

Grades 6-8
LEARNING GUIDE

EXPLORING FUNCTIONAL ART FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD AND TODAY

getty





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FEATURED ART OBJECT

Stag Rhyton



Object Name: [Stag Rhyton](#)

Date Created: 100-1 BCE

Place Created: Eastern Seleucid Empire (west Asia)

Culture: Near Eastern (Parthian/ancient Iran)

Material: Gilt silver, garnet, glass

Maker: Unknown

Dimensions: 27.5 × 46 × 12.7 cm

(10 13/16 × 18 1/8 × 5in.)

Getty Museum

This silver horn decorated with a stag is called a **rhyton**, a luxury wine vessel. Its name comes from the ancient Greek word for “pour” or “flow.” Wine was poured from the rhyton into a cup from a tiny spout (missing) between the animal’s front legs. This added air to the wine to improve it. Sometimes drinkers also held the rhyton up high and poured the wine directly into their mouths. (That required practice and very good aim!) This rhyton is from Parthia, a region in modern Iran, and it was made sometime between 50 BCE and 50 CE.

Ancient Iran was overrun by many different cultures over time. Persians were in control in the 330s BCE when Alexander the Great conquered the area.

Rhyton

Horn-shaped drinking vessel for pouring wine either into a cup to aerate it (add air) or directly into the mouth.



FEATURED ART OBJECT

Functional Art

Object intended for a purpose but decorated with elements unnecessary for its function and intended to be aesthetically pleasing or thought-provoking.

Gild

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

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.

Zoomorphic

Including images of one or more animals or parts of animals within an artwork or functional object. From ancient Greek words for “animal” and “transform.”

After his death, his Greek generals took over. Then the local Parthians slowly expanded their own empire in Iran and beyond. These different peoples borrowed one another's social and artistic practices. Persians, Greeks, and Parthians shared a custom of eating together at banquets to create community. Rhyta (plural) like this one were used in rituals and given as gifts at dinners by the Parthian king and other important people.

Although they are called “horns,” they could be made of animals’ horns and tusks. Metal drinking vessels mimic these. Horns became **functional art** when decorated. This rhyton is **gilded** (coated with gold) and has floral decoration and finely **incised** (cut) details. Some horns, like this one, were also **zoomorphic**, with animal foreparts (front legs, chest, and head) added to the narrow end. The animals chosen to decorate rhyta were considered noble or brave, such as lions, stags, and mythical beasts. Guests at banquets would have admired the craftsmanship and fine details on this rhyton, such as the veins on the stag’s snout and the curling leaves and flowers on the horn.



VOCABULARY

Functional Art

Object intended for a purpose but decorated with elements unnecessary for its function and intended to be aesthetically pleasing or thought-provoking.

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Rhyton

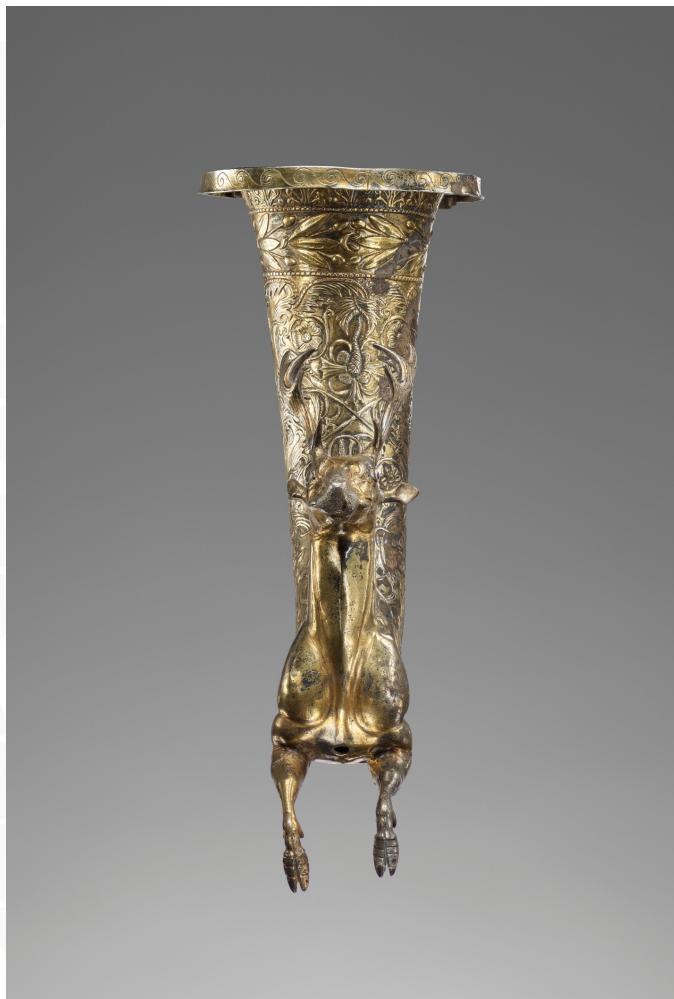
Horn-shaped drinking vessel for pouring wine either into a cup to aerate it (add air) or directly into the mouth.

