Ancient Dolls

This education pack is focused on ‘dolls’ from the ancient world.

Use this education guide to interact with the exhibit ‘Girls and Dolls’ and gain a deeper understanding of what part dolls have played in the lives of children throughout time.

Activities in this guide are aligned to U.S. and/or U.K. educational standards. They are designed to be used by students and teachers as school lessons or enrichment opportunities.
Students can answer the following questions on their own or discuss in groups.

1. What is a ‘doll’? (Can you think of different types of dolls?)

2. Who plays with dolls and why?

3. What do you think ancient dolls might have looked like? (Use the pictures above to give you a clue!)

4. In what ways do you think ancient dolls were different from modern dolls? (Think about how they look, what they are made from, and how they can be used.)
Along with the large number of ‘dolls’ archaeologists have found that look like girls from the ancient world, they have found some that look like boys too.

These objects were found in a potter’s workshop on the Greek island of Corinth. Image source: ASCSA Digital Collections, Corinth Image: bw 4055: Jointed dolls

We are not sure if these objects were all used as toys, or even if they were all used by children, but it is possible that boys as well as girls played with dolls in the ancient world.

If you think about it, many children play with dolls today. Even if you don’t play with Barbies, you might play with other toy figures, Lego figurines, or play as a virtual character as part of a video game that imitates real life. So in a way, many children play with ‘dolls’ and use them to learn about the world around them.

**Answer the following questions:**

*Could any of your (old) toys be called ‘dolls’? Why?*

*What do you think makes a doll a doll?*
Resource: interesting objects!

All of these ‘dolls’ are from ancient Greece. How do you think they were used by ancient Greek children?

This ‘doll’ from ancient Greece is on display in the British Museum in London, England.

It sits on a miniature throne and was found with a miniature pair of boots and other miniature objects.

- Does this remind you of any of your toys?

Here is a ‘doll and doll’s crockery’ which is on display in the Altes museum in Berlin.

- Why do you think ancient doll makers also made miniature objects for these dolls?

This is a ‘toy’ that was found in a grave from a place called Papatislures, which was on the island of Rhodes in ancient Greece. This object is also in the collection of the British Museum.

- What do you think the figure is doing? Would you call this a doll?

Educational Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6–8.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6–8.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
In addition to physical objects, we also have a small number of poems written by people in the ancient world that mention dolls. Below are three epigrams (short poems) which describe children or young people dedicating their toys to a god or goddess as they grow up. Historians would say that this is part of a ‘coming of age’ ritual.

**Read the epigrams below. What can they tell us about the relationship between children and their toys in the ancient world?**

*Timareta, the daughter of Timaretus, before her wedding, hath dedicated to thee, Artemis of the lake, her tambourine and her pretty ball, and the caul that kept up her hair, and her dolls, too, and their dresses; a virgin’s gift, as is fit, to virgin Dian. But, daughter of Leto, hold thy hand over the girl, and purely keep her in her purity.*

*We clung to our dolls in our chambers when we were girls, playing Young Wives, without a care. And towards dawn your Mother, who allotted wool to her attendant workwomen, came and called you to help with the salted meat.*

*To Hermes Philocles here hangs up these toys of his boyhood: his noiseless ball, this lively boxwood rattle, his knuckle-bones he had such a mania for, and his spinning-top.*

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**Educational Standards**

**CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RH.6–8.2**
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

**CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RH.6–8.1**
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
Activity: Make an ancient paper doll!

To make this doll, you will need to cut out the individual pieces with scissors and then join them together using string, pins, or metal brads. (Like an ancient doll maker!)

Educational Standards
National Core Art Standards
Visual Arts Anchor
Standard 1
Investigate, Plan, Make.
Ancient dolls were often painted in bright colours, dressed in miniature clothing and sometimes adorned with jewellery. Some children even had small objects for their dolls such as treasure chests - they would hang the key around their doll’s neck for safe keeping!

Your task is to colour in the dolls below.

If you like, you can draw on clothes and give them objects that you think children or adults might have had in ancient times.

These colouring sheets for ‘Girls and Dolls’ exhibition can be downloaded here from the Girl Museum website.

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Activity: Design Your Own Doll

Dolls are simply inanimate objects that we bring to life with our imaginations. Dolls can be made out of almost anything, even a stick or a pebble with a face drawn on it.

Dolls, like many toys, are used by children as a way to explore the world around them and to make sense of their place in it. Over the centuries, people have made dolls out of many different materials, from dried apples to ivory and gold.

If you could create your very own ancient ‘doll’ from scratch, what would it be made of and what would it look like? Remember, a doll can be made out of anything and look like anything you want, so think outside the box!