

Grades 9-12  
LEARNING GUIDE

# CELEBRATING ATHLETES

IN ANCIENT GREECE AND TODAY



Getty



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## FEATURED ART OBJECT

### Statue of a Victorious Youth



Object Name: [Statue of a Victorious Youth](#)  
Date Created: 300–100 BCE  
Place Created: Greece  
Culture: Greek  
Materials: Bronze with inlaid copper  
Maker: Unknown  
Dimensions/Weight: 151.5 × 70 × 27.9 cm,  
64.4108 kg  
(59 5/8 × 27 9/16 × 11 in., 142 lb.)  
Getty Museum

This life-size hollow bronze figure of a naked Greek youth is extremely rare. Thousands of large bronze statues once stood in cities throughout the ancient Greek world, but they were later melted down to make other metal objects and artworks. This bronze figure escaped being melted because it sank underwater off the northeast coast of Italy, probably when the ship carrying it was wrecked by a storm. Almost 2,000 years later, the statue was found by fishermen dragging a net along the Mediterranean seabed. It was badly **corroded** (damaged by water) and sea creatures had been living on and in it. Luckily, barnacles created a protective layer that helped preserve the bronze. Early efforts to clean the surface left some scratches, but eventually the barnacles were carefully removed, and the bronze was stabilized.

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#### Corrode

(relevant to copper-based metals like bronze): To become damaged by the chemical reaction of copper and chlorides in soil or water, similar to the effect of rust or iron.



## FEATURED ART OBJECT

### Did You Know?

Our word 'gymnasium' comes from the Greek word *gymnos*, meaning "naked," since athletes practiced and competed in the nude.

The statue was made in the Hellenistic period, which followed the death of Alexander the Great. Greek (Hellenic) art and culture spread widely under Alexander's successors. Someone likely broke the youth off his statue base between the first centuries BCE and CE, when wealthy Romans were especially eager to own original Greek art. The statue's feet are missing and may have been left behind when he was wrenched off his base. Without the base to tell us his name or the reason he was being honored, we must make educated guesses about him. The olive wreath on his head was a prize of honor at the Olympic Games, suggesting that he was a victor at Olympia, where the games were held. While a public nude statue of an athlete would be startling today, it was common for participants in ancient Greek sports to compete naked. In artworks, male nudity symbolized physical and moral excellence.

The youth's right hand is raised toward the wreath, and scholars theorize that he was about to take it off to dedicate it to Zeus, patron god of the Games. The young man's empty left hand likely held a palm frond, another symbol of victory. Statues of victors stood in the god's sanctuary at Olympia or in



## FEATURED ART OBJECT

### Cast

To make in a mold from liquid metal. A cast object can be hollow or solid.

### Contrapposto

("opposite" in Italian): Pose of a standing figure with most of the weight on one leg and the other bent. This causes hips, shoulders, and head to shift to balance the body. One arm is often higher and one lower.

winning athletes' hometowns, but we cannot know where he stood. His face and toned body seem idealized, common in art showing heroic figures, but the artist has included individual features that may reflect his real appearance, such as his long nose and the dimple in his chin.

The Victorious Youth's head, arms, and torso with legs were **cast** separately in molds and then joined. If his lost feet were still attached, he would stand about five-and-a-half feet tall, an average height for a man at the time. He faces forward in a **contrapposto** (asymmetrically balanced) pose. His left knee is bent so that his right leg takes most of his weight, and his torso forms a gentle curve to the left to compensate. This stance makes a standing figure look more natural and dynamic than one with both feet flat on the ground, legs straight. The Greeks began to perfect the pose in the fifth century BCE, and it survived across time. Michelangelo's famous over-life-size sculpture of David (1504 CE) was influenced by such standing statues from antiquity, and that in turn inspired other artists to experiment with contrapposto.



# FEATURED ART OBJECT

## Bronze disease

Corrosion of a bronze object that cannot be permanently stabilized. Without special care, an object with bronze disease will continue to corrode.

