



# NASHVILLE PARTHENON EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES



## Gender on the Parthenon

## **Gender on the Parthenon**

**Mission:** To educate the public concerning the Parthenon and the civilization that built it, both in Athens, Greece, in the fifth century BCE and in Nashville, Tennessee, from 1897 to the present. To exhibit, collect, and care for objects and information related to: fifth century BCE Athens, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, and the rebuilding of the Nashville Parthenon. To exhibit, collect, and care for visual art and to educate the public concerning its various forms.

**Title:** Gender on the Parthenon

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**Activity Time:** Approximately 30 minutes

**Age Levels:** Grades 9-12

**Date:** Summer 2020, ongoing

### **Overview:**

The Parthenon offers the ability to highlight the political and social power of art in societies as ancient as Athens and in modern-day. The artistic elements of the Parthenon reveal important insights into the historical background of its construction, including the political situation in Athens, the Athenian conception of their identity, and gender roles for Athenian men, women, and non-citizens. By examining how the Parthenon functioned in Athens, students can understand how other artistic objects throughout history have been used to reinforce political and social ideals.

### **Goals:**

- Students will be able to use non-textual sources in historical analysis.
- Students will discover how art can express political or social realities.
- Students will gain an awareness of the role architecture plays in politics.

### **Objectives:**

- Students will acquire information on how the Parthenon functioned in Athens' political and social landscape.
- Students will see art on the Parthenon that expresses gender politics.
- Students will see art that shows important roles in politics from antiquity to present day.

### **Age Level:**

Grades 9-12 Social Studies, Ancient History

The Classic Civilizations of Greece and Rome: 1000-500 BCE

- AH.21 Describe early Greek society, with an emphasis on social classes, cultural traditions, and religious beliefs.
- AH. 23 Evaluate the significance of the Persian Wars.
- AH.25 Identify the significant developments and contributions of Greece to the following: architecture, art/drama, history, language, law, literature/poetry, medicine, philosophy, religious institutions, science, and technology

### **Background information:**

### What is the political situation in Athens at the time of the construction of the Parthenon?

- At the time of the Parthenon's construction, the Greeks had defeated a Persian invasion and Athens was the most powerful city-state in Greece. As a result of Athenian centrality in the Greek world, Athens received many visitors who would have toured the major monuments of the city. In this environment, artistic production was a key element of propaganda supporting Athenian dominance both in the city-state itself and among the Greek world. The Parthenon, and the Acropolis building program in general, served as both a thank-offering to Athena for victory in battle and a display of Athens' wealth and power.

### What were the social values in Athens at the time of the construction of the Parthenon?

- Gender Norms
  - Greeks believed men needed to impose order upon women through marriage because women lacked the civilized ability of self-restraint. Women could not control their own sexuality and thus could threaten the order of the *oikos* (household) and subsequently the *polis* (city-state) by indiscriminately having sex with men and blurring patrilineal lines. Athena, possessing clear wisdom and self-restraint, as evidenced by her virgin status, overcame the failings of mortal women. She did not oppose the system, but rather had enough male qualities to refuse marriage and motherhood.
  - Existing mainly in the private sphere, women had four roles in Greek society: prayer, care, lament, and weaving. They played important roles in religious festivals and kept their *oikos* pious, they cared for their family, they mourned deaths, and they wove cloth for their family and for market, an important economic role in Greek society. However, these roles were not valued equally to the male duties, which centered on the public sphere.
- Foreigners
  - Athenians, and Greeks in general, believed they were the superior civilization because of their rationality and ordered society. In contrast, barbarians (ie foreigners) were chaotic and uncivilized and, therefore, inferior to Athenians. To keep foreigners separate from Athenians, marriages were strictly regulated and only the union of a citizen man and citizen woman could create citizen children. Thus, no way existed for foreigners to marry into the Athenian citizenry, keeping them disenfranchised from many political, social, and religious institutions.
  - Greeks considered marriage a hallmark of rational civilization and prided themselves on the importance of marriage to their society. These fundamental Greek values showed rationality and order and were considered the reason why Athens, and Greek society, flourished against barbarian outsiders.
- Related Religious Values
  - The Gods' favor was central to Athenian's conception of their self. They believed their success was a direct result of their piety and connection to the gods.
  - Particularly, they viewed themselves as the children of Athena.
    - In the Athenian origin myth, Hephaestus ejaculated onto Athena's thigh. When Athena brushed it onto the ground, one of the founders of Athens, Erechtheus, sprung from the ground.
    - Later in Athenian mythology, Athena's role as a parent of Athens is reinforced in the contest for the patronage of the city. In this contest,

Athena and Poseidon are fighting to become the patron god of the city, showing Athens' power as two powerful gods desired them. Athena ultimately won by gifting the city with an olive tree, a gift which was far better than Poseidon's saltwater spring.

