

Grades 6-8
LEARNING GUIDE

HERCULES IN ANCIENT ART

Getty





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FEATURED ART OBJECT

Statue of Hercules



This impressive marble statue of Hercules (called Herakles by the Greeks) is over six feet high and weighs 850 pounds. It was found in 1790 in the ruins of an ancient villa outside Rome. The villa belonged to the Roman emperor Hadrian, who loved Greek culture. The hero may have stood in a garden or alongside a pool with other statues. Hadrian especially appreciated Greek art and he had copies made of earlier Greek sculptures. This Hercules may be a copy of an earlier lost statue made in Greece around 300 BCE. (The figure is nicknamed the “Lansdowne Herakles” because a British lord named Lansdowne once owned it. Since there are many statues of Hercules, this nickname helps identify this one.)

Object Name: [Statue of Hercules](#) (Lansdowne Herakles)

Date Created: about 125 CE

Place Created: Roman Empire

Culture: Roman

Material: Marble

Maker: Unknown

Dimensions: 193.5 × 77.5 × 73 cm, 385.5575 kg
(76 3/16 × 30 1/2 × 28 3/4 in., 850 lb.)

Gift of J. Paul Getty

Getty Museum



FEATURED ART OBJECT

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 in order to balance the body. One arm is often higher and one lower.

Attribute

Object, clothing, symbol, or physical characteristic associated with a specific person, hero, or god. An attribute can identify a figure in an artwork.

Hercules has a smooth, expressionless face that doesn't show signs of age. His body is toned and muscled. The hero stands in a **contrapposto** pose with one knee slightly bent, causing his hips and shoulders to shift direction. The pose makes him look more active and natural than if both legs were straight. His identifying **attributes**, a club and lion skin, tell us who he is. The club rests on his left shoulder and the lion skin dangles from his right hand. Killing the lion was the first of his famous Twelve Labors, dangerous tasks the hero was forced to carry out. The lion was terrorizing the city of Nemea. Human weapons could not pierce its skin, so no one could kill it. But Hercules was so strong that he strangled the animal. He skinned it with its own claw and wore the skin as a cloak.

Why is Hercules naked? Greeks exercised and competed in athletic competitions naked. Even they were not totally sure how this practice started. Perhaps it made everyone equal aside from their natural abilities. In art, nudity came to symbolize excellence of body and mind.



FEATURED ART OBJECT

Did You Know?

One of the famous Twelve Labors does not sound very heroic! Hercules had to clean out an impossible amount of cattle manure in one day from the many stables of King Augeas. The hero was so strong that he diverted two rivers to do the dirty work for him.

In the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, Greek artists developed a type of ideal male figure. Images of bodies and faces were standardized to reduce individual differences and flaws. Men and male gods were shown without clothes, displaying their highly toned muscles. Their faces and features were ageless and unwrinkled. Because it was hard to identify individuals, artists identified them by symbols they wore or carried (like the lion skin).

Damage and Repair

Marble is a hard and strong material, but it can still break. Stone sculptors often added a tree trunk, animal, or object (like Hercules's lion skin) next to a figure's legs. This helped to stabilize the sculpture, but did not prevent all harm. At some point, this statue of Hercules fell forward, damaging his face, left side, right arm and leg, club, and more.



FEATURED ART OBJECT

Pentelic

From Mount Pentelicus, near Athens. An adjective that mostly refers to the beautiful white Greek marble in its quarries.

Carrara

Region in Italy north of Rome famous for a hard white marble very popular with Romans for sculpture.

Conservator (of antiquities)

Professional responsible for preserving ancient objects and materials.

Conservators usually have a general knowledge of chemistry and of ancient art-making practices and are often specialists in one material.

Among many other responsibilities, they conduct technical and historical research and oversee preventive care such as climate control.

Hercules was originally carved from hard Athenian **Pentelic** marble. In the 1800s, repairs to the figure's damaged areas were made with Italian **Carrara** marble. The two marbles have worn differently over time. If you look closely you can see that the Carrara marble has visible grains – like grains of sugar. Other repairs are difficult for anyone to notice who is not an expert. The hero's head, face, and shoulders were re-carved to disguise damage. Hercules now has a somewhat smaller head and smaller ears, reworked eyes, and a new nose. Restoring missing parts or recarving a damaged statue used to be common. Buyers thought a complete statue was more attractive and valuable. But today, **conservators** do not generally invent body parts or make permanent changes.



VOCABULARY

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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 in order to balance the body. One arm is often higher and one lower.

Pentelic

From Mount Pentelicus, near Athens. An adjective that mostly refers to the beautiful white Greek marble marble in its quarries.