## Conservator (of antiquities)

Professional responsible for preserving ancient objects and materials. Conservators usually have a general knowledge of chemistry and ancient art-making practices and are often specialists in one material. Among many other responsibilities, they conduct technical and historical research and oversee preventative care such as climate control.

## Inlay

To decorate an object by inserting a piece of another material into it so that it is even with the original surface.

## Alloy

Mixture of two or more substances, one a metal. Bronze is an alloy of copper and other elements, including tin.

## Gild

To apply a thin layer of gold foil or liquid gold (gilt) to create the look of solid gold.

During its time under water, the statue developed

**bronze disease** which must be carefully monitored by **conservators**. The statue's environment in the

museum is designed to limit its exposure to moisture.

Humidity and even human breath can cause further damage. The figure's original shiny tan skin now

appears mottled brown and green. Just as white marble statues were often painted with pigments to look more lifelike, parts of bronze figures were also **inlaid** or coated with **alloys** (metal mixtures) and other materials to create different colors. This athlete's nipples were inset with a copper alloy to make their color stand out.

His wreath may have been **gilded** (covered with gold).

His eyes, lost in the sea, would have been crafted separately of materials such as stone, glass, or ivory and inserted from inside the head before it was attached. The eyes were often extremely detailed, showing tear ducts and eyelashes as well as the pupil, iris, and white of the eye. The original Victorious Youth would have looked very lifelike.



