

STORIES IN STONE

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FEATURED ART OBJECT

Elgin Throne



This rare example of a Greek ceremonial chair (“thronos” in ancient Greek) was found in Athens and likely once stood in a public place as a seat of honor. Such marble chairs often had ornamental arm rests and animal legs in front, like this one. While we usually think of thrones being made for royalty, the Greek seats were intended for important officials and prominent members of the community. In theaters and crowded meeting places their high backs would have stood out from the bench seating provided for most people. Some ceremonial chairs were built into other nearby seats, but this one is freestanding, meant to be viewed from all sides.

Object Name: [Elgin Throne](#) Date
Created: 300–200 BCE Place Found:
Athens, Greece Culture: Greek
Material: Marble
Maker: Unknown
Dimensions: 81.5 × 70 × 66 cm
(32 1/16 × 27 9/16 × 26 in.)
Getty Museum



FEATURED ART OBJECT

On the back of this chair, just below the top, an **inscribed** text names BOETHOS, but the text is too badly worn to tell us about him or whether he is the person the chair was originally meant to honor. The back and armrests are carved with symbolic imagery in **low relief** above a horizontal carved band running around the chair at the level of the seat. The raised decoration would once have been painted to stand out more clearly, but the paint and some of the stone have worn away. On the back, two olive wreaths, symbols of victory and honor, are carved below the inscription. On the outside of the armrests are two different **narrative** relief scenes of warriors, each symbolizing the Athenian rejection of **tyranny** and outside control.

Details of the Reliefs

On the exterior of the right armrest, two armed men stride toward the front of the chair with their weapons raised

Inscribe

To write something on or cut letters, text, or imagery into a hard medium with a sharp tool.

Relief, low

Method of carving figures or designs into a surface so that they are raised slightly above a flat background.

Narrative

In this context, a story told in art, sometimes a shorthand version of longer, more complex tales told orally or in literature.

Tyranny

Absolute control of government by an oppressive ruler.



FEATURED ART OBJECT

Did You Know?

When marble seating was included in public architecture, people often brought their own cushions to sit on since the seats were so hard.

dramatically. Although the heads of the men have been worn away, their poses suggest that they are two elite Athenians named Harmodios and Aristogeiton. They were called the Tyrannicides (tyrant-slayers) and were credited with introducing Athens to democracy by assassinating a tyrant (actually, the tyrant's brother) in 514 BCE. Until that time, the word "tyrant" just meant a sole ruler, although it came to mean a lawless or cruel one. Despite the damage to both figures, we can see Harmodios at Aristogeiton's left side with his arm uplifted, while the older, bearded Aristogeiton advances with his sword held out horizontally. Both are nude except for a cloak thrown over the older man's left arm. Greeks represented athletes, gods, and heroes nude to signify their moral and physical excellence. The two men represent heroic resistance to oppression.

On the exterior of the left armrest, a Greek hero is about to kill an Amazon, one of a tribe of female warriors. He is probably Theseus, the founding hero of Athens, credited with unifying the area around Athens and later defeating the Amazons when they attacked the city. Theseus is nude like the Tyrannicides except for his armor (helmet, shield, and sword).



FEATURED ART OBJECT



Object Name: [Elgin Throne](#) Date Created: 300–200 BCE Place Found: Athens, Greece Culture: Greek Material: Marble Maker: Unknown Dimensions: 81.5 × 70 × 66 cm (32 1/16 × 27 9/16 × 26 in.) Getty Museum

He stands above the fallen Amazon in a dramatic pose, sword lifted high to strike as she struggles on her knees. It is hard to identify much more than her outline, the folds of her knee-length garment, and what may be leggings below. However, based on similar scenes from this time period, we can assume who these figures are. The depiction of a strong, heroic Theseus towering over the defeated Amazon made this scene a symbol of Athenian triumph over their enemies.

More on the Amazons: Fact or Fiction?

There are other stories of the Amazons, who lived in a female-only society, spurning men but fighting on equal terms with them. Although Amazons have long been thought to be a complete invention, they may have a historical basis. In recent decades, archaeologists have discovered burials of female warriors far to the northeast of Greece.



VOCABULARY

Inscribe

To write something on or cut letters, text, or imagery into a hard medium with a sharp tool.

Narrative

In this context, a story told in art, sometimes a shorthand version of longer, more complex tales told orally or in literature.

Low relief

Method of carving figures or designs into a surface so that they are raised slightly above a flat background.

Tyranny

Absolute control of government by an oppressive ruler.



