

PSYCHE

EDUCATION PACK 1: ANCIENT GREEK POTTERY

RESOURCES + WORKSHEETS



PSYCHE: WHERE DOES THE SOUL GO?
26 APRIL - 1 SEPTEMBER 2024
GREAT NORTH MUSEUM: HANCOCK

exhibition education resources

PACK 1: POTS!

THE EXHIBITION

PSYCHE [sike-ee]: Where does the soul go? is a story-led exhibition which explores Ancient Greek ideas about life after death. Does the soul spend eternity in the murky underworld? Will it be reborn as something new? Or does it just... disappear? This exhibition reveals some of the Ancient Greek answers to these unknowable questions through storytelling and ancient objects, as our short paper animation brings the figures of Ancient Greek pottery to life.

The exhibition features a short animation [3:30] alongside eight objects from the Great North Museum: Hancock's collections. Together, they explore the theme of death and the afterlife in the ancient Greek world from practical funerary rituals to mythological and philosophical beliefs.

THIS LESSON BLOCK

Ancient Greek pottery is usually a well-known sight in museums: striking black and orange colours, interesting figures, and all manner of shapes and sizes! A huge quantity of pottery survives from the ancient world. It is an important source of evidence as it can provide different types of information. This learning block looks at ancient pottery more closely, from how it is made to what it was used for, while introducing key terms and some useful vocabulary.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe materials used by the ancient Greeks
- Describe the process for turning raw clay into a painted pot
- Use technical terms to identify pottery types
- Understand the functions of pottery inside and outside the house

AUTHOR

This content has been created by Dr Steph Holton to accompany the PSYCHE: Where does the soul go? exhibition at the Great North Museum: Hancock in Newcastle upon Tyne. If you have any questions, please do get in touch! You can drop Steph an email at Stephanie.Holton@open.ac.uk or fill in the contact form on our project blog www.wheredoesthesoulgo.org

how to make ANCIENT GREEK POTTERY

WORD BANK

Pottery: pots, jars, cups, and other objects made from clay



Archaeologist: a history expert who studies the remains people have left behind - and often digs them out of the ground!

Terracotta: a type of clay that is reddish-orange in colour.

Levigation: the process for cleaning up clay after it has been dug from the ground.

Wedging: the process to remove air bubbles from clay - a bit like kneading dough!



Pliable: something that is easy to bend, fold, or twist without breaking.



1.1 MATERIALS

People all over the ancient world have made pottery for thousands of years. Archaeologists have found examples from as far back as 29000BC! Pottery is made from clay. Clay is dug out of the ground. This makes it a cheap and accessible resource. The image below shows an ancient workshop - what can you see?



In the ancient Greek region of Attica, the clay dug from the ground contained a large amount of iron: this gave their pottery a strong reddish-orange colour. This type of clay is known as **terracotta**.

1.2 PREPARING THE CLAY

Before it can be used to make pots, clay has to be cleaned. It is added to a container with a large amount of water and then left to settle. This process is called **levigation**. It helps get rid of impurities in the clay like rocks, leaves, stones, or any other material it has picked up while in the ground. Heavier objects like stones sink to the bottom while lighter organic material rises to the top. The clay left in the middle will be cleaned up and ready for **wedging**. This involves repeatedly pushing the clay against a hard surface to knock out any air bubbles. This is important as air bubbles inside the clay can cause it to break later in the process.

1.3 SHAPING THE CLAY

Once ready, the clay can then be moulded into different shapes. Adding small amounts of water while shaping the clay can help make it more pliable. There are two techniques for creating pottery called **hand-building** and **throwing**.

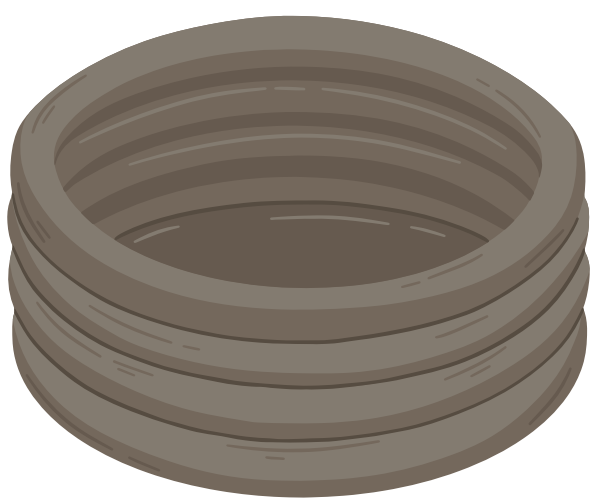
how to make ANCIENT GREEK POTTERY

WORD BANK

Pinching: a method of making a pot from clay using your hands to pinch it into shape.