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK



Closeup of Statue of Hercules (Lansdowne Herakles)



Closeup of Hercules's (Herakles's) Lion Skin



DISCUSS & RESEARCH

Using Attributes to Identify Stories in Art

45
MINS

Note for Teachers:

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

Use close observation and discussion to find out more about this statue and the story it tells, then research other objects that share related stories.

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 attributes tell us about an ancient mythological character

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution image of [Statue of Hercules](#)
- Featured Art Object information for [Statue of Hercules](#)
- Resource: The Twelve Labors of Herakles (pgs. 10-13)
- Audio: [Statue of Hercules](#)



DISCUSS & RESEARCH

DIRECTIONS:

1. Begin by looking closely at [Statue of Hercules](#) using a high-resolution image. Make sure to zoom in and out to notice small details. Then discuss the following questions as a class or in small groups.

Discussion Questions:

- Describe the figure and the details you see.
- What is the figure holding?
- How would you describe the figure's pose?
- What visual clues help you to identify this statue as Hercules?
What might you already know about him or his story?



DISCUSS & RESEARCH

2. Read related [Featured Art Object](#) information and/or listen to the [audio](#) about the statue.
3. Identify details you read or listened to and had already noticed from your visual analysis of the object.
4. Make a list of any details that you read or listened to that you may have missed in your visual analysis of the object.
5. Next, read [The Twelve Labors of Herakles \(pgs. 10–13\)](#).
6. Go to the [Getty Museum's collection search page](#) (or use your search engine) and hunt for works of art that depict Herakles performing another of his Twelve Labors. Compare what you found with your classmates and see how many of the Twelve Labors you found represented in art. HINT: Try searching both the Greek and Roman terms, “Herakles” and “Hercules.”

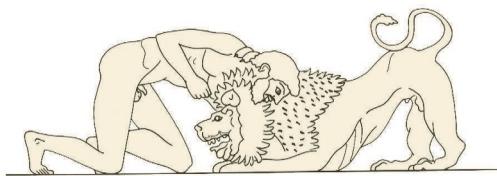


HANDOUT

The Twelve Labors of Herakles

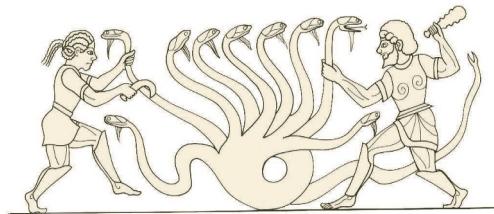
Herakles was a universal hero, celebrated by the Greeks, the Etruscans (who called him Herkle), and the Romans (who knew him as Hercules). He was the son of Zeus (king of the gods) and a mortal woman, Alkmene. Ironically, his name means “the glory” (kleos) of Hera (queen of the gods), his jealous stepmother, who drove him mad and caused him to kill his wife and children. As penance, the hero was bound to serve King Eurystheus of Mycenae and Tiryns. The king sent him on a series of difficult tasks, or labors, twelve of which became standardized in art and literature.

1. The Lion of Nemea



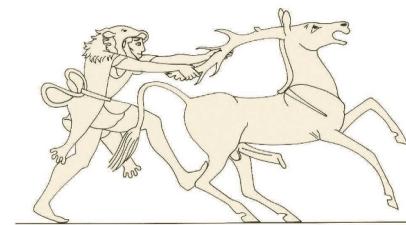
The Lion of Nemea had an impervious hide and could not be killed with traditional weapons. Herakles strangled it and then used its own claw to skin it. Afterward he wore its pelt as a talisman.

2. The Hydra of Lerna



The Hydra of Lerna was a serpentlike, multiheaded monster. Every time a head was cut off, two more grew in its place. With the aid of his nephew Iolaos, Herakles killed the beast by cauterizing each wounded neck with a torch.

3. The Hind of Keryneia



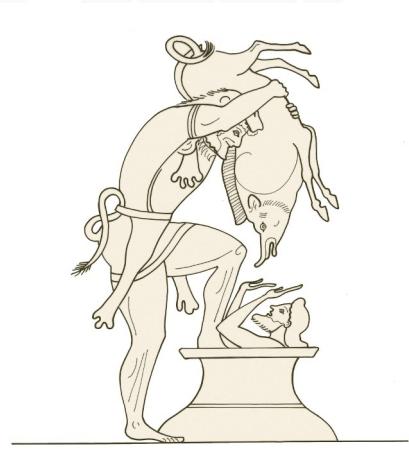
The Hind of Keryneia was sacred to Artemis (goddess of the hunt and wild animals). Herakles was ordered to bring the deer, or its golden horn, back to Eurystheus without harming it.



