

Grades 6-8
LEARNING GUIDE

EXPLORING AN ANCIENT GREEK SCULPTURE OF A MUSICIAN

Getty





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FEATURED ART OBJECT

Harp Player of the Early Spedos Type



Object Name: [Harp Player of the Early Spedos Type](#)

Date Created: 2700-2300 BCE

Place Created: Cyclades, Greece

Culture: Cycladic

Material: Marble

Maker: Unknown

Dimensions: $35.8 \times 9.5 \times 28.1$ cm
($14\frac{1}{8} \times 3\frac{3}{4} \times 11\frac{1}{16}$ in.)

Getty Museum

This small marble harp player is in many ways a mystery. He is similar to other figures made in the Cycladic Islands, a circle of islands near Greece, about 4,500 years ago. Most were found in cemeteries, and some came from what may be religious structures. Few houses have been excavated, so we don't know if the figures were used at home. We don't know what the ancient people living there called their islands, because their writing has not been discovered. Archaeologists must interpret Cycladic culture by studying their buildings, artifacts, and art. We don't even know whether the sculptures show humans or gods.

Most of the sculptures are flat figures of women, but some men are represented, including warriors and musicians. Only about a dozen sculptures of harpists are known, as well as some men playing reed instruments, such as pipes. All the figures have simple, elegant shapes.



FEATURED ART OBJECT

Abstract

Simplified, intended to capture an aspect or essence of an object or idea rather than to represent reality.

Picasso

Pablo Picasso was a famous Spanish artist of the 1900s known for his creative work in painting, sculpture, and other media. He admired ancient art and experimented with abstract forms.

Modigliani

Amedeo Modigliani was an Italian painter who became well known in the early 1900s for his simplified human figures with blank eyes.

Iliad

Greek epic poem about the Trojan War and the hero Achilles, told orally for centuries and then written down by about 700 BCE. Attributed to the poet Homer.

Odyssey

Greek epic poem about the return of the hero Odysseus from the Trojan War, told orally for centuries and then written down by about 700 BCE. Attributed to the poet Homer.

The **abstract** qualities of Cycladic sculpture and their apparent white simplicity (due to faded colors) strongly influenced modern artists (such as **Picasso** and **Modigliani**) in the 1900s. This led to greater interest in Cycladic art. Although that might sound like good news, unfortunately, archaeological sites were looted, and much information was lost.

The harpists sit on stools or chairs. They rest the bottom of the harp, or its sound box, on one thigh. Some musicians seem to play or sing. This harpist is not playing, since he rests his right arm along the sound box. His left hand stretches forward and holds the frame of the harp. Since his head is tilted up slightly, some people think he may be singing. This sculpture might be one of the earliest images of a bard, a musician with a stringed instrument, singing or chanting a story.

Many years after this figure was carved, the bards described in Homer's **Iliad** and **Odyssey** told tales of exciting adventures, describing heroes' courage and honorable behavior. Bards sang of victories in competition and combat. They described heroes' encounters with monstrous beings.



FEATURED ART OBJECT

Emery

Hard, dense rock rich in corundum, found easily on the Cycladic Islands. A powerful abrasive for grinding and smoothing other stones.

Pumice

Lightweight form of volcanic rock filled with bubbles, useful for grinding and smoothing.

Obsidian

Volcanic glass that splits or chips easily to make tools with sharp edges. Obsidian was available on the Cycladic Islands and its blades may have helped shape or add details to Cycladic figurines.

Incise

To press or cut into a surface (stone, metal, clay, wood) with a sharp tool to write text or create fine curving and linear details.

Proportions and shapes repeated within and across figures show that many Cycladic sculptures were measured with a compass. The completed sculptures were carefully smoothed and polished. An artisan's tools included **emery**, **pumice**, and **obsidian** for chipping, grinding, smoothing, and **incising**. On some figures, surviving paint shows facial features, hair, jewelry, and patterns. The pigments are mineral-based and include red, blue, green, and black. Because the paint is fragile, though, mostly it has faded away. The stone surfaces with and without color have also become worn over the centuries.

Luckily, evidence of pigment has survived on the figures in two ways. First, some color slightly penetrated the stone and is still visible even if the surface is worn. Second, some thickly painted areas were especially protected. Even once the color did finally wear off, the once-painted areas were less worn than unpainted areas. Upon close looking, those areas remain raised slightly higher than the unpainted stone. The raised areas that were once painted are sometimes called paint "ghosts."