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK



Close-up of Tyrannicides on exterior of right armrest



Close-up of Theseus on exterior of left armrest



VISUAL ANALYSIS

Describing Objects in Detail: Elgin Throne

45
MINS

Explore an object in depth using video, audio and images, and describe the details of that object through writing and/or sketching.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Examine and describe the details of an ancient object
- Explain how an ancient object was used in the time that it was made
- Gather and make notes about information seen or heard in video and audio clips

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution digital images of the [Elgin Throne](#) (the image of the entire object and detailed images from different points of view).
- Video: [Elgin Throne](#)
- Audio: Elgin Throne (a.k.a. [Ceremonial Chair](#))
- Graphic Organizers (two options pg. 10 & pg. 13)
- OPTIONAL:
 - Index cards
 - Access to video recording device



VISUAL ANALYSIS

DIRECTIONS:

1. Watch the video about the [Elgin Throne](#).
2. At the end of the video, the question is posed, “What kinds of people are given special seats today?” Consider this question individually or in small groups and write a short response. You may respond in one of the following ways:
 - a. Write your response on index cards.
 - b. Type your response on a smartphone or device and share it digitally (e.g. via a shared slide deck or shared classroom drive).
 - c. Make a short video of your response and share it with the class (e.g. via an app like flip or shared classroom drive).
3. Next, look closely at the Thone’s details using [high-resolution digital images](#) showing several points of view. Zoom in on the carvings on the exterior, back, and sides. Use the graphic organizer to make notes about the details you notice. You may not be able to fill out all sections of the graphic organizer just by looking at the object.
4. To gather more information, listen to the [audio clip](#) about the Elgin Throne, also described as a Ceremonial Chair. As you’re listening, add to your notes in the graphic organizer. (You may want to listen to the audio clip more than once or pause as you make notes.)



VISUAL ANALYSIS

5. Finally, decide which detail you find most interesting, and either sketch it or write a short description.
 6. **OPTIONAL:** Share your sketch or short description with your peers in a classroom gallery exhibition that ends with a gallery walk.
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HANDOUT

Art Analysis: Elgin Throne

Explore an object in depth using video, audio and images, and describe the details of that object through writing and/or sketching.

Step 1 - Look closely at the images of the object. Then describe what you see by answering the questions in the chart below:

Art Analysis Questions	My Description
What material was used?	
What color(s) do you see?	
What shapes or decorations do you see?	



HANDOUT

Art Analysis Questions	My Description
What images (animals, people, places, plants, things, etc.) do you see?	
What do your eyes focus on? Why?	
What shapes or decorations do you see?	



HANDOUT

Art Analysis Questions	My Description
What surprises or interests you about the Elgin Throne?	
What do you believe was the function of this object? Why?	

Step 2 - Think about what questions you have about the Elgin Throne. Write your questions in the space below or on a separate document.



HANDOUT

Elgin Throne Notes:

Information or details that surprised or interested you:

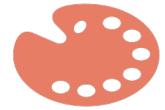
Describe the object's **form** (material, color, shape, decoration, etc.):



HANDOUT

Describe the object's function:

Questions you have about the object:



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

Using Line Drawings to Continue a Narrative

45
MINS

Explore the connection between art and storytelling by reading a scene from a story carved in stone, and then extending that story through line drawings.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Use visual evidence to support interpretations of narrative images
- Create a drawing of a moment to continue a narrative about people
- Use drawing to communicate a story

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Paper
- Pencils (or colored pencils)
- Eraser
- [Otto Magnus von Stackelberg's drawing of the Elgin Throne](#), Getty Research Institute
- High-resolution digital images of the [Elgin Throne](#) (the image of the entire object and detailed images from different points of view).
- **OPTIONAL:** [Featured Art Object information](#) for Elgin Throne



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

DIRECTIONS:

Narrative art is when an artist creates a work that tells a story or shows an event. In this activity, create your own work of **narrative** art through a simple line drawing.

1. Look at photographs of the [Elgin Throne](#) and zoom in to its carvings of the figures. Take some time to identify their shapes and lines. Look at this [drawing of the throne by Otto Magnus von Stackelberg](#) as an example.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think the figures are doing? What do you see that led you to that conclusion?
- What object(s) can you identify in the scene?
- What might they be thinking about?
- What might they have been doing before this scene?
- What might they do after this scene?



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

OPTIONAL: Read the [Featured Art Object description](#) for Elgin Throne to learn more about the narratives depicted in the carvings.

2. Pick one of the figures shown whose story you would like to continue. Using a pencil, sketch the figure in a scene before or after the moment shown. The sketch should show just the basic shapes and outlines of the characters and the setting. Then, add details such as symbols, backgrounds, and objects around the characters. (OPTIONAL: Use colored pencils for this step.)
3. Share your narrative with other students in small groups. Explain what details on the throne led you to the before or after scene you chose to draw.
4. While your classmates share their narratives, take notes about similarities and differences. Answer the following questions:
 - Were there any details you missed or interpreted differently?
 - If you had a different interpretation, what details led you to that interpretation?



EXPLORE MORE

If not already done during the Optional activity, read the Featured Art Object information for Elgin Throne then discuss the narratives on the throne using the following prompts:

- Describe the basic plot of each of these stories. Look for visual clues in the image that show details of the story.
- Are there any elements of these stories that are still relevant today? What are they?



RELATED LINKS

[Connecting the Provenance of Antiquities Collections](#) from Getty (includes a drawing of the Elgin Throne)



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:Re7.1 Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.

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.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.SL.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

9-10.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

9-10.WHST.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

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.