HANDOUT

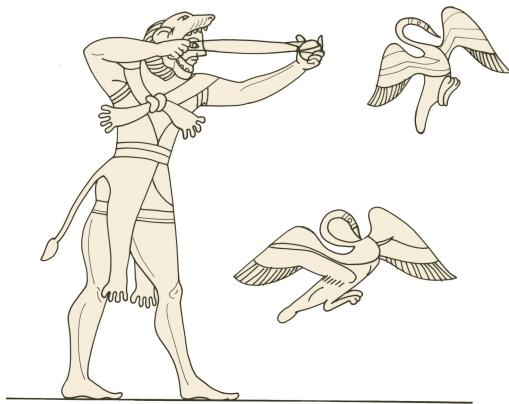
The Twelve Labors of Herakles

4. The Boar of Mount Erymanthos



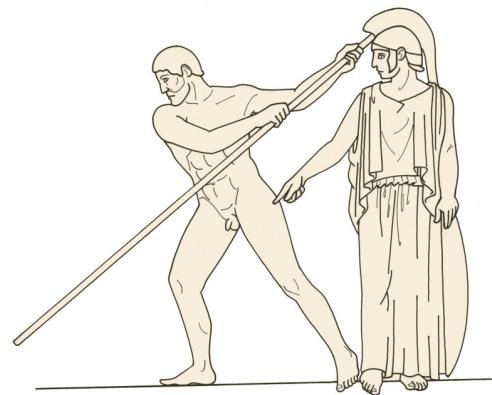
The Boar of Mount Erymanthos, the largest and fiercest of its kind, was ravaging the surrounding land. Herakles caught it and returned it to King Eurystheus, who was so frightened that he hid in a large storage jar.

5. The Birds of Lake Stymphalos



The Birds of Lake Stymphalos created a great disturbance. Herakles caused them to take flight with bronze castanets that were made by Hephaistos (god of metalworking) and given to him by his patron goddess, Athena. He then killed the birds.

6. The Stables of King Augeas



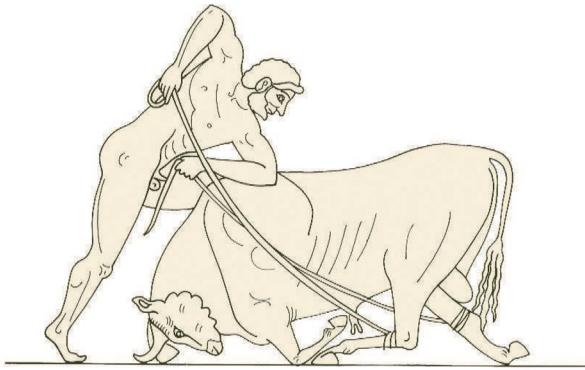
The Stables of King Augeas were filthy after many years of neglect, and Herakles had to clean them in a single day. He ingeniously washed away the accumulated dung by shifting the course of a nearby river.



HANDOUT

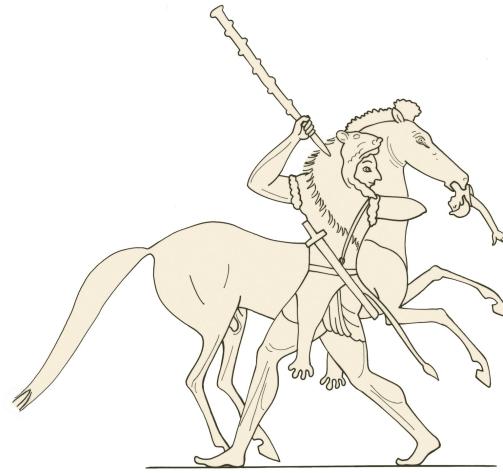
The Twelve Labors of Herakles

7. The Bull of Crete



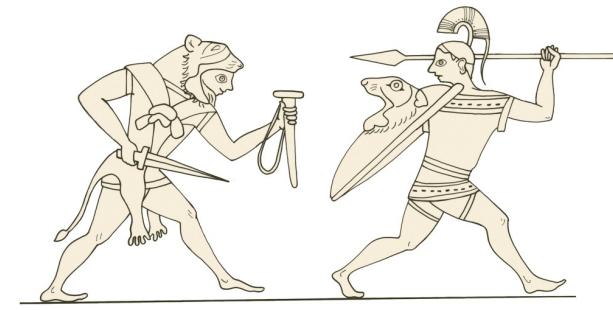
The Golden Apples of the Hesperides grew in a garden at the end of the world. They were tended by maidens and guarded by the serpent Ladon. Herakles had to fetch the apples to gain immortality.