Coiling: a method of making a pot from clay by adding strips of rolled clay on top of each other.



Throwing: making pottery on a wheel.



Mesopotamia: an ancient region between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, now in modern-day Iraq.

1.4 HAND-BUILDING

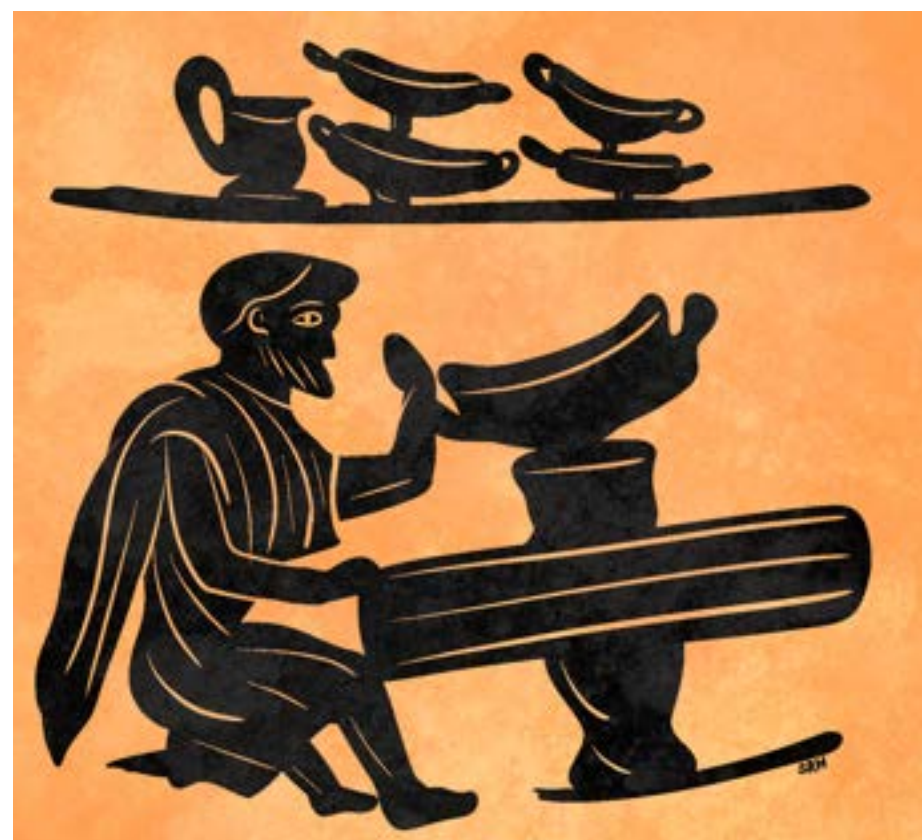
Hand-building is exactly what it sounds like: shaping the clay into a pot using only your hands. The oldest method of hand-building is called **pinching** – you might have tried this already yourself! Starting with a ball of clay, push down in the centre with your fingers to make a hollow. Then you pinch around the sides as much or as little as you want to create your pot shape.

Another method is called **coiling**. Roll the clay into long sausage-shaped strips. You can then start building your pot by adding the strips one on top of the other in a spiral or as separate rings. While building it you can smooth the joins and squeeze the walls to get your desired shape. Some people start by adding the rings to a thick flat base of clay while others add the base at the end.

1.5 THROWING

The second technique, **throwing**, isn't what it sounds like! Throwing involves using a potter's wheel to create the pot. A potter's wheel is an early mechanical invention that has been traced back as far as 3250BC in **Mesopotamia**.

