Susan Deacy, "Entry on: Ancient Greeks by Colin King, Stephanie Turnbull", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/890. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Colin King , Stephanie Turnbull

Ancient Greeks

United Kingdom (2002)

TAGS: Gods Greek Theatre Hero(es) Monsters Olympic Games Pottery / Vases

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Ancient Greeks
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2002
First Edition Details	Stephanie Turnbull, *Ancient Greeks*. Usborne Beginners Series. London: Usborne, 2002, 32 pp.
ISBN	9780746074855
Genre	Instructional and educational works
Target Audience	Children (Children starting to read on their own)
Author of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators

Colin King (Illustrator)

Colin King was born and raised in Essex in the UK and remained in Essex to study drawing and printmaking at Colchester School of Art in the 1960s. From there, he studied at the Royal College of Art in London, graduating with an MA in Illustration. He began illustrating children's books freelance in 1976. Since then, he has illustrated numerous titles, including: *How Things work*; *See Inside Trains*; *How Your Body Works*; *See Inside Maths*; *Round and Round the Village Oak*; *In Comes the Tide*; and *The Return of Old Smokey.*

Sources:

Illustrator's website (accessed: August 19, 2019).

Illustrator bio (accessed: August 19, 2019).

Bio prepared by Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

Stephanie Turnbull (Author)

Stephanie Turnbull is the author of numerous non-fiction books for children on a range of topics including history, natural history and the human body. Among her books published to date, all in the *Usborne Beginners* series, are: *Caterpillars and Butterflies*; *Volcanoes*; *Sun, Moon and Stars*; *Why do we Eat?*; *Ancient Greeks*; and *Egyptians*.

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Bio prepared by Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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Additional information

Summary

This short book starts by introducing "An ancient land", before moving to specific sections, each covering a double spread, on:

- Life in Greece;
- Clothes and fashion;
- What people ate;
- A trip to market;
- Feasts and fun;
- Gods and goddesses;
- Talking to the gods;
- Heroes and monsters;
- The Olympic Games;
- Greek plays;
- Mighty warriors;
- Into battle; and
- Great Greeks.

Each section comprises short sentences in a large font accompanied by illustrations, some by modern artists, others from ancient Greek statues, vases and jewelry. There is also a 'Glossary of Greek words', a list of 'Websites to visit' and an index.

Analysis

Like other works in the *Usborne Beginners* series, this book seeks to present its topic in an accessible way informed by the expertise of reading and subject consultants. The book takes care to show what the lives of both men and women were like, notably adult men and women (there is no section on children's lives) and free people rather than slaves. For instance, the illustration of an ancient Greek house (p. 4) shows women and men each involved in household activities, each in their own quarters, and each on their own floor of the house, with women upstairs wool working and men downstairs in conversation.

This interest in women's activities includes some areas that might surprise readers with prior knowledge of certain aspects of ancient Greek culture and society. For example, the section on going to the theatre is illustrated with a depiction of female spectators sitting alongside men (p. 23). This depiction of theatre-going women fits one

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side in the long-running, and sometimes heated, academic debate over whether ancient Greek women attended the theatre (Please see, here, Hughes 2008.) There is a female presence, too, among the 'clever people' in the section 'Great Greeks,' namely Sappho who, as someone who 'wrote beautiful poems' (p. 28), is showcased alongside Hippocrates (doctor), Aristotle (scientist and author), Pericles ("wise leader") and Alexander the Great ("brave solider" and ruler).

In keeping with the male-only nature of the Olympic Games, the athletes depicted participating in various events are all men. However, by including a photograph of women participating in a track event at the modern Olympics, readers might potentially infer that women could take part in the ancient Games, especially as the modern Olympics are depicted as a continuation of the ancient Games: "The Olympic Games began in Olympia…They were made up of many sports. They still exist today" (p. 20). This way of depicting the relationship between the ancient Olympics and their modern revival sits uneasily alongside a comment included the blurb on the back cover which states that readers will be able to: "Find out how [the Greeks'] Games differed from ours".

The presence of slaves in ancient Greece is noted several times, but only briefly, perhaps out of a concern that slavery is an inappropriate aspect of ancient life to be presented to the target readers. For example, according to a text box in the section "Life in Greece", slaves were owned by "rich people…to do the housework for them". Among the many things shown taking place at the market in the section "A trip to market" are slaves, three male and one female, being presented for sale (p. 11). Readers with some knowledge of ancient Greek society might recognise that additional people, such as the musician performing at a "Greek party" (p. 13), might also be slaves.

While the book is written for children just starting to read independently, the information on websites at the end, including the instruction to "Read the Internet safety guidelines" (p. 31) looks to be pitched to older readers. Young readers might also benefit from an older person's help with some of the ancient names and how to pronounce them, e.g. Hippocrates.

The url provided in the first edition is still correct. One of the "four fun websites" (p. 31) listed is still available: "Paint your own Greek pot online", alongside a further six recommended sites (correct as at 22 August 2019).

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Gods Greek Theatre Hero(es) Monsters Olympic Games Pottery / Vases
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	History Past
Further Reading	Hughes, Alan, "*Ai Dionysiazusai*: Women in Greek theatre", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 51 (2008): 1–27 (jstor.org, accessed: October 12, 2019).
Addenda	**Greek Consultant: Katharine Haynes** Katharine Haynes is a British classicist educated the Universities of Wales and Birmingham. Her research interests include gender and ethnicity in the ancient Greek novel. **Reading Consultant: Alison Kelly** Alison Kelly lectured in English Education at Roehampton University and has been the Reading Consultant for a range of books for children. She was part of the team which designed the *Teach Your Monster To Read* games for young children which was nominated for a BAFTA in 2015. Sources: roehampton.ac.uk (accessed: August 19, 2019). Interview with Alison Kelly (accessed: August 19, 2019). **Designer: Catherine-Anne MacKinnon, Vici Leyhane**

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Additional Designers: Helen Wood, Laura Parker

Additional Illustrations: Uwe Mayer

Publisher website

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