

Activity Plan. *Dionysus*.

Objectives

The *Dionysus* animation is designed to help learners:

- Read and interpret ancient material culture (ancient pottery)
- Know who Dionysus was and understand his role in the origins of drama and theatre
- Understand how gods and mythical figures (such as maenads & satyrs) can be represented by images
- Think about and discuss the concepts of performance and audience

Activities: After you've watched the *Dionysus* animation together, try an activity:

Design: Plan an alternative vase scene featuring Dionysus. Is it a revel, a drama, or some other event? Who is there? What is happening?

Storyboard: Plan an animated story based on this vase and what you know of Dionysus and ancient Greek culture.

Who was Dionysus?

The Greek god Dionysus was associated with many things, especially things beyond the everyday. He was the son of the god, Zeus, and of the human woman, Semele. Sometimes he was depicted as young and smooth-chinned, and at other times he was shown older and bearded. Sometimes he is very masculine and at others very feminine. Above all he was the god of wine and of intoxication, although he himself was never drunk. Transformation was his domain; sometimes bringing joy, sometimes terror. He presided over the liberation of dance and revels, of mask-wearing and performance. He was the god of theatre, to whom all ancient Greek dramas were dedicated as an offering. He is often shown with companions; with satyrs who reflect the animal aspects of human nature, and with maenads, women who sing, dance, and worship Dionysus. Wild deer and fawns are associated with Dionysus and he often wears a fawn-skin.

About the Vase

This vase is a bell krater, made in Athens c.450-425BCE, and now housed in the National Museum in Warsaw, in Poland (number 142355MNW). The vase was decorated by an artist known as the Lycaon Painter. It would have been used for mixing wine and water together at symposium parties, so it is appropriate to have a scene showing Dionysus and a revel. The scene shows a satyr playing the auloi, double pipes. A second satyr is pouring wine into a different kind of krater, a calyx krater, also used for mixing wine and water. On the left a maenad listens to the music, while the maenad on the right pets a fawn. Both maenads hold a ritual staff known as a thyrsus, a wand with an ivy or pine cone top. Dionysus also holds a thyrsus. He dominates the centre of the scene and supervises the preparation of the wine. In the animation you see him create and control the scene like a theatre director – setting the scene, bringing people in, and setting them in motion. He is the only one who looks out at the viewer – he knows that it is a performance, but do the others?

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Dionysus with satyrs and maenads

Based on a red-figure krater (number 142355) National Museum in Warsaw, in Poland



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