



Educational Program: Contests: Action and Spectacle

*Material for optional student activities
before and after a visit to the Acropolis
Museum.*

During your school group's visit to the Acropolis Museum, the students will come into contact with the concept of the contest in ancient times and today, and learn about ways of exploring this, using the Museum's artefacts as a starting point.

Some brief preparation with the students before their visit to the Museum can make the experience of this program even more fruitful.

After observing the below image of an exhibit at the Museum and learning about it from the text below, which is intended for the teacher, show the image to your students. Encourage them to observe it very carefully a number of times. Initiate a discussion about it based on the questions for students that follow.

After your visit to the Museum you can suggest to your students that they continue their critical and creative exploration of the same subject using the material below, thus reinforcing the benefits of the experience offered by this program.

Material for optional preparation in class:

- Look at the image of the exhibit (or view the exhibit on the Museum's website using the zoom function):

<http://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/sites/default/files/pygmaxia.jpg>



- Questions for the students:

Observe the image carefully.

- * Can you describe what is depicted, in detail?
- * What do you think each figure is doing?
- * Does the image remind you of any activities taking place today?
- * If so, in what aspects do you think they differ?

The artefact shown in the image is a fragment of a decorated terracotta vase found on the Acropolis, in the sanctuary of the goddess Athena.

- * Can you guess why it got there?

- Material for the teacher:

Fragment of an Attic vase, Acropolis Museum inv. no. NM Acropolis collection 1054

Found: 1886, east of the Parthenon.

Date: 530-500 BC.

Dimensions: Maximum preserved height 13.3 cm.

Form: The fragment is from an amphora of Panathenaic shape.

Technique: Black-figure technique, as the figures are rendered in black colour (glaze) with incised details, while the background is left in the orange colour of Attic clay.

Description of decoration: The scene on the side that was preserved is set inside a reserved panel (*metope*) around which the vessel is covered in black glaze. Three figures are visible from left to right. A bearded man, dressed in an oblique mantle (*himation*), faces right. Two men, their upper bodies naked, wear protective straps (*himantes*) on their hands and are engaged in a boxing match (*pygmachia* or *pygme*). The one on the left is definitely bearded.

Initial use: The sport of boxing which is depicted on this vase, is associated with the Great Panathenaic games, the greatest festival held by the ancient Athenians in honour of the goddess Athena. In 566 BC the tyrant of Athens Peisistratus reorganized the, until then, local Panathenaic festival, turning it into a large-scale festival. The Great Panathenaia was held every four years. The program of the festival included, among others, athletic, equestrian, musical and rhapsodic competitions. The sport of boxing, was considered a “heavy” event and part of the gymnastic (“naked”) contests, along with *stadion* (running race), wrestling, boxing, *pankration*, and pentathlon (*stadion*, discus throw, long jump, javelin throw and wrestling)

Athletes at the games were divided into three age groups, boys, beardless youth and men. The fact that at least one of the two athletes depicted on the vase has a beard probably places them in the competitive class of men.

The athlete on the right appears to be making a movement raising the fingers of his left hand in the gesture of surrender (*apagoreuein*), a feature of boxing matches. With this gesture the athlete indicates that he is unable to continue further and requests that the match come to an end.

Besides the athletes who participated in the various events, the outcome of each match was watched by spectators, judges and so on. The clothed man on the vessel could be a spectator, referee or judge of the contest.

For prizes, the winners of the nude and equestrian contests at the Great Panathenaia were awarded special vases, Panathenaic amphorae, filled with the sacred oil of the goddess Athena’s olive trees. These vases can be recognized by the black-figure technique, and by their form and dimensions, as well as the scenes they depicted. Goddess Athena was always depicted on the front side as *Promachos*, as warrior ready for battle, bearing helmet, spear and shield, standing between two Doric columns, next to one of which the inscription ΤΩΝ ΑΘΕΝΕΘΕΝ ΑΘΛΩΝ (from the games at Athens) was painted. On the reverse of the vase was depicted the event for which it was intended. The dimensions of the vases were specific: 60-70 cm in height with a maximum diameter of 35-40 cm. It is estimated that they would have held 35-40 kilos of oil. Each winner could receive from 30 to 140 such vessels as his prize.

This particular vessel is influenced by the Panathenaic amphorae – the official prize vases – in terms of shape, technique and decoration. It differs from these, however, in its dimensions, which would indicate that it had a different use. It is possible that such vases served as souvenirs of Athens' glorious celebration and were commissioned by the winners, their relatives and so on. We do not know who brought this particular vase to the sanctuary of Athena. It was probably presented as an offering to a god of the Acropolis. It may have even been used at symposia held in the sanctuary.

Selective bibliography:

P. Valavanis (trans. David Hardy), *Games and Sanctuaries in Ancient Greece: Olympia, Delphi, Isthmia, Nemea, Athens*, Los Angeles 2004.

B. Graef, E. Langlotz, *Die antiken Vasen von der Akropolis zu Athen*, Berlin 1925.

J. Neils, (ed.), *Goddess and Polis. The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens*. Princeton, New Jersey 1992.

J. Neils, (ed.), *Worshipping Athena: Panathenaia and Parthenon*, London 1996

D. Pandermalis, a.o., *Acropolis Museum, guide* (Athens 2016) 217-221

Optional material to take further advantage of the program experience

- Suggestion for the students:

After your experience at the Acropolis Museum:

- * Choose a sport that interests you and focus on an event of its kind, held as part of an official competition.
- * Try not to experience it in the usual roles of e.g. athletes, judges, or spectators, but as researchers. You can divide up into research teams.
- * Before you focus on the competition, gather as much information as you can about it (e.g. the venue where the event is held, the rules of the sport, its promotion, etc.) from various sources that refer to it (e.g. the media, accounts by other people and their behaviour, etc.)
- * At the venue where the event is held, observe – as a researcher – the other roles (athletes, referees, spectators, etc.) and the environment of the event.
- * Try to gather information about the progress of this event, and the emotions and behaviour of all the people at the venue, before, during, and after the end of the contest.
- * Finally, what role does this particular event play in people's lives?

We would be very pleased if you shared the results of your activities with us at: learning@theacropolismuseum.gr/en