8. The Man-Eating Mares of Diomedes



The Man-Eating Mares of Diomedes of Thrace were a menace. Herakles fed them with their master, Diomedes, before bringing them back to Eurystheus.

9. The Girdle of Hippolyta



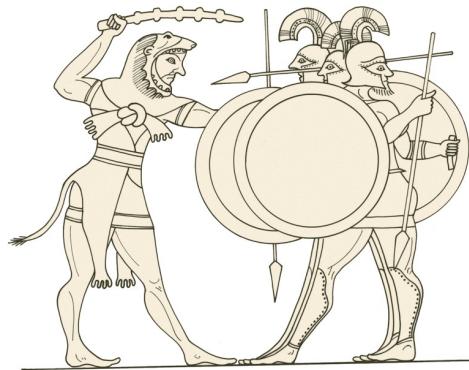
The Girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons (a race of women warriors), had to be retrieved in one version of the tale. Herakles charmed the queen into surrendering her belt; more commonly, he fought her for it.



HANDOUT

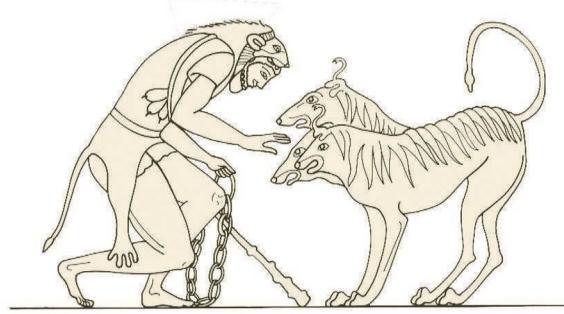
The Twelve Labors of Herakles

10. The Cattle of Geryon



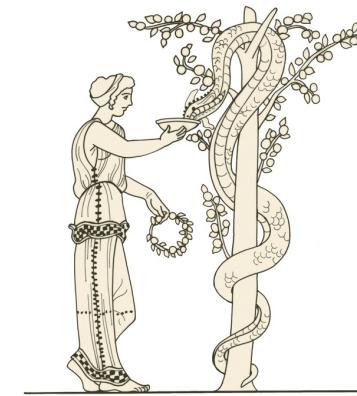
The Cattle of Geryon—a fearsome, triple-bodied warrior—had to be captured. To accomplish this, Herakles killed not only Geryon but also his herdsman and dog.

11. Cerberus



Cerberus was the triple-headed guard dog of the Underworld. Herakles negotiated with Hades (god of the Underworld), who consented to loan the monster, provided that Herakles did not use weapons to master it.

12. The Golden Apples of the Hesperides



The Golden Apples of the Hesperides grew in a garden at the end of the world. They were tended by maidens and guarded by the serpent Ladon. Herakles had to fetch the apples to gain immortality.



MOVEMENT & DISCUSSION

Exploring Contrapposto

30
MINS

Learn about contrapposto and how it was used in an ancient statue.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

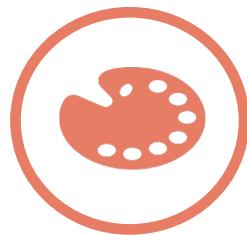
- Examine and describe an ancient work of art
- Understand contrapposto and show an example

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution digital image of [Statue of Hercules](#)
- High-resolution digital image of [Votive Statuette of a Male Youth](#)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Look at images of the Statue of Hercules and Votive Statuette of a Male Youth.
Discuss the differences in their poses.



MOVEMENT & DISCUSSION

2. Stand in poses that mimic each of these statues. Hold each pose for at least 30 seconds. Then discuss the following questions:
 - How did it feel to stand in each of these poses?
 - In each pose, where was the weight of your body resting? How could you tell?
 - Which pose felt most natural? Why?
 - When you looked around the room and saw your classmates in these poses, which pose appeared most relaxed? Why?
 3. Read the definition of **contrapposto**. In small groups or as a class, discuss the following questions:
 - Which of these sculptures uses a contrapposto pose?
 - What words would you use to describe a contrapposto pose?
-



RELATED LINKS

- The Twelve Labors of Herakles (pgs. 10-13)
- Perseus Project, Tufts University: [Hercules's First Labor: the Nemean Lion](#)



STANDARDS

National Core Arts Standards:

6.VA:Re7.1 Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people live around the world and what they value.

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

6.VA:Re8.1 Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.

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.6.4 Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

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



STANDARDS

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:

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