Zoomorphism

Including images of one or more animals or parts of animals within an artwork or functional object. From ancient Greek words for “animal” and “transform.”



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK



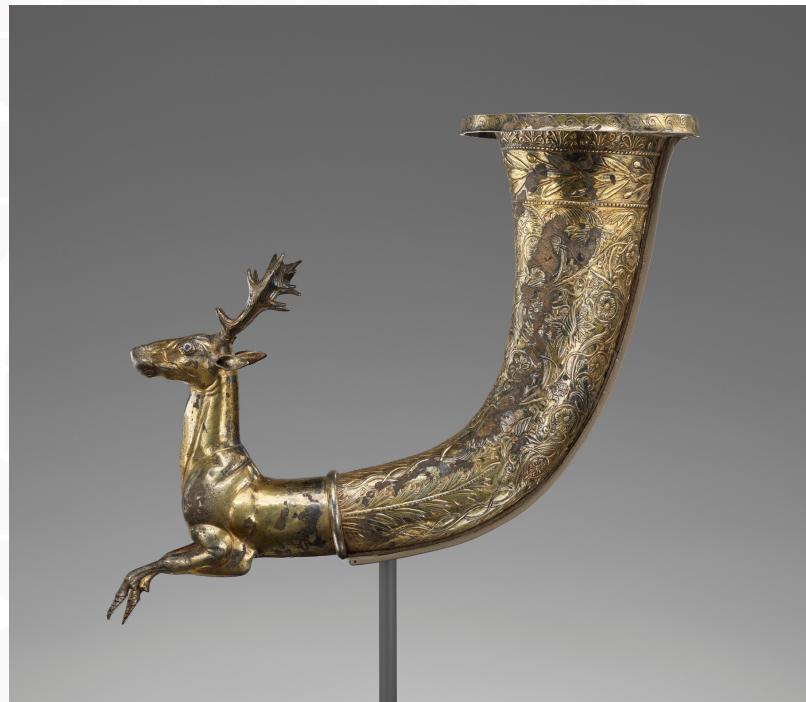
Closeup of front view Stag Rhyton



Closeup of back view of Stag Rhyton



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK



Closeup of left profile of Stag Rhyton



Closeup of right profile of Stag Rhyton



ANALYZE & DISCUSS

Analyze an Ancient Rhyton through Close Looking

45
MINS

Look closely at an example of ancient functional art, analyze it, and make informed guesses about what you observe.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Examine and describe an ancient object
- Listen to others' perspectives about an ancient object

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution digital images of [Stag Rhyton](#)
- [Featured Art Object information](#) for Stag Rhyton
- [Audio: Partian Rhyta](#)
- [Video: Creating Silver Drinking Horns from Ancient Persia to the Present](#)
from time stamp 38:45–39:35

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.



ANALYZE & DISCUSS

DIRECTIONS:

1. Begin by looking closely at [Stag Rhyton](#) using high-resolution images that show the object from different points of view. Make sure to zoom in and out to notice small details and to look at the object from all points of view available.
2. Then discuss the following questions as a class or in small groups.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you see? Describe the object.
- How would you describe the surface of the object?
- How do you think people used this object? Why?

3. Read the related [Featured Art Object](#) information.
4. Listen to the [Partian Rhyta](#) audio clip.
5. Watch the [Creating Silver Drinking Horns from Ancient Persia to the Present](#). See time stamp 38:45-39:35 for examples of aerating wine into a cup and drinking directly from the rhyton.



ANALYZE & DISCUSS

6. Discuss which details you read or listened to that you already noticed from your visual analysis of the object.
 7. Identify and make a list of four new pieces of information that you read or listened to that you missed in your initial visual analysis of the object.
-

Did You Know?

The horn of the rhyton was hammered into shape from one sheet of silver as the metal was heated to soften it.



RESEARCH REPORTER

Functional Art Today

90
MINS

Work in groups to research functional art and pick a method to report what you learned.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Understand and explain functional art

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution digital images of [Stag Rhyton](#) (image of the entire object and detailed images from different points of view).

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.



