

Implementation of 'Greek Canon' (LS-HR-34)

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My name is Nathalie Chessé-Chesnot, I teach Litterature and French Language at the European Schools, in Brussels. I have implemented [Greek Canon \(LS-HR-34\)](#) learning scenario by Natasa Tram. I have done it with the seventh graders (13 years old) during my literature lesson. This lesson is about art history. I don't teach this subject, but it was easy to adapt it to my literature course.

PRESENTATION

Objectives of the lesson

- 1- Familiarise students with the use of Europeana.
- 2- **Show them through art history that the perception of beauty is eminently subjective.**
- 3- Make them understand how art, literature, sculpture, painting is a questioning of the world, how it reflects the ideals of a time.

Why this choice?

It was an opportunity to show the students the links between literature, art and philosophy. The discovery of Greek canons also interested me because, at this age, students see their bodies transform and are very concerned about their physical appearance. More particularly, I wanted to illustrate the literature course on love (*The beauty and the beast* by Leprince de Beaumont, and *Riquet with tussock* by Charles Perrault, with a reflection on the subjective representation of beauty...).

So, I had to start with the first definition of beauty, that of Greek sculpture.

What was studied before this course?

Before the implementation of this course, we worked on the **myth of Pygmalion**, the sculptor who wanted to create with his statue a perfect beauty, inaccessible ideal to simple mortals. It was the opportunity to present Europeana to the students. We worked from a sculpted representation of the myth exhibited at the Louvres: ['Pygmalion au pied desa statue qui s'anime, dit aussi Pygmalion et Galatée'](#).

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 - 45 minutes

For the first lesson, I presented Europeana portal and explained how to search for information; then I showed different works of art from the Greek and Roman period. I asked the students what the common points were, and if they thought beauty could be represented in this way today. In the end, I did the same as Natasa: measuring the proportions one's own body.

For the next lesson, I gave different topics for presentations. Students had to work on the proportions in the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods of Greek art. I distributed them the worksheet (Annexe 1) made by Natasa, so that they can analyse the different sculptures. On our online platform (O365 Teams), I gave them the links for their researches.

- First topic: [Greek sculpture of men: research on Europeana > Kouros](#)
- Second topic: [Doryphoros](#).
- Third topic: [Laocoon and his sons](#).
- Fourth topic: Same work with [a sculpture of women: Kora](#).
- Fifth topic: [Nike of Samothrace](#).
- Sixth topic: [Venus de Milo](#).

Activity 2 - 30 minutes

Group 1 /2 /3 make their presentation on the Greek beauty canons with **male sculpture** and then on the analysis of the works sought on Europeana. They are asked to compare the different representation of male characters and his evolution.

Activity 3 - 30 minutes

Group 2 make their presentation on the Greek beauty canons with **female sculpture**. They are asked to compare the different representation of female characters and his evolution.

Activity 4 - 30 minutes

Categorising. Together we synthesised all these presentations. As Natasa, I showed on Teams different sentences about Greek canon on the smartboard, and I used a True/False online quiz (annexe 2)

Activity 5 - 45 minutes

The last lesson was devoted to an assessment: a quiz distributed online (Annex 3).

REFLECTION

What worked well

Students liked doing research on Europeana and even tried to find resources different from those I had indicated to them.

What didn't work

The activity of taking each other's measurements was not conclusive. I had to stop it because I saw that for some, it was an opportunity for mockery!

Also, I faced one obstacle when implementing the learning scenario: I couldn't go to the Kahoot site and had to create my questionnaires (annexes 2 and 3). I believe it is easier to propose annexes that colleagues can easily copy by printing them as I did for Natasa first annexe.

Lesson proposed after this implementation on the beauty criteria of Greek art

The influence of this Greek art on the perception of beauty in the Renaissance through the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Botticelli. These painters sought to express a universal beauty, witnessing the eternal order of the cosmos, hence the desire for harmony in proportion (the Vitruvian man, the golden number or the divine proportion). In his theories, Vinci often refers to mathematics as "the absolute paradigm of knowledge". Almost all his remarks are presented as theorems, demonstrations of experiments supported by sketches. The pupils could have to find some paintings of these artists on Europeana.

Conclusion & teacher's remarks

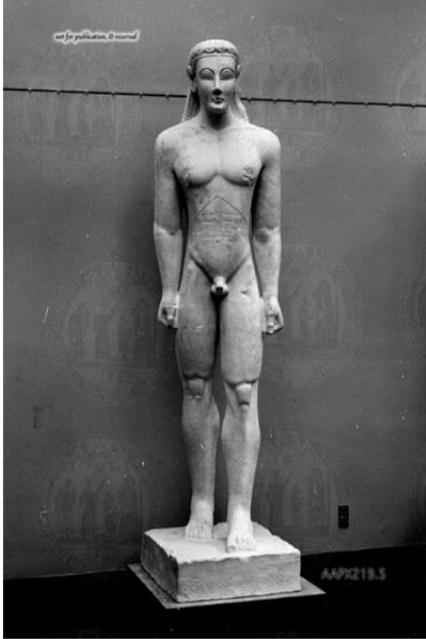
I consider that the objectives were achieved. The students were very interested and involved in this course. The questioning on the quest for perfection led to a reflection on the excesses of cosmetic surgery. One student asked the ethics teacher to do a presentation on this topic, and another asked to work on anorexia. I suggested to them another work about Greek mythology: the myth of eternal youth with Hebe, and the Ambrosia.

This course was, therefore, an opportunity to collaborate with a colleague! Finally, for these presentations, students found by their resources on Europeana, which shows that the use of this site will now be a useful tool for them.