# VOCABULARY

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## Getty

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## Corrode

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## Gild

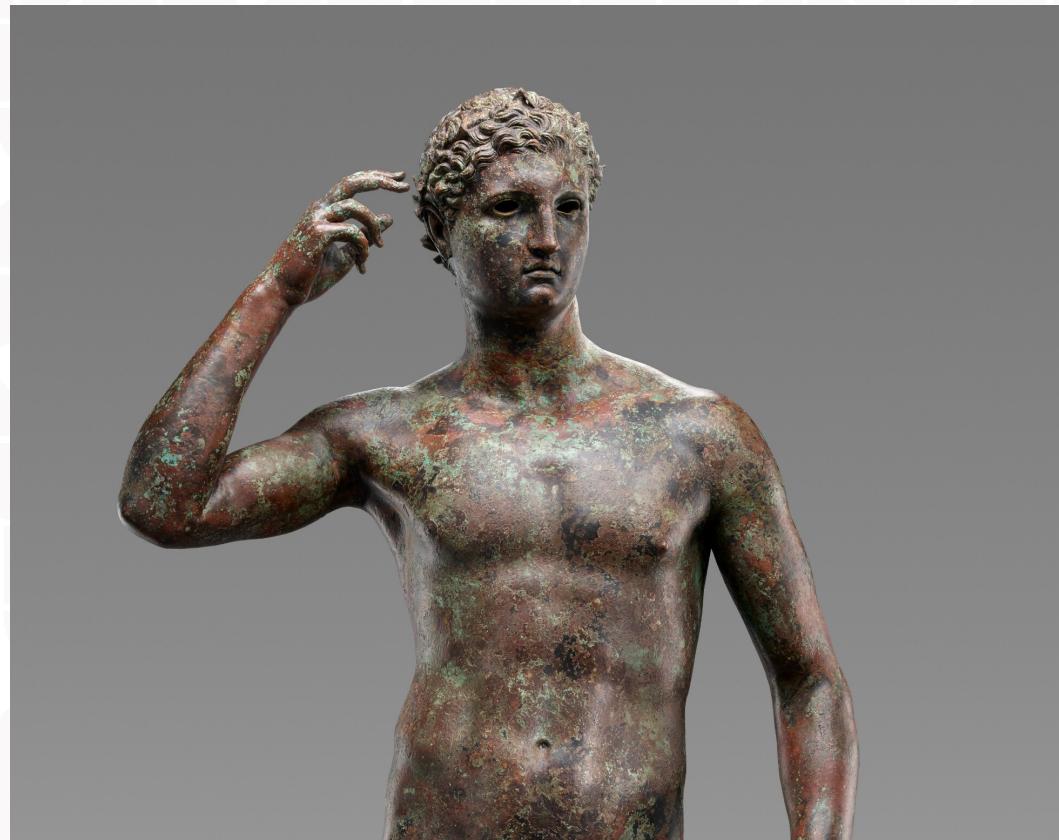
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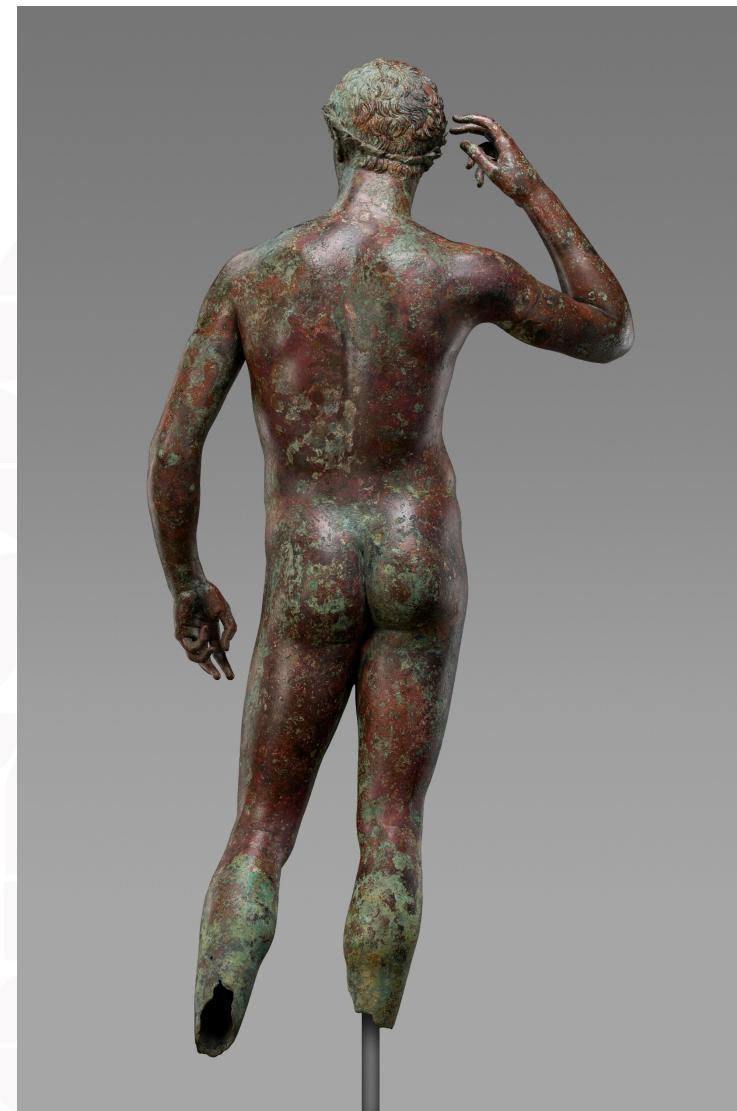


TAKE A CLOSER LOOK



Front details of Statue of a Victorious Youth

Getty



Back of Statue of a Victorious Youth



# VISUAL ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

## Discover the History of an Object Using Visual Clues

45  
MINS

**Use close observation and discussion to learn about an object's history.**

### OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Examine and describe an ancient work of art
- Listen to others' perspectives about an ancient work of art
- Understand how visual details can provide information about an object

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution digital images of [Statue of a Victorious Youth](#)
- [Pre-conservation image](#) of Statue of a Victorious Youth (pg. 11)
- Video: [Statue of a Victorious Youth: Getty Conversations](#)

### Note for Teachers:

This activity works best as a lead-in activity before students read about or research the object.



# VISUAL ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Begin by looking closely at the pre-conservation image of Statue of a Victorious Youth. Then discuss the following question as a class or in small groups.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION:

- What do you observe about this object? Elaborate using specific visual details. What do you think they tell us about the object?
- 2. The pre-conservation image shows what the statue looked like when it was pulled from the sea. At that time, it had not yet received conservation treatment, including the removal of barnacles and stabilization of the corrosion resulting from the bronze having been in contact with moisture for so long while underwater.
- 3. Next, compare the pre-conservation image with a high-resolution version of the Statue of a Victorious Youth as it looks today. Make sure to zoom in and out to notice small details. Then, discuss the following questions:



# VISUAL ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

## **Discussion Questions:**

- What details do you see that you were not able to see in the pre-conservation image? Describe as many as you can.
- What can you infer about this person, just by looking at this sculpture? What are the visual clues?
- What do you like and/or dislike about this sculpture?

