The Influence of Ancient Greece and Rome on the New Nation

Secondary (Grades 9–12)

Objectives

Students will observe the influences of ancient Greece and Rome on the aesthetics of early American silver and will make connections to classical influences on the formation of the American government.

Connecticut State Standards Addressed

Visual Arts

4A: Analyze and interpret artworks in terms of form, cultural and historical context, and purpose.
5A: Research and analyze historic meaning and purpose in varied works of art.
6A: Analyze and compare characteristics of the visual arts within a particular historical period or style with ideas, issues, or themes of that period or style.

Social Studies

HS 1.2: Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in United States history.
HS 1.3: Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in world history/ international studies.
HS 1.7: Explain the purpose, structures, and functions of government and law at the local, state, national, and international levels.

Procedures in Brief

Students will compare Paul Revere II’s Tankard, c. 1760–74 with images of ancient Greek or Roman columns in order to illustrate the aesthetic influence of the classical style on mid-eighteenth-century art and architecture (Neoclassicism). They will then review the structures of government of these ancient civilizations and will be asked to compare them to the organizational structure of America’s government as outlined in the Constitution.

Time Frame

Allot two 45-minute class periods for this lesson.
Materials Needed

- Excerpts from the Constitution of the United States of America, specifically Articles I–III+
- Image and/or diagram of a Doric column+
- Image of John Singleton Copley’s Paul Revere, 1768+
- Making Connections Worksheet+
- Museum’s Teacher Resource for this object
- Pens/pencils
- Photograph of the Pantheon+
- Photograph of Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello+
- PowerPoint image of Paul Revere II’s Tankard, c. 1760–74
- Resources on the governments of ancient Greece and Rome (comparable materials may be located in students’ textbooks)+

+Make copies for classroom distribution
*Many of these resource materials can be found in the Web Resources section of this lesson plan.

Students’ Prior Knowledge

This lesson will be most successful when students have become familiar with the patriotic events surrounding the Revolutionary War, including the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Teacher Preparation

Teachers are encouraged to read the museum’s Teacher Resource on the object for more information concerning its maker, the historical and artistic context in which it was produced, and the artistic style it demonstrates. Sample questions for guided looking are provided to promote students’ careful investigation of the object and to foster classroom dialogue. Teachers should review the historic information articulated below.

Emerging Neoclassicism in Eighteenth-Century America

Throughout the mid-eighteenth century, the Rococo (1740s–1780s) style dominated the designs of American artistic production. Items created during this period are often characterized by extravagant, intricate, and dramatic ornamentation, frequently resembling the organic forms of the natural world. The sinuous curves of these designs, along with their asymmetrical compositions, stood in contrast to the emerging Neoclassical (1770s–1820s) style inspired by the eighteenth-century excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii, ancient cities buried by the volcano Vesuvius in A.D. 79. Fascinated by the classical sensibilities found in the architecture, arts, and decorative motifs of ancient Greece and Rome, Neoclassical designers sought to revive the past by favoring the presentation of proportion, order, and balance in their work over the elaborate decoration and detail of their predecessors. This transition in design is reflected in the tankard by Paul Revere II (see Teacher Resource).

Following the Revolution, Americans sought to establish and legitimize their new collective identity, abandoning the tyrannical influence of England by emulating the democratic structures
of government found in the ancient world. The Declaration of Independence enumerates a clear set of injuries and usurpations of power by the British throne and states that colonists are henceforth no longer required to function as British citizens. They are to sever ties with England and create their own structure of government based upon a system of checks and balances and the inclusion of ordinary citizens in the discussion of government’s role and function. Both of these proposed tenets were derived from the organizational structures of the ancient Greek democracy and the Roman Republic.

The Neoclassical style may be found throughout the museum’s galleries of American art. Consider scheduling a visit to the museum for your students in order to reinforce the concepts explored in this lesson. Call (860) 838-4046 to book a tour today.

Similarities in Governmental Structures and Functions
*Points of comparison with the United States government include:*

**ANCIENT GREEK DEMOCRACY**
- First direct democracy in world history;
- Duty of all citizens (free males) to attend public meetings and vote regularly on proposed laws; and
- System of citizen-based jury duty.

**THE ROMAN REPUBLIC**
- Hierarchy of shared governing power, including a system of citizen assemblies, a senate, and two consuls;
- Election of government officials from various socio-economic factions by their constituents;
- Ratification of laws and ordinances by government officials on behalf of the people; and
- Use of veto power over lower officials.

**Procedures**

**Opening**
Begin by asking students what they already know about Paul Revere II. Project or distribute copies of John Singleton Copley’s *Paul Revere, 1768* and discuss Revere’s role as a colonial silversmith (see *Teacher Resource*). Explain to students that they will now investigate an object produced by Revere in his workshop and follow by introducing the basic premise of the lesson as outlined above.