- Europeana research: "[chirurgie esthétique](#)".
- Europeana research: "[anorexie](#)".

Annexe 1. The working document that I copied from Natasa's course

- Draw the composition on the sculptures shown, mark the lines of the shoulders and knees.
- Measure and fill in the blank lines how many heads fit into the body.



Annexe 2 - Greek art / Synthesis: elements you may want to copy for your students

Greek art concerns Greece but also the many colonies located on the shores of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Most of what is known about ancient Greek sculptures comes from the authors of antiquity who refer to them. These masterpieces are not signed, some sculptors have passed into posterity thanks to the authors and have become real myths (Phidias, and the Parthenon Praxiteles etc.)

A small part of Greek sculptural production has reached us, while almost all painting has disappeared, except for painted ceramics. The term sculpture covers reliefs and statues. In addition to the temples, sculptures have been found thanks to the friezes and pediments of monuments such as the Parthenon

What were the functions of this art?.

It is assumed that it was used to pay tribute to politicians, that it could also serve propaganda in the same way as texts such as *Iliad* which exalts Greek values or the *Aeneid* which does the same with Roman values. Art may also have had a religious or votive function.

There are generally three periods in the evolution of Greek art: the archaic period - the classical period - the Hellenistic period.

I-Archaic period: Kore and kouros.

Kore: refers to the representation of a young girl

Kouros: refers to that of a young man standing with his arms glued to his body or detached, always naked.

This last point is not indifferent since it marks an evolution concerning the art that undoubtedly inspired the Greeks: Egyptian art. The pharaohs often used Greek mercenaries. But nudity was unthinkable in Egyptian art unless it was to represent slaves or enemy prisoners...

The kouros are naked as for the kores; they are draped in tunics that reveal the perfection of their bodies.

There resided a key point: beauty is assimilated to perfection and the harmony of forms. The proportions must be harmonious, hence the use of mathematical laws that have the ambition to achieve agreement between the parts with the whole; the bodies are athletic for both men and women; only physical exercise could achieve this ideal. Another essential point: eternal youth: representations of old age are infrequent.

Why this cult of perfection? It is a question of giving the idea of divine perfection.

The Greeks' view of the world is anthropocentric: their gods are in the human image but an image that aims to give the sensation of perfection, an exclusive attribute of the divine. For the Greeks, beauty is linked to the notion of good. The sculptor seeks to represent the ideal.

This archaic style has gradually evolved into what is known as the classical style, marking a clear stylistic progression as technical knowledge has improved. The posture of the bodies is not natural as you can see by mimicking the position of statues. During this period, sculptors did not yet focus on the anatomy of their subject.

II-The classical period.

The poses become more natural; the desire for realism is obvious. The technical skills of Greek sculptors of this period evolved with the representation of human forms in more varied postures. The sculptors try to mimic the natural movement of the body as closely as possible; they work on the dynamism of the posture. This is how they invent what is called contrapposto: one of the two legs carry the weight of the body, the other is left free and slightly bent. cf the Doryphore. This wiggle explains the presence of elements next to the body, which allows it to be supported. They are the supports required by the misalignment that shifted the centre of gravity of the statue.

Another striking fact: statues are beginning to take as a model existing characters: political figures or family members (funeral monuments)

These statues also had a votive function: they testified to the recognition of men towards the Gods. It was thus a question of thanking the gods for their benefits but also of reconciling them by these offerings in order to obtain favours...

III-The transition from the classical to the Hellenistic period.

The renunciation of idealisation is even more confirmed because from now on sculptors aim at the individualization of figures. The sculpture thus became more and more realistic, natural and accessible: wealthy families could choose to represent their members to decorate interiors etc.

Most of the existing Greek works survived thanks to the marble copies that the Romans made of Greek bronze sculptures. However, even if it is inspired by Greek sculpture, Roman sculpture has its particularities such as the invention of the bust and the democratization of the portrait. Also, it has produced a mix of styles inherited from the countries conquered by the Romans.

Annexe 3. Review and verify my knowledge: true or false?

1. The Romans allowed us to know Greek art.

True

False

2. The statues were signed by their sculptor.

True

False

3. The Greeks inspired Egyptian sculpture.

True

False

4. Greek art represents naked men and women.

True

False

5. Two essential periods can be distinguished in Greek art.

True

False

6. The archaic Greek ideal of beauty aims to represent divine perfection.

True

False

7. *Contrapposto* is a technique used to give elegance to a statue.

True

False

8. The classical period tends to be more natural in the representation of bodies.

True

False

9. The function of the statues was only to honour the gods.

True

False

10. Roman sculpture has reproduced the canons of classical Greek sculpture.

True

False

Annex 4. Questionnaire on the beauty canons of Greek statuary.

1- How did we get access to Greek art?

2- The sculptors of ancient Greece did not sign their works: how do we know their names?

3- How did the Greeks gain access to Egyptian culture?

4- In what cases could nudity be represented among Egyptians?

5- Give the three periods of Greek art.

6- Why this cult of perfection in archaic statuary?

7- Explain what contrapposto is

8- What are the reasons why the classical period aims less for perfection and more for naturalness in representation.

9- What were the functions of the statues?

10- What have been the contributions of Roman sculpture?

Annexe 5. Working document that I copied into Natasa's course: *Student feedback*

What form of work did you like the best? Explain why.

a)individual b)in pairs c)group work

How did you feel during today's lesson? Explain why.

a)bad b)interested c)excited e)bored f)as usual

What would you do to improve this lesson?

Are you satisfied with today's lesson?

a)yes b)no

What would you change in this lesson?

What did you like best about this lesson?