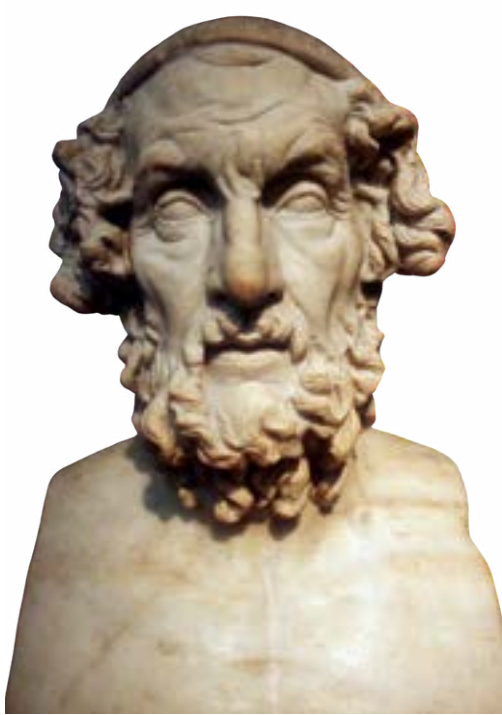
On a potter's wheel, a lump of clay is placed on a large flat disc – the wheel – made of wood or stone, or even terracotta. The wheel is then turned by hand or by foot. A slave or potter's assistant might be responsible for turning the wheel so the potter could focus on shaping the clay. As the clay spins on the wheel, the potter creates different shapes by applying different amounts of pressure with their hands or with special tools. The image below shows an ancient potter using their wheel:



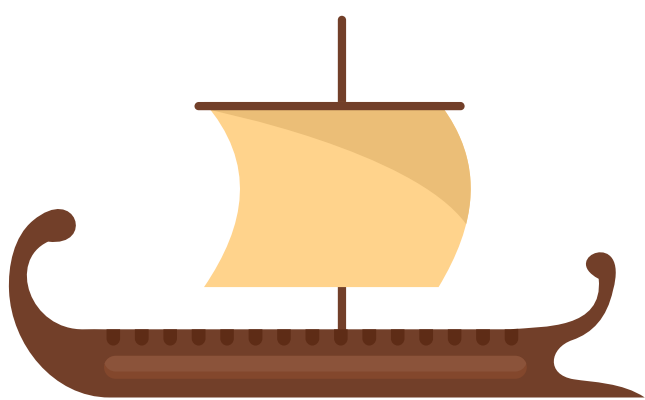
how to make ANCIENT GREEK POTTERY

WORD BANK

Homer: an Ancient Greek poet who created famous stories called **epics** about heroes from the Trojan War. He lived in the 8th century BC.



Odyssey: one of Homer's epic poems. It tells the story of Odysseus, a Greek soldier, who is trying to return home after the end of the Trojan War. He faces many challenges on his 10 year journey like monsters, witches, and giants.



Black-figure: an Ancient Greek pottery style which has black-coloured figures or patterns on an orange background.

Red-figure: an Ancient Greek pottery style which has orange-coloured figures or patterns on a black background.

1.6 DECORATING

Once the clay has been transformed into a pot, it is left to dry. As it dries out it shrinks and starts to harden. When the clay has dried out enough that it no longer feels cold when you touch it, the potter adds on smaller pieces like handles and then adds the decoration.

Ancient Greeks liked to decorate their pottery with patterns and figures. They might show mythological tales of the gods and goddesses, parts of famous stories like **Homer's Odyssey**, or scenes from famous plays. Many pots also included scenes of animals in nature or people enjoying different activities, having parties, or working. What job do you think the woman in the picture below is doing?



From around 600-500BC, the most popular style of decoration on Greek pottery was called **black-figure**: this means the pots were decorated with black coloured figures on a reddish-orange background, like this:



Then, from around 500-300BC, **red-figure** became more popular. This means the pots now had reddish-orange figures on a black background, like this:



POTTERY STYLES

Ancient Greek pottery painters created their designs using **slip** rather than paint. Slip is a mixture of clay and water. The slip turns black when the clay is fired in a kiln. The painter would sketch out their design first using charcoal or a blunt scraper tool, and then begin to add the slip with a brush.



BLACK-FIGURE

For black-figure, the **figures and shapes** are painted on the pot using the slip. Details are scratched in afterwards. The background is left unpainted.



RED-FIGURE

For red-figure, the **background** around the figures is painted with the slip. Details are added with the slip using a finer brush. The figures and shapes are left unpainted.



BLACK-FIGURE



RED-FIGURE

Sometimes painters added in details using coloured paints after the pot had been fired. White, red, and yellow were common for patterns on clothing. White paint was also used for the hair or beards of elderly figures, as well as women's skin.

how to make ANCIENT GREEK POTTERY

WORD BANK

Fired: bringing clay to a high temperature to cause physical changes to the material.

Kiln: a special kind of oven for hardening and drying clay. It can reach very high temperatures.



Oxidise: a process where something is combined with oxygen.

Carbon monoxide: a poisonous gas made of carbon and oxygen.

