

Make Art Like the Ancient Greeks: Black-Figure Vase Painting

When is a vase just a vase and when is it art? Can it ever be both? In ancient Greece, vases were not only utilitarian but they were also visual masterpieces. Decorating a vase in the style of the ancient Greek artists isn't difficult at all; all you need are a few basic materials and your imagination. So grab your supplies, find a space to work, and get ready to go back in time!

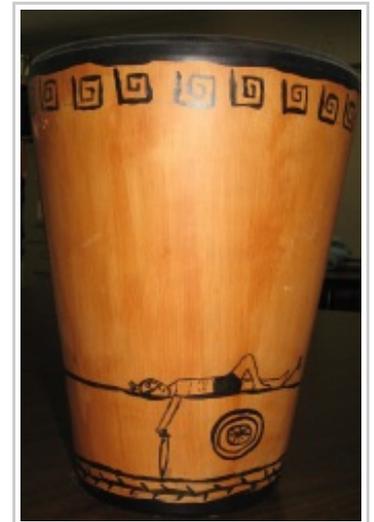
Hands-on activities like this are a great way to spark your child's interest in art history and ancient cultures by bringing the subject to life. Reading about Greek vases in a textbook can be dull, but making your own is a lot of fun!

What You Need:

- Art books on ancient Greek art from the library or images downloaded from the Internet
- Plain, unadorned terracotta flower pot (any size)
- Pencil
- Eraser
- Black permanent markers (fine and extra fine) or acrylic paint
- Paintbrush

What You Do:

1. Before beginning the vase, start by doing a little research into classic Greek black-figure pottery with your child. Flip through the art books from the library or look at the images downloaded from the Internet. As you do, talk about recurring design motifs and the overall style of the black-figure paintings.
2. Using a pencil, have him sketch a design onto the flower pot. While the Greeks most often painted scenes from literature, mythology, or daily life on their vases, creating an original design is the most fun part of the project. Encourage him to be imaginative and creative with his pattern design or scene.
3. When he is satisfied with his design, have him erase any stray marks and make sure that his outline is dark enough to guide him when he starts painting.
4. Now have him go over his design in either Sharpie or with black acrylic paint. For highly detailed designs, it's best to use an extra-fine Sharpie. Also keep in mind that the Greeks weren't afraid of leaving blank space on their vases so remind him to let some of the natural terracotta show through!



Did You Know?

There were a number of steps to making and decorating a vase in ancient Greece. After the potter shaped the vase on a pottery wheel and allowed it to dry, the designs were painted on using a slip that would change color when fired. Additional details could be incised after the pot was fired or added using a special glaze. Greek vases are one of the most important artifacts left to us by this ancient culture because they reveal not only the culture's values and beliefs, but they also serve as a reminder of what highly advanced and skilled craftspeople the Greeks were.