**Core**

**DAY ONE**

1) Project Paul Revere II’s *Tankard, c. 1760–74* for all students to view. Give them ample time to look at the object and make initial observations. Using the questions for guided looking (see *Teacher Resource*), facilitate an analysis of the tankard. Focus the students’ responses on the form, style, and decoration of the object. Students should cite visual evidence to support their statements.
2) Distribute the *Making Connections* worksheet (see Appendix). Ask students to record their recent observations on the left-hand side of the t-chart. Ensure that students’ responses include as much descriptive language as possible (i.e., tall body; straight, horizontal bands; seemingly heavy weight; symmetrical form composed of clean lines; domed top; etc.).

3) Distribute copies of an image and/or diagram of an ancient Doric column. Have students look at it carefully and record their observations, following the same instructions mentioned above, to complete their t-chart.

4) Ask students to review their recorded observations. Do they see any similarities between the objects? Encourage them to take a closer look. Conduct a classroom discussion about the visual parallels between the two pieces.

5) Explain Neoclassicism and its derivation from the art of ancient Greece and Rome (see *Teacher Preparation*). Through this lens, reexamine the tankard and the column with the class. How does this new information relate to the objects being analyzed? Can students more easily identify the tankard’s ancient stylistic influences? Are there similarities they did not see before?

6) Pass around or project photographs of both the Pantheon (c. A.D. 126) and Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello (1768–1809) to give students an example of how art forms besides silver—in this case, architecture—reflected the growing influence of ancient forms and styles during this historical period. Discuss the visual parallels between these two buildings (i.e., columned façade, domed roof at center of structure, etc.).

7) As a class, discuss why these ancient aesthetic influences might have gained popularity as the country entered the Revolution and during the years that followed the conflict (see *Teacher Preparation*). Note how the same ancient influences helped shape the organizational structure of the new American government.

**DAY TWO**

1) Present information on the structure and ideals of the ancient Greek and Roman governments. If classroom resources allow, have students analyze various documents pertaining to these ancient lawmaking organizations.

2) Investigate the structure of the American government. Distribute copies of the Constitution and ask students to carefully read Section 1 of the first three Articles (Sections 1–3 for Article 1). Students should then write a summary of each. If time permits, students should read Articles 1 to 3 in their entirety as well as the Preamble. Engage students in a discussion that promotes understanding of the basic structure of the United States government. Topics could include the three branches of government, voting by the people, the system of checks and balances, and so forth.

3) Once these research exercises have been completed, have students draw out the similarities between ancient Greek and Roman structures of government and that of the United States (see *Teacher Preparation*).
Closure
Review the similarities in artistic production, architectural construction, and governmental structure that students have uncovered between ancient Greece and Rome and the newly formed United States. Reinforce that as the American patriots rebelled against what they considered to be the tyrannical control of the British monarchy over the Colonies, they looked to the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome as their source for a democratic lawmaking structure. These classical influences also served as inspiration for their artistic pursuits, as they sought to define and legitimize a new national identity.

Conclude by returning to the projected image of Paul Revere II’s *Tankard*, c. 1760–74. Ask students to answer the following questions: Do you look at this object differently now than you did at the beginning of this lesson? If so, how? Convey to the class that works of art often contain layers of meaning and symbolism—social, artistic, and historical—that encourage viewers to rethink their initial reactions and observations.

**Web Resources for Deeper Exploration**

**Doric Order (Columns)**
http://www.doric-column.com/
http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110tech/Parthenon.html#Orders

**Greek Democracy**
http://greece.mrdonn.org/athensdemocracy.html
http://languages.siuc.edu/classics/Johnson/HTML/L10.html

**John Singleton Copley’s Paul Revere, 1768**
http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/paul-revere-32401

**Neoclassicism**
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/neoc_1/hd_neoc_1.htm
http://www.neoclassicism.us/Main/HomePage

**Roman Republic**
http://romanempire.net/romepage/PolCht/Main_political_hierarchy.htm

**The Constitution of the United States of America**
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html

**The Pantheon**
http://www.romanlife-romeitaly.com/roman-pantheon.html
http://www.sacred-destinations.com/italy/rome-pantheon

**Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello**
http://www2.monticello.org/
http://www.dl.ket.org/humanities/arch/images/monticello.jpg

Additional web resources may be found in the *Teacher Resource* for this object.
References


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Appendix
Making Connections

Record your observations regarding the form, style, and ornamentation of these objects. Begin with broad observations and work toward specific details in both pieces. Use as much descriptive language as possible.

Paul Revere II, *Tankard*, c. 1760–74

Ancient Doric Column
Tankard, c. 1760–74
Paul Revere II (1735–1818)
American, Boston, Massachusetts
Gift of Harold C. Lovell, Jr. and Lulu K. Lovell,
In Memory of Harold C. Lovell, Sr., 2000.7.1
From the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum
Museum of Art, Hartford, CT.