1.7 FIRING THE CLAY

Finally, the decorated pot is **fired** at a high temperature in a special oven called a **kiln**. The firing process makes the pot hard and durable. It also helps bring out the different colours from the slip that the painter has used for decoration. The image below shows an ancient potter at his kiln:



There are **three stages** to the ancient Greek firing process.

OXIDISING

The finished pots are placed in a kiln which is heated to around **800-900 degrees Celsius**. The air vents of the kiln are open, allowing oxygen to circulate. The iron in the clay is **oxidised**.

Any unpainted clay turns a light reddish-orange colour. The areas painted with the slip start to turn dark red.

REDUCTION

Vents are closed to cut off the oxygen. wet brushwood or green wood is added into the kiln. The temperature is increased to 950 degrees. The burning wood releases **carbon monoxide** which reacts with the clay – now, the light red areas turn grey, and the slip turns a shiny black colour.

Because of the different chemical reactions taking place, the slip is now '**sealed**' and will not undergo any more changes.

REOXIDISING

The vents are reopened to allow **oxygen** back inside the kiln. The temperature is cooled back down to 900 degrees.

The grey areas of the pot are reoxidised and undergo a final change to their distinctive orange colour. The painted slip remains a shiny black colour.

Once the kiln has cooled down, the pots are removed!

POTTERY SHAPES

Ancient Greek pottery came in many shapes and sizes. Have a look at some of the examples below. Do they remind you of any objects in your home?



STAMNOS

storage jar



ALABASTRON

perfume bottle



VOLUTE KRATER

mixing bowl for wine
and water



COLUMN KRATER

mixing bowl for wine
and water



CALYX KRATER

mixing bowl for wine
and water



LEKYTHOS

oil bottle



KYLIX

drinking cup



ARYBALLOS

perfume / oil holder



HYDRIA

water jug



AMPHORA

storage jar for oil,
wine, milk, or grain

where did they use ANCIENT GREEK POTTERY

WORD BANK

Oikos: the Ancient Greek word for household. This meant all the people who lived together in a house, including the family and their slaves.



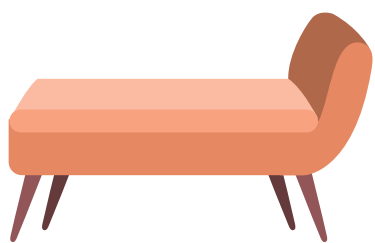
Mistress: the woman in charge of the running of the household.

Slaves: someone who is the property of another person. They might have been captured, sold, or born into slavery. The person has no freedom or rights, and must work for their owner without any payment.

Symposium: an Ancient Greek drinking party which took place after dinner.

Aristocratic: someone who is wealthy and has a high social standing.

Couches: a type of furniture used by the Ancient Greeks for dining. It looks a bit like a bed!



Krater: a large mixing pot.

Oinochoe: a serving jug.

Kylix: a drinking cup.

2.1 IN THE HOME

You would find many different types of pottery in an Ancient Greek house (**oikos**). In the kitchen, pots were used to store food and liquids, for cooking, and for serving food. Most of these pots would be quite plain rather than elaborately decorated.

Ancient Greeks used clay cups and beakers for drinking, rather than glass like us. Even babies had their own special cups! Archaeologists have found small beakers with tiny teeth marks on their spout, suggesting they were used by babies and toddlers.



You might also find pots in the bedroom belonging to the **mistress** of the household, containing make-up and perfume. These were sometimes decorated with scenes of the mistress getting dressed, helped by her **slaves**.

2.2 AT THE SYMPOSIUM

The **symposium** was a special kind of Ancient Greek drinking party for **aristocratic** men. They would drink wine, enjoy entertainment like music and dancing, and have lively discussions while reclining on **couches**.



One of the most important pots at the symposium was the **krater**. Inside this large pot, water was mixed with wine to make it less strong. A slave would then fill up a smaller jug called an **oinochoe** from the krater and pour the mixture into each guest's **kylix**, a drinking cup.

where did they use ANCIENT GREEK POTTERY

WORD BANK

Aryballos: a small container for carrying perfumed oil.

Stlengis or **strigil:** a curved metal tool for scraping oil off the skin.



Cemetery: a large burial ground. For the Ancient Greeks, this was usually outside the city walls.

Spirit: the Ancient Greeks believed part of a person survived after death. They called it different things, including a soul or a ghost.

Lekythos: an oil bottle.

White-ground: a pottery style where figures or designs are painted onto a white background.

White slip: Slip is a mixture of clay and water. To make the white slip, the Ancient Greeks used a different type of clay which did not contain iron.