How does the iconography of the Parthenon reflect the social and political values of its environment?

- Functioning as a thank-offering and propagandistic monument more than a temple, the Parthenon reflects Athens' preeminence and power in its visual language. The artistic program on the Parthenon references mythological tales and figures to proclaim Athens' own importance and highlight the societal values which lead to its rise in power. Athenians believed that their Greek rationality, defeat of barbarian foes, and proper social order, with men controlling women and a focus on citizenship, led to the gods' favor and their success.
- The Amazonomachy on the West Metopes:
  - To perpetuate the idea of Athenian rationality and superiority, each side of the Parthenon displayed on metopes a different battle between order and chaos, Greeks and barbarians.
  - The depiction of the Amazonomachy on the West Pediments had a multi-layered meaning to the viewer. Athenians often used Amazons as an analogue for Persians because of their dress and weaponry to show Greek rationality defeating their barbarous foes. In the Parthenon, Amazons subverted social norms, rejecting traditional feminine roles of domesticity in favor of masculine warfare. Amazons were wild, unconstrained by marriage, and thus could threaten the masculine modes of power. However, since they were women, they lacked self-restraint and thus could never overcome the rational power of the Greeks. Although the Amazons appeared strong, the underlying message argued that women who rejected Athenian norms and tried to gain independence would always be defeated.
  - The location of this scene on the West side interacted with the contest between Athena and Poseidon on the Pediment above to highlight the difference between mortal and divine women. Athena also engaged in traditionally masculine behaviors and refused to marry, but she succeeded as a result of her divine status. Mortal women, however, would always be subordinate to patriarchal powers and expectations.
- The Birth of Athena on the East Pediment:
  - This scene firmly associates Athena with the patriarchal power of her father, Zeus. In this scene, Athena emerges fully formed from the head of her father Zeus, who had swallowed his wife Metis to protect his power. In birthing Athena from his own body, Zeus has essentially co-opted feminine reproduction, rendering women non-essential to procreation. Although Athena is a woman, her unique birth aligns her with patriarchal rather than feminine powers. Thus, Athena favors continuation of the patriarchal system rather than improving the lives of mortal women. Although Athena breaks the boundaries of traditional femininity, her birth showcases her role as a protector of the patriarchy, not of women.
  - The layout of this pediment reinforces the idea that Athena's birth was an important element in the order of the universe. The pediment is bookended by

Helios raising the sun north end and Selene bringing the moon on the south, showing the order of the cosmos.

- The Contest for Athens on the West Pediment:
  - Two versions of the story could have been known to ancient Athenians and both contain patriarchal ideals. In the more traditional retelling of the myth, Athena and Poseidon presented gifts to the men of Athens who then voted on their favorite. In this scenario, women were not counted as part of the Athenian citizenry and had no say in the fate of their city. Augustine recounts the second version, which at first gives more agency to Athenian women. In this version, Augustine says that “at that time it was customary in that area that the women also should have a part in public deliberations—to take a vote.” Since the women voted for Athena and outnumbered the men, Athena won the contest, but the men and Poseidon were angered, leading to chaos. To stop this destruction, Athenian women were punished in three ways: “they should never vote thereafter, that none of their children should bear their mother’s name and that no one should call them Athenian women” (Augustine).
- The Panathenaia Procession on the Frieze:
  - This festival centered on the cult statue of Athena Polias, which was the most sacred item on the Acropolis and the center of most of Athens’ religious activity. Although the Panathenaia included a wide variety of events, from athletic competitions to musical competitions to feasts, it centered on the creation and presentation of a handwoven *peplos* to the cult statue. The preparations for and the procession itself involved women of all ages and social classes and is a clear insight into how women could participate in religious activity. Young girls, known as Arrhephoroi, worked on the Acropolis to prepare the loom for the weaving of the *peplos* and visited a sacred underground location, reenacting the founding of the Athenian race through Erechtheus. A collection of women, the characteristics of whom are widely debated, then wove the *peplos* during the Chalkeia festival, which occurred during the cultivation season.<sup>2</sup> Nine months later, the peplos processed through Athens, reenacting the birth of the goddess, before being presented to the statue. The inclusion of the procession on the Parthenon is a source of debate, but it does show the religious piety of the city and their connection to Athena.
- The Colossal Cult Statue of Athena inside:
  - Athena is shown in her armor with a weapon and shield resting beside her. Her war helmet is on, but the earflaps are raised, signifying that the battle has ended. The Nike figure in her right hand further emphasizes that Athena, and thus Athens, has emerged victorious from combat. The colossal chryselephantine statue was covered in plates of gold and, with the doors open and a reflecting pool in front of the statue, the light would be almost blinding. By making it difficult to directly look at the goddess and with the reflecting pool creating distance, the disparity between the mortal and divine would be emphasized. Once again, mortal women would be reminded that they could not act like the divine goddess.
  - The contrast between the gods and mortals is strengthened by the design on the base of the statue depicting the creation of Pandora. Pandora is literally stepped on by Athena, indicating how inferior mortals are to the divine. Clearly, mortal woman are so different from Athena that they could never hope to emulate her.