Watch the video [Statue of a Victorious Youth: Getty Conversations](#) until the 4:10 mark. Then discuss the following questions:



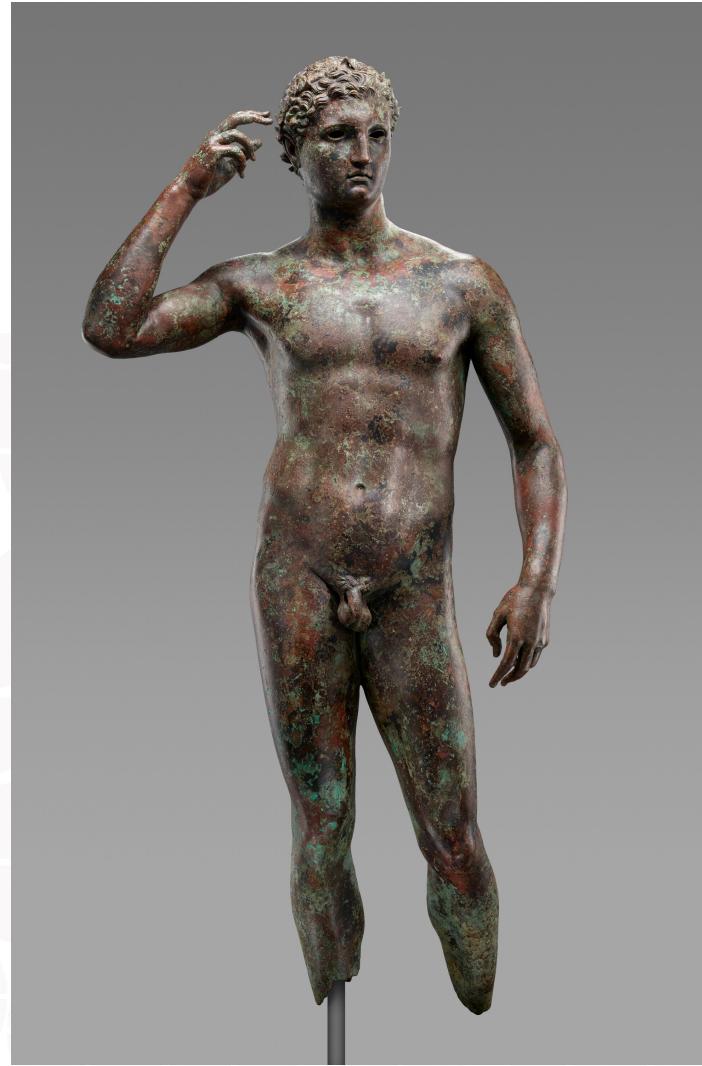
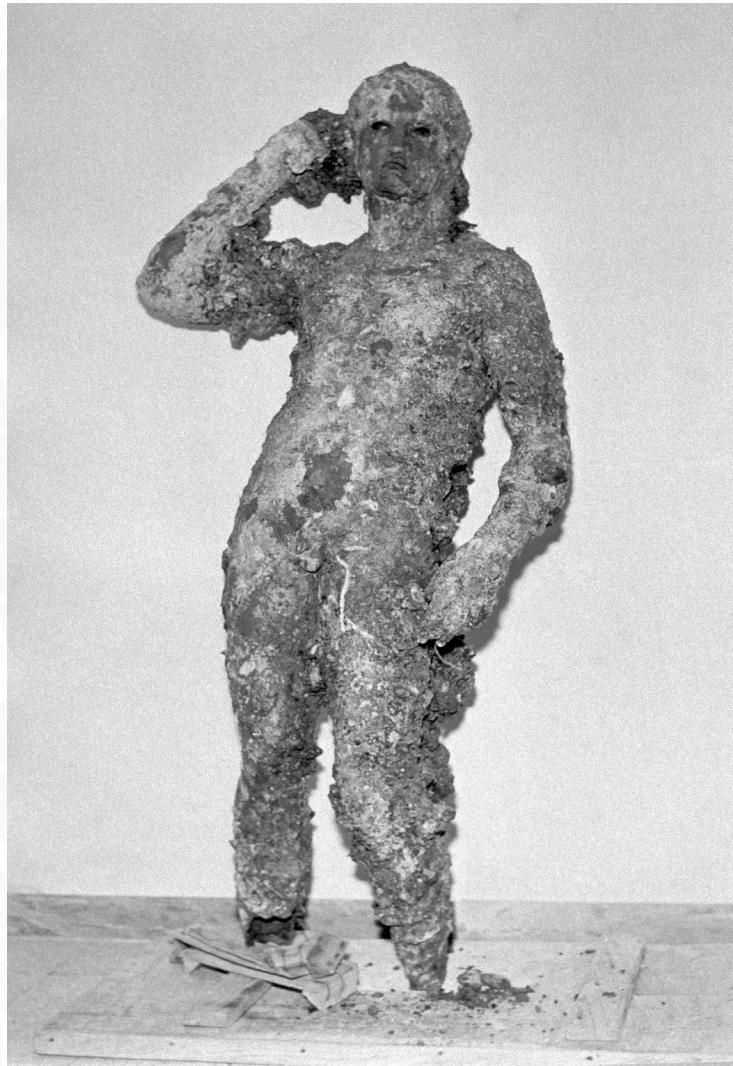
# VISUAL ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