2.3 AT THE GYM

Athletes carried an **aryballos**, a small container for perfumed oil, on a leather strap that looped around their wrist. Before exercising, they rubbed the oil all over their skin. When they had finished, they scraped the oil, dirt, and sweat off their bodies using a curved metal tool called a **stlengis** or a **strigil**.

2.6 AT THE CEMETERY

The Ancient Greeks buried their dead in **cemeteries**. They believed that it was important to continue to honour the dead and keep their **spirits** happy, so they would visit their graves frequently to leave offerings and gifts. A popular gift to leave was a **lekythos**, an oil bottle. These oil bottles were often decorated with pictures of the dead, their family visiting the grave, or scenes from the Ancient Greek underworld.



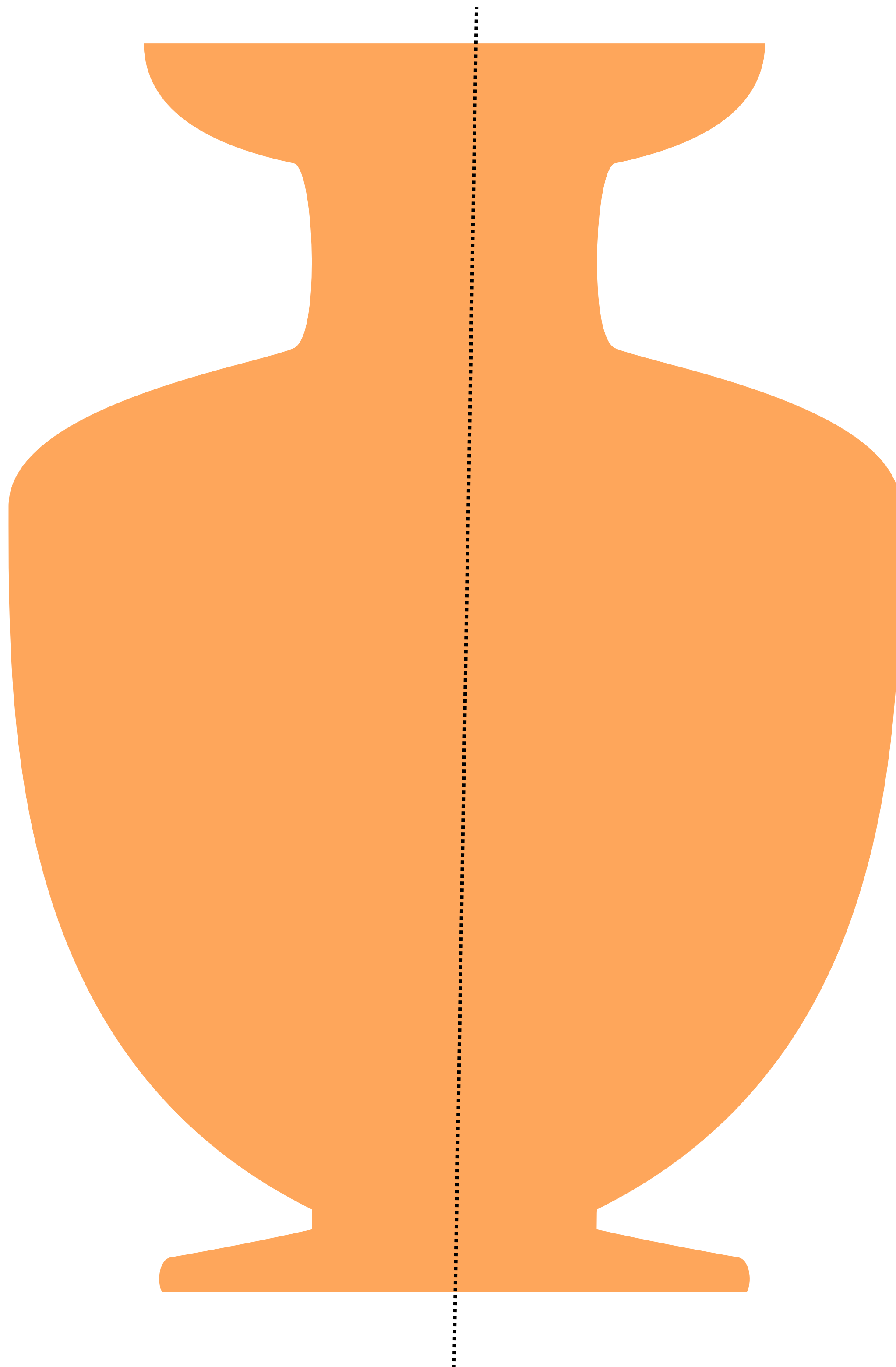
White-ground lekythoi look different to black-figure and red-figure pottery. This is because a **white slip** is added to turn the background a pale white colour. Figures are drawn and painted using a combination of black slip and paints.

