

Myth in Silhouette

Grades

Grade 3; Grade 4; Grade 6.

Subjects

Visual Arts; History and Social Science

Introduction to the Theme

The events that comprised the Trojan War, in approximately 1200 BCE, were passed down from generation to generation in oral tradition. Over the centuries details may have changed, but in the eighth century BCE, Homer composed the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the story of the Trojan War, considered to be the earliest and greatest works of Greek literature. The *Iliad* recounts the story of Paris' abduction of the beautiful Helen from her husband Menelaus, of Sparta. Paris and Helen retreated to Troy with the army of Greece in pursuit. The army was made up of former suitors of Helen who had pledged to her husband to defend her honor, many of whom were the greatest heroes of Greek myth. The most detailed and most familiar version of the Trojan Horse story is in Virgil's *Aeneid*. There is no concrete evidence of the existence of the Trojan Horse that is said to have been the deciding factor in the outcome of the war, but it has been depicted repeatedly in art over the ensuing millennia.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Read passages from the *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* or *Bulfinch's Mythology* concerning the story of the Trojan War and the horse that defeated the Trojans.
- Examine examples of black-figure vessels and interpret the scenes on them.
- Write a narrative about a historic or mythical event.
- Create a scratchboard drawing of a moment in their narrative resembling the black-figure technique seen in the Greek ceramic examples.

Vocabulary

Review the following terms with students.

- Myth – Comes from the Greek word *mythos* which means “fable” or “legend.”
- Mythology – a collection of myths.
- Epic – a lengthy narrative poem, usually about a serious subject, heroic deeds and events important to a culture or nation.
- Black-figure pottery – a style of ancient Greek pottery painting in which the decoration appears as black silhouettes on a red background.
- Silhouette – a picture (as a drawing or cutout) of the outline of an object filled in with a solid usually black color.

Lesson Steps

Narrative

1. Begin by looking at examples of Greek black-figure vessels.
2. Read about the Trojan War and its heroes (greekmythology.com, *Bulfinch's Mythology*, the *Odyssey* or *Aeneid*).
 - a. Discuss the role of heroes in an epic tale.
 - b. Identify the most important events in the story.
 - c. Which parts of the story are illustrated on the ceramic examples? Are they the same as the ones the students chose?
3. Read other myths from the ancient Greeks. Discuss the qualities of an epic story and whether or not students think these events actually occurred. Does

exaggeration enhance a story? Students will write a narrative of their own based on a myth or a historic event. Possible tales to read are:

- a. Pandora's Box
- b. The Golden Fleece
- c. Pygmalion
- d. Narcissus

Materials

- Scratchboards or
- Heavy construction paper
- Crayons, red or terracotta colors
- Black tempera paint
- Wooden stylus
- Toothpicks or paperclips

Activity

1. Students select a scene from the story they wrote and illustrate it on the scratchboard in the style of the black-figure vases.
2. Scratchboard can be purchased or it can be made for this project. Take a sheet of heavy construction paper and cover the entire sheet heavily with red or terracotta crayon. Then, take a large brush and paint the entire sheet with black tempera paint.
3. Once the paint is dry, students can then begin to draw the scene selected from the myth they read. Discuss how they can use line and pattern, and positive and negative space in their designs. Students should create a design with the main figures silhouetted in black against the colored ground.
4. Once they have decided on a design, let students begin by scratching their designs through the black tempera with the stylus, toothpick or straightened paperclip.
5. When the class is finished, discuss why they chose the scene they drew on their "vase." How are the drawings different or similar to the examples seen at the beginning of the lesson.

Assessment

Students are assessed on the completion of the assignment and their ability to incorporate the black-figure or silhouette style. They are assessed on their ability to use the new vocabulary words introduced in this lesson in talking about their work.

Standards

Historical and Cultural Context Content Standards for California Public Schools

- **Grade Six**

6.4 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious and social structures of the early civilizations of ancient Greece.

4. Explain the significance of Greek mythology to the everyday life of people in the region and how Greek literature continues to permeate our literature and language today, drawing from Greek mythology and epics, such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and from *Aesop's Fables*.

Visual Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools

- **Grade Three**

Historical and Cultural Context

3.1 Compare and contrast selected works of art and describe them using appropriate vocabulary of art.

Connections, Relationships, Applications

5.2 Write a poem or story inspired by their own works of art.

5.3 Look at images in figurative works of art and predict what might happen next, telling what clues in the work support their ideas.

- **Grade Four**

Artistic Perception

1.2 Describe how negative shapes/forms and positive shapes/forms are used in a chosen work of art.

Creative Expression

2.5 Use accurate proportions to create an expressive portrait or a figure drawing or painting.

2.6 Use the interaction between positive and negative space expressively in a work of art.

2.7 Use contrast (light and dark) expressively in an original work of art.



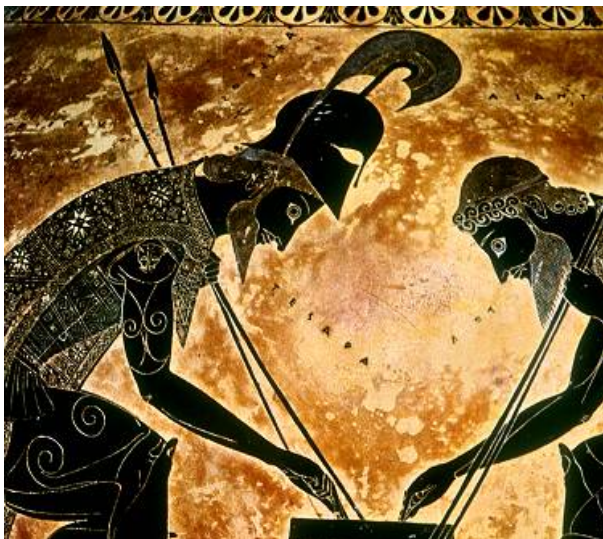
1. Amphora, later 6th c. BC;

Greek

Terracotta; Height: 61cm.

Vatican City **Museum**

Ajax and Achilles, seated on low stools, lean forward playing a board game that the helmeted Achilles is winning: tessara (four) is written beside his head, tria (three) by Ajax's.



2. Detail of Ajax and Achilles



3. Kylix, c. 540–530 B.C.; black-figure
Greek

Terracotta; Height: 4 7/8 in. (12.4 cm)

Metropolitan Museum of Art

The artist depicts an episode recounted by Homer in great detail in the thirteenth book of the *Iliad*. Seeing the Greeks hard-pressed and discouraged, Poseidon ordered his chariot prepared so that he could ride to their aid. Poseidon visits the Greek camp at Troy. With trident in hand, he greets the two Ajaxes—Ajax the son of Oileos, and Ajax the son of Telamon.