RESEARCH REPORTER

DIRECTIONS:

1. Begin by looking at images of the ancient vessel, Stag Rhyton, which is an excellent example of functional art.
 2. Split into groups to research functional art together.
 3. Use available resources (internet search, library, etc.) to answer the following questions:
 - What is functional art?
 - When do everyday functional objects become functional ART objects?
 - What are your group's favorite examples of functional art? Why?
 - If your group could design a functional art piece to use at a group gathering, what would it be? Why?
 4. Choose a way to report your group findings. A presentation, news report, large poster, rap, dance, etc., are all possibilities. Get creative! The report must do the following:
 - Answer all questions in Step 3
 - Have contributions from all team members
 - Provide visuals
-



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

Design a Functional Art Object

90
MINS

Design a functional object you would use at a special gathering. Just as Parthians honored important guests at banquets with objects like this rhyton, you can design or create something special!

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Understand and explain functional art
- Design a functional art object

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution digital images of [Stag Rhyton](#) (the image of the entire object and detailed images from different points of view).
- Video: [Stag Rhyton](#)
- Sketch paper
- Pencil
- Colored pencils or markers

Did You Know?

The stag's eyes are made of glass. One eye was lost, but the right eye still contains its original glass inlay.



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

Plan Your Project

1. Begin by looking at images of the ancient vessel, [Stag Rhyton](#), which is an excellent example of functional art.
2. After looking closely at the images, learn more by watching the video on the [Stag Rhyton](#).
3. Discuss the following questions with the class or in small groups:

Discussion Questions:

- Consider the question at the end of the Stag Rhyton video:
What do you have that combines function and beauty in a cool way?
- What is functional art?
- When do everyday functional objects become functional ART objects?
- What are your favorite examples of functional art? Why?
- If you could design a functional art piece to use at a special gathering, what would it be? Why?



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

4. Start making your own functional art object. Quickly sketch several ideas for a functional art object on a sheet of paper. Think about how you would use this item and what it needs to have to make it an artwork and a functional object. Experiment with different ideas.
5. Choose one sketch to use for the final drawing.
6. Draw your final idea for a functional art object on a separate sheet of paper. Make sure the drawing fills the page.
7. Use markers or colored pencils to add details like imagery, decorations, textures, or color to your object.
8. In pairs or in small groups, share your object and answer the following questions:
 - Which idea did you choose from those you brainstormed? Why was this idea your favorite?
 - What features did you add to the object? Why?
 - How did you decorate your object? Why did you choose those decorations?



EXPLORE MORE

Complete your design and make your object out of materials of your choice.



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

Draw a Zoomorphic Functional Object

45
MINS

Draw a zoomorphic functional object inspired by the ancient Stag Rhyton.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Understand and explain zoomorphism
- Understand and explain functional art
- Design a functional work of art that has zoomorphic qualities
- Reflect on and discuss your creative process

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution digital images of Stag Rhyton (the image of the entire object and detailed images from different points of view).
- Sketch paper
- Pencil

EXPLORE MORE

Make your functional object out of a selection of art materials (like clay).





ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

DIRECTIONS:

Introduction

1. Begin by reading the definition of zoomorphism and looking at an example of functional art by viewing [images of Stag Rhyton](#).
2. Use scrap paper to brainstorm and sketch or write ideas for the drawing. Each drawing should:
 - Include an animal in your design so that your final design is zoomorphic.
 - Include a functional object of your choice.
 - Show care, craftsmanship, and attention to detail.
3. Pick the best idea/sketch, and write down answers to the following:
 - What animal and what functional object will you be combining? Why did you choose them?
 - How do you plan to combine the two?
 - Does combining the two change how the object functions? If so, explain how.



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

3. Finish the final drawing of your zoomorphic functional work of art using your rough sketches and notes for reference.
4. Present your drawing and share the answers to these questions in a brief presentation to the class or in pairs:
 - What did your creative process involve?
 - What information did you find most interesting about functional art and zoomorphism?
 - How do you imagine using the object you designed?



EXPLORE MORE

- Complete your design and create the object you designed using materials of your choice. Everyone can gather to share and use the objects for a party or event everyone chooses.
- Create a class gallery of all the designs (and/or finished objects).



RELATED LINKS

[Luxury Silver of Ancient Persia](#) from Google Arts and Culture

Video on [Creating Silver Drinking Horns from Ancient Persia to the Present](#) from Getty Museum See time stamp 38:45-39:35 for examples of aerating wine into a cup and drinking directly from the rhyton

Video on [Royal Banqueting in Ancient Persia](#) from Getty Museum in which the speakers address silver rhyta at timestamps 19:45 and 43:38



STANDARDS

National Core Arts Standards:

- 6.VA:Cr1.1** Combine concepts collaboratively to generate innovative ideas for creating art.
- 6.VA:Cr2.1** Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design.
- 6.VA:Cr3** Reflect on whether personal artwork conveys the intended meaning and revise accordingly.
- 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.

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.
- SL.6.2** 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.

W.6.1A Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.

W.6.1B Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

W.6.2.D Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

W.6.5 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W.6.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

W.6.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.

California Social Studies Standards:

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