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VOCABULARY

Picasso

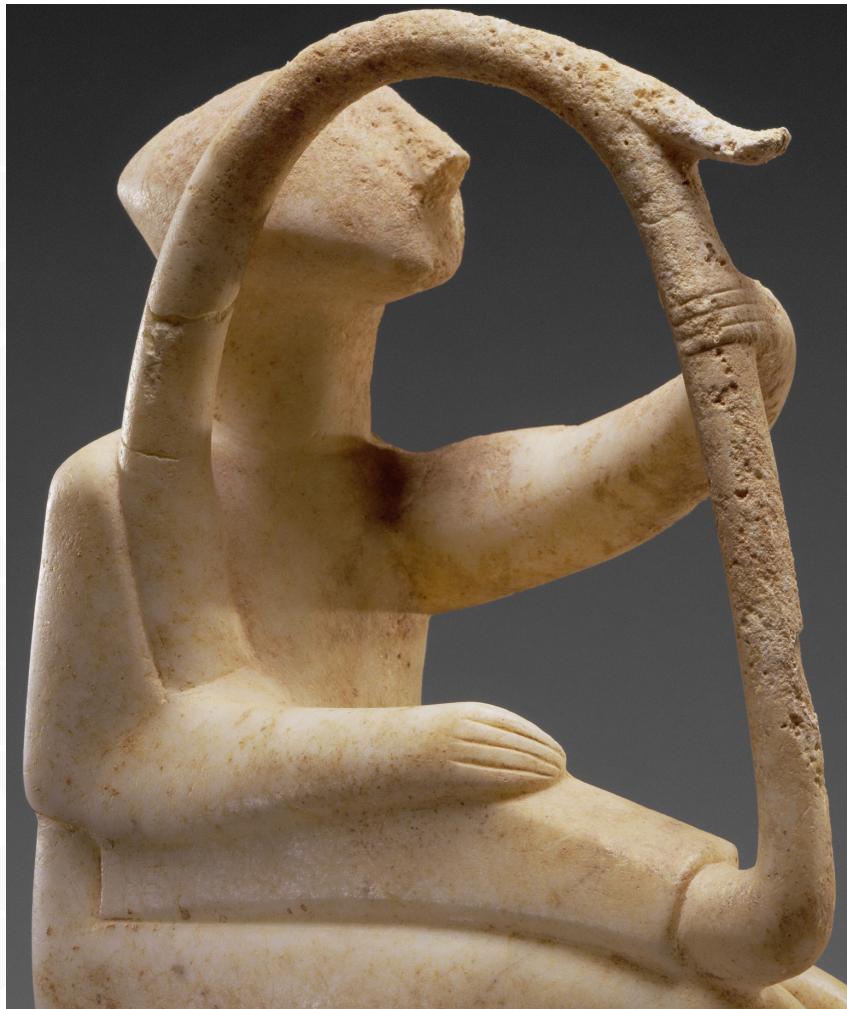
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TAKE A CLOSER LOOK



Closeup of Harp Player of the Early Spedos Types



ANALYZE & DISCUSS

Close Look at an Ancient Sculpture

45
MINS

Use close looking and discussion to learn more about this ancient object and what it might represent.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Examine and describe an ancient object
- Make informed guesses about an ancient object based on visual clues
- Listen to others' perspectives about an ancient object

Note for Teachers:

This activity works best as a lead-in activity before students read about or research the object and focus specifically on what can be discovered through visual analysis.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Featured High-resolution digital images of [Harp Player](#)
- [Featured Art Object information](#) for Harp Player of the Early Spedos Type
- Video: [Harp Player](#)
- Audio: [Harp Player](#)



ANALYZE & DISCUSS

DIRECTIONS:

1. Begin by looking closely at [Harp Player of the Early Spedos Type](#) using high-resolution images. Make sure to zoom in and out to notice small details.
2. Then discuss the following questions as a class or in small groups.

Discussion Questions:

- Describe what you see. Based on visual analysis alone, can you tell what the figure is doing?
- What materials do you think were used to create this sculpture?
- One Getty visitor joked, “It looks like this person is playing a vacuum cleaner!” What does it look like to you?
- What do you like and/or dislike about this sculpture?



ANALYZE & DISCUSS

Did You Know?

The Cycladic Islands—or Cyclades, the “encircling ones” in Greek—form a rough ring. The inhabitants could easily sail between these islands to trade.

3. Next, explore the sculpture more by using any combination of the following resources:
 - Watch the [Harp Player](#) video.
 - Read the related [Featured Art Object](#) information.
 - Listen to the [Harp Player](#) audio.
 4. When you have completed your exploration, discuss which details you already noticed from your visual analysis of the object.
 5. Identify four new pieces of information you learned from reading about the object, watching the video, and listening to the audio clip. Make bullet points listing the new information that you discovered.
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RELATED LINKS

[Cycladic art: The art of the Cycladic Islands](#) from Smarthistory

[Early Cycladic Art and Culture](#) from Metropolitan Museum of Art

[Early Cycladic Sculpture: An Introduction, 2nd Edition](#) online book from Getty Publications

Did You Know?

Cycladic marble quarries remained famous for thousands of years because of the great beauty of their stone.



STANDARDS

National Core Arts Standards:

6.VA:Cn11 Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards:

SL.6.1.A Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

SL.6.1.C Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.

SL6.2 Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

SL.6.5 Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.

RI.6.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

RI.6.7 Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

California Social Studies Standards:

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