2.3 AT THE GYM

WORKSHEETS

POTTERY PAINTING

Try being an Ancient Greek potter! Using only a black pencil or pen, design your own pot using the template below. One half should be **black-figure** and one half should be **red-figure**.



BLACK-FIGURE

RED-FIGURE

COLOUR CHANGES

Fill in the blanks then match the statements to the correct picture.



The kiln vents are opened again to allow more _____ to circulate. The temperature cools down to about _____ degrees Celsius. Any clay that was not covered in the slip turns a final _____ colour.

The vents are closed and _____ is added to the kiln. It releases carbon monoxide which reacts with the clay. Any parts painted with the slip turn _____. The rest of the clay turns a light grey colour. The slip is now _____.

The painter adds a design to the pot. Instead of using paint, they use a mixture of _____ and _____. This is called a _____.

The pots are placed in a _____ which is heated to around 800-900 degrees Celsius. The vents are open so that the _____ in the clay is oxidised. The slip and the clay begin to turn red.

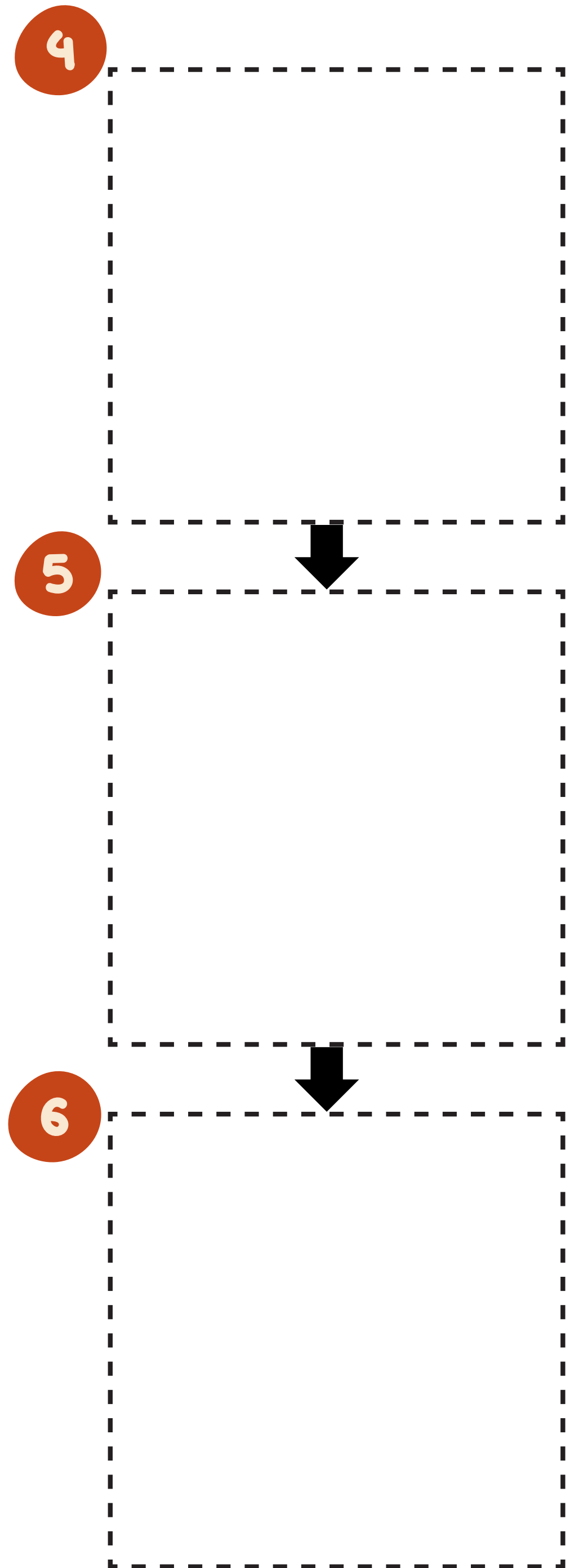
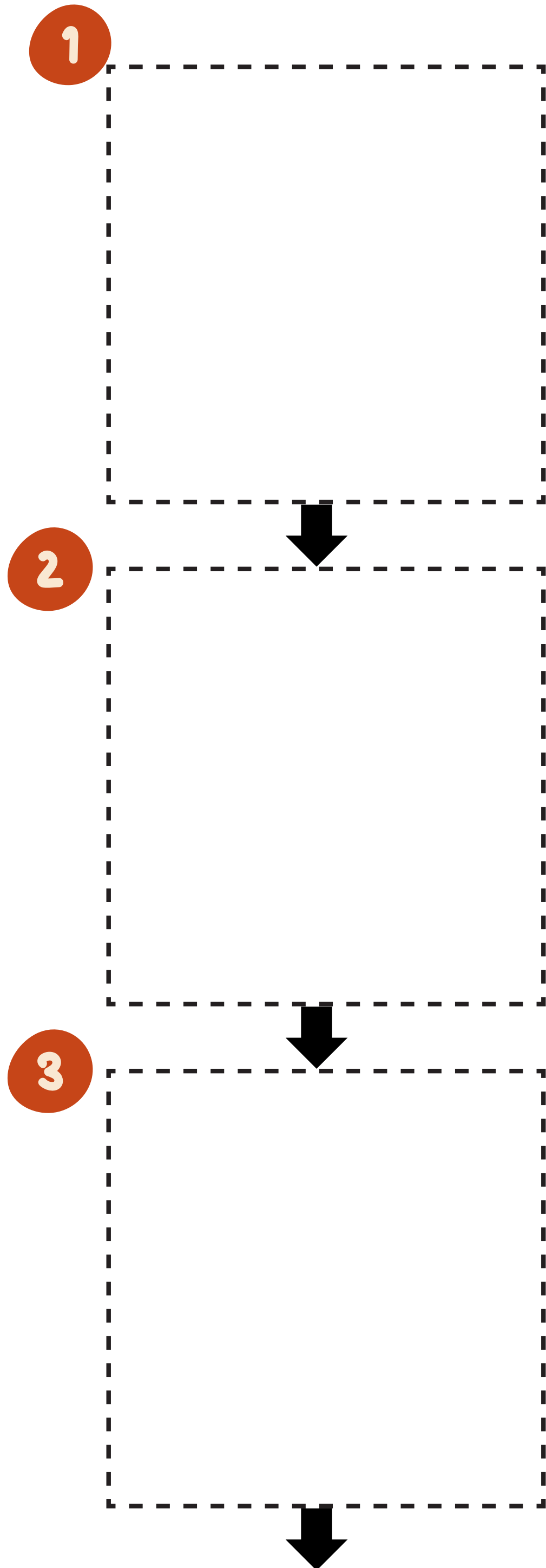
FROM CLAY TO POT!