## Discussion Questions:

- What types of damage has happened to this object since the time it was first made?
- What were some of the reasons that made it difficult for objects like this one to survive to the present time?
- Why did the *Statue of a Victorious Youth* survive when most other bronze statues of that time did not? What roles did the environment play in contributing to its preservation?
- Imagine how this figure would have looked originally. What are some differences between how the figure looks today and how he would have looked when he was first made and displayed?
- Do you have any objects of your own (they don't have to be art objects) that show their history just by looking at the details you can see today? Discuss one such object and describe any visual details that tell us about the object's history.



# HANDOUT



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Getty Museum



## DISCUSSION & WRITING

# Contemporary Connections: Athletic Heroes in Art

45  
MINS

Compare how athletic heroes are depicted in ancient Greece and today.

### OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Examine and describe an ancient work of art
- Compare works of art from different time periods
- Analyze how visual details such as symbols and attributes are used in a work of art to communicate meaning

### Did You Know?

Even ancient Greeks were not sure about the origins of naked athletics. The first Olympic event was the sprint, and one author claims a runner shed his garment on purpose to make running easier.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution image of [Statue of a Victorious Youth](#)
- Image of a statue of any modern-day athletic hero



# DISCUSSION & WRITING

## DIRECTIONS:

Look online to find a statue of a modern-day athletic hero. For example, you could look at an image of the [statue of Jerry West](#) made by Omri Amrany and Julie Rotblatt Amrany outside of a stadium in Los Angeles, CA; a [statue of Wilma Rudolph](#) made by Howard Brown and currently located in Clarksville, TN; or an image of the [Jessie Owens sculpture](#) in Oakville, AL, made by Branko Medenica. In small groups or as a class, discuss the following questions:

### Discussion Questions:

- What is the purpose of the statue?
- Does the statue seem realistic? If yes, what details tell us that it represents a specific person?
- Do you think the person represented is idealized in this sculpture? Why or why not?
- What details does the sculptor include to tell us about the person represented? What do the details tell us about the person?



## DISCUSSION & WRITING

Next, compare the modern-day statue with the [Statue of a Victorious Youth](#). Discuss the following questions:

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Does the modern-day sculpture seem more realistic than the Statue of a Victorious Youth? Why or why not? If yes, explain whether realism changes how you view and connect with a sculpture.
- Are there stylistic elements in the modern-day statue that look similar to, or look like they were influenced by Greek sculptures like the Statue of a Victorious Youth? If yes, what are they? If the modern-day statue does not have any stylistic elements in common with the Statue of a Victorious Youth, how would you describe its style?