- The snake next to Athena references Erechtheus (see above). Snakes emerged from the earth fully formed, which created a deep connection between the land and snakes in the Greek mind and, in this statue, would have stressed the connection Athenians had to Athena and their land.
- The breastplate of Athena has the head of Medusa, whose mythology shows Athena twice taking the side of men over women (see Theoi mythology link).
- The shield of Athena depicts the Amazonomachy once again, reinforcing the same themes as the exterior.

### **How does this program tie to your gallery content and the museum?**

This program uses the colossal statue of Athena and artistic themes to facilitate learning about social and religious practices in ancient Greece. Through this discussion, the program invites students thinking about daily life and gender roles in ancient Athens, and apply the same logic to modern American society.

### **Ideas for Initiating Interaction:**

- This program will take place in a classroom. Alternatively, it can also be done on-site at the Parthenon in the Naos or Treasury.

### **Props:**

- A board visible to the entire class (white board, screen, etc.).
- A pen or pencil for each student.
- A sheet of paper for each student.
- A device to access the internet for each student (or enough for small groups).
- Appendix B: Analyzing Artistic Themes on the Parthenon for each student or small group.
- Artistic Analysis Worksheet for each student or small group.
- Appendix D Images to project.

### **Advance Preparation:**

- Print Appendix B: Analyzing Artistic Themes on the Parthenon for each student or small group.
- Print the Artistic Analysis Worksheet for each student or small group.
- Prepare sample images to project, possibly including:
  - An overview of the Parthenon
  - A detail of the Parthenon's sculptural program to be analyzed as an example
  - A modern example of political architecture or art

### **Procedures:**

- Welcome students to today's lesson.
- Activate prior knowledge of the political situation in Athens at the time of the Parthenon's construction.
  - Consider projecting images of the Parthenon or Acropolis
- Begin Appendix A instructions.
  - Consider projecting a sample image of a modern political art piece, such as the Lincoln Memorial.
- Discuss as a class observations and final thoughts.

### **Summing Up:**

- Clarify the connections students made between the Parthenon and more modern buildings and objects to emphasize the role art plays in any society.
- Encourage students to delve deeper into the meaning behind art and architecture within society that is often taken for granted.

### Assessment:

- If needed, the writing assignment comparing the Parthenon and another object can be assessed.

### Following Up:

- Recommended: Visit the Nashville Parthenon with your family.
- Khan Academy's Analysis of the Parthenon
  - <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/ancient-mediterranean-ap/greece-etruria-rome/v/parthenon>
- Virtual Tour of the Acropolis
  - <https://www.acropolisvirtualtour.gr/>
- Send comments, feedback, or suggestions to the Nashville Parthenon- we'd love to hear your students' thoughts. Email [info@parthenon.org](mailto:info@parthenon.org).