Can you put the steps below back in the correct order?



FROM CLAY TO POT!

Can you put the steps below back in the correct order?



2.3 AT THE GYM

EXTRA RESOURCES

POTTERY TREASURE HUNT

Can you find any of these pot shapes in the museum? It doesn't have to have the same design - it just has to be the same shape! Write down the name that the pot is given on its display label and any other information it provides.



OBJECT INVESTIGATOR

Choose one of the Ancient Greek pots on display (in the gallery) or on your table (in a session) and fill in the object investigation record below.

Draw a picture of your object here:

What details do you notice?

Who might have used it?

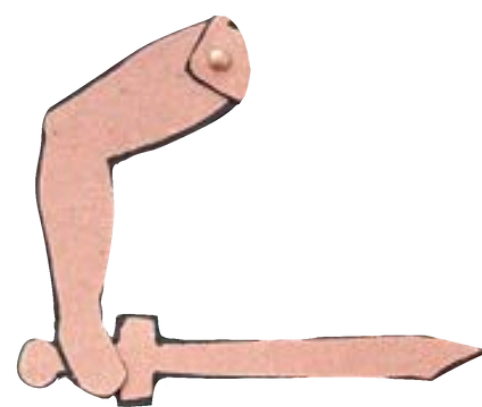
What does this object tell you about the Ancient Greeks?

POTTERY PUPPETS!

