or wood. Very few of them survive today.
  - (D) Early Greek statues, called kouros, were not realistic. The figures were stiff and stood up very straight.