### Resources:

- Augustine. "Recount of the Athenian Loss of the Vote." In *City of God, Volume 5*. Rev. Ed. Edited by William M. Green. Translated by Eva M. Sanford. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Blundell, Sue. "Marriage and the Maiden: Narratives on the Parthenon." In *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*, edited by Sue Blundell and Margaret Williamson, 47-70. London: New York Routledge, 1998.
- Boloti, Tina. "Offering of Cloth and/or Clothing to the Sanctuaries." In *Textiles and Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean*, edited by Cecilie Brøns and Marie-Louise Nosch. Havertown: Oxbow Books, Limited, 2017.
- Hurwit, Jeffrey M. "Beautiful Evil: Pandora and the Athena Parthenos." *American Journal of Archaeology* 99, no. 2 (1995): 171-86.
- Stehle, Eva. "Women and Religion in Ancient Greece." In *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, edited by Sharon L. James, and Sheila Dillon. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012.
- Stewart, Andrew. "Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens." *Poetics Today* 16, no. 4 (1995): 571-97.
- [http://www.stoa.org/demos/article\\_women\\_and\\_family@page=4&greekEncoding=UnicodeC.html](http://www.stoa.org/demos/article_women_and_family@page=4&greekEncoding=UnicodeC.html)
- <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/historians/narrative/4thcent.html>
- [https://www.loebclassics.com/view/augustine-city\\_god\\_pagans/1957/pb\\_LCL415.391.xml](https://www.loebclassics.com/view/augustine-city_god_pagans/1957/pb_LCL415.391.xml)
- <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/pericles-funeralspeech.asp>
- The Acropolis Museum in Athens
  - <https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/content/parthenon-gallery>
- Overview of Greek mythology
  - <https://www.theoi.com/>

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## **APPENDIX A:**

### Teacher Directions

- Briefly summarize the political situation in Athens at the construction of the Parthenon. Emphasize the importance of artistic production in this environment.
- For each pair or group of students, assign or let students choose one artistic element on the Parthenon from the list below.
  - The Amazonomachy on the West Metopes
  - The Birth of Athena on the East Pediment
  - The Contest for Athens on the West Pediment
  - The Panathenaia Procession on the Frieze
  - The Colossal Cult Statue of Athena inside
- Keeping in mind the socio-cultural background of the Parthenon, lead students in analyzing how the depictions of women could reflect societal ideas of gender. Consider projecting one artistic element of the Parthenon, or another work, on the board and giving a sample analysis.
- After each group has worked through their element, discuss as a class some interesting observations and theories.
- Allow them to break off into groups to brainstorm objects with similar goals or political purposes. Consider providing examples, such as the Lincoln Memorial, to kickstart the process. Depending on your goals, encourage students to focus on other ancient or modern objects of all types, from art objects to literary texts.
- If time permits, compare the results of students. Encourage them to remark upon any similarities and explain their reasoning.

## **APPENDIX B:**

### Analyzing Artistic Themes on the Parthenon

#### Directions:

- Browse the three introductory images of the Nashville Parthenon. Then, choose one artistic element on the Parthenon from the list below.
  - The Centauromachy on the Metope (2 pictures)
  - The Birth of Athena on the East Pediment (2 pictures)
  - The Contest for Athens on the West Pediment (2 pictures)
  - The Panathenaia Procession on the Frieze (1 picture)
  - The Colossal Cult Statue of Athena in the Naos (1 picture)
  
- Look closely at the details of your artistic element and either sketch it or describe it on the Artistic Analysis Worksheet. Then, brainstorm how these details could tell us something about societal values in ancient Athens.
  
- Compare your observations to your classmates. Have you reached any similar conclusions?
  
- Can you think of any other art objects, architectural monuments, or literary texts that served a political or social purpose? What truths do they reveal about the customs, values, and politics of the culture in which they were created? Brainstorm by yourself or in a small groups and write a short paragraph comparing your chosen object with the Parthenon.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Artistic Analysis Worksheet

Detail	Interpretations

## **APPENDIX D**

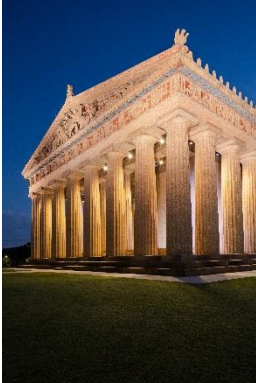
Nashville Parthenon: East Side



Nashville Parthenon: West Side



Nashville Parthenon: At Night



Metope: Centauromachy



Metope: Centauromachy: Detail



East Pediment: The Birth of Athena: Exterior



East Pediment: The Birth of Athena: Interior Maquette and Plaster Casts



West Pediment: The Contest for Athens: Exterior



West Pediment: The Contest for Athens: Interior Maquette and Plaster Casts



The Panathenaia Procession on the Frieze



<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/content/frieze-0/3>

The Colossal Cult Statue of Athena in the Naos