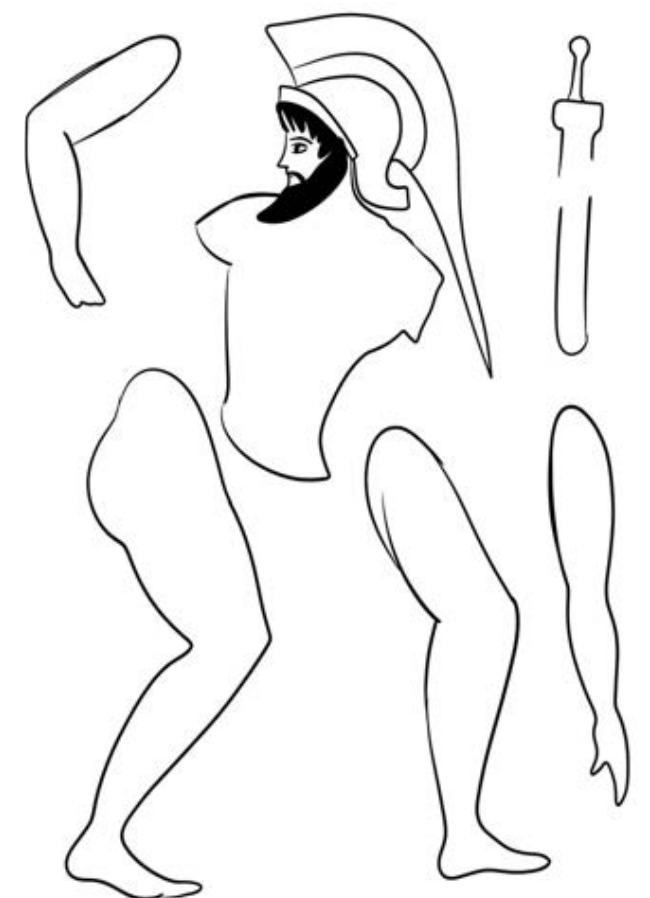
The paper animation in our exhibition was inspired by the figures on Ancient Greek pottery. We really liked the **black-figure style** and how it could be recreated in shadow puppet form. Why not have a go? You can design your own puppet based on the pots you have seen in the museum or use one of the templates from our website.



Plan your puppet design! Think about light and shadow. Remember, when you shine a light on your finished puppet, cut-out spaces will let the light through while card will block the light to create a shadow.



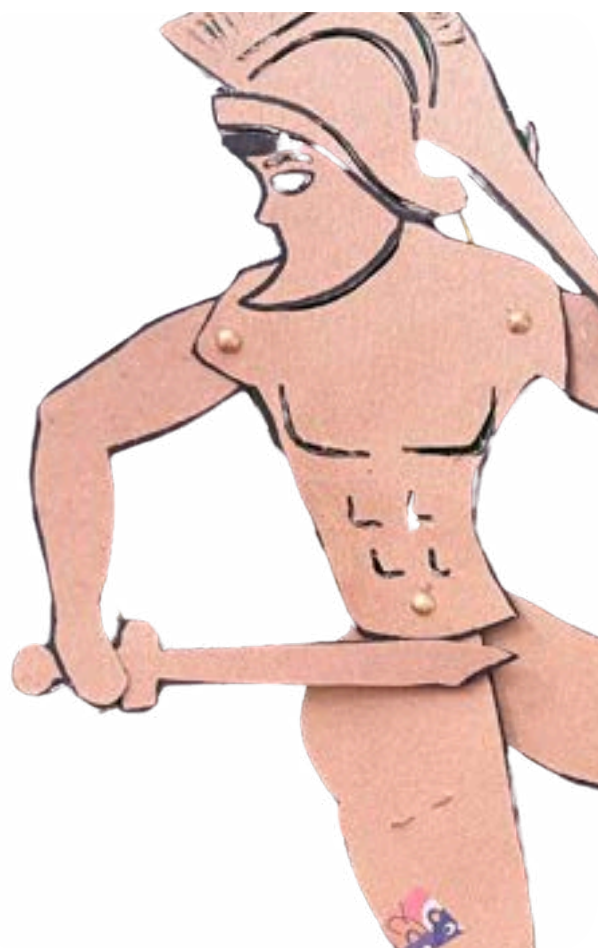
Do you want your puppet to have any moving parts? We like wiggly jiggly arms and legs, or nodding heads!



Sketch your final design out on a piece of card. Draw any moving parts separate to the main puppet body.



Cut the pieces out with scissors. Ask an adult for help with any fiddly bits!



Attach moving parts to the puppet body using split pins.



Using strong paper tape, **attach a stick** to the back of the main puppet body. If you have moving parts, you might want to attach a stick to one or two of these, too. Or you can just leave them loose to wiggle and jiggle!



Feeling creative? Why not **experiment** with different materials to see what kind of shadows they create!

POTTERY PUPPETS!

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