## DISCUSSION & WRITING

Finally, write an essay that explores the following question: *What role(s) do athletes play in society and popular culture today?* As part of your essay, include answers to the following questions:

- In both the modern-day statue, and the 2,000 year-old bronze Statue of a Victorious Youth, athletes are often heroized and celebrated by their societies. What are some of the ways that athletes are celebrated today?
- What types of roles do today's athletes play in our society that extend beyond the realm of athletic competitions or sports? Give some examples.
- The wreath on the Statue of a Victorious Youth provides important context and background to this figure, communicating that he was likely a celebrated athlete. What symbols are associated with victory and athletic success today?
- Why do you think athletes are so celebrated throughout history?
- Do you think athletes should be treated like heroes?



# ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

## Athletic Hero Portrait

90  
MINS

### Did You Know?

The events held at the ancient Olympics included running, wrestling, boxing, long jump, discus, and horse and chariot racing. Running was the most celebrated event.

**Create a portrait of an athletic hero of your choosing.**

#### OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Create a portrait using features and attributes to portray a specific person
- Reflect on the creative process of making a portrait

#### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- drawing materials such as crayons, colored pencils, or markers
- a large piece of drawing paper (at least 11 x 17")
- Audio clip: [Victorious Athlete \(Getty Bronze\)](#)

#### DIRECTIONS:

Briefly explore the Statue of a Victorious Youth and discuss how this athletic hero is depicted. Listen to this audio clip: [Victorious Athlete \(Getty Bronze\)](#) to hear a background on the Statue of a Victorious Youth while looking at images of the object. Then, discuss the following questions.



# ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What are some of this statue's attributes that signal he is an athlete and a hero?
- What other information did the artist want to communicate about the athlete?

**OPTIONAL:** For an exploration of the ways that athletic heroes are depicted today, complete the activity Contemporary Connections: Athletic Heroes in Art before moving on to the artmaking component.

Next, choose an athletic hero to represent in your portrait. Brainstorm why you consider them to be heroes, and what you would like to communicate about them in a portrait. Write a list of features and attributes of that person. Consider how you might use pose, gesture, and gaze to communicate their heroic qualities.

1. Choose a few features and attributes from your list, and then decide on imagery to include in the portrait. For example, what facial expressions might they show? (Joy, determination, focus, excitement, etc.) Do they have any distinguishing pieces of clothing or accessories?



## ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

2. Draw your portrait using markers, colored pencils, or drawing materials of your choice. Make sure to add at least three features or attributes of the person.
  
3. Reflect on your creative process and either write about it or discuss it with a classmate. Use the following questions to guide your writing/discussion.
  - Why did you choose this person for your portrait?
  - What attributes or features did you include and why?
  - Was your portrait influenced by any other representations of heroes?  
If yes, explain how.



## RELATED LINKS

[Illustrated Process of Casting Bronze Statues in Ancient Greece](#) from the National Gallery of Art

[Book on The Victorious Youth](#) from the Getty Villa

Video on [an exhibition of the Victorious Youth and other objects that have withstood the test of time](#) from PBS NewsHour

[The Getty Guide to the Ancient Olympics](#)

[Talking about the Getty Bronze](#)



# STANDARDS

## National Core Arts Standards:

**Prof.VA:Cr3** Apply relevant criteria from traditional and contemporary cultural contexts to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for works of art and design in progress.

**Prof.VA:Re7.2** Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.

**Prof.VA:Re8** Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.

**Prof.VA:Re9** Establish relevant criteria in order to evaluate a work of art or collection of works.

**Prof.VA.Cn11** Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

## Common Core English Language Arts Standards:

**9-10.SL.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**9-10.W.1** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

**9-10.W.2** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

**9-10.W.7** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

## California Social Studies Standards:

**HSS-10.1** Standard: Students relate the moral and ethical principles in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, in Judaism, and in Christianity to the development of Western political thought.