Greek Writing

ABC, 123 ... How did the Greeks do it?

You have

- Pen
- Paper
- Worksheets photocopied

Activity

In this activity you can learn the Greek alphabet and decipher some words written in Greek. You will need the worksheets on the next pages which can be photocopied.

Research Opportunities

This is a piece of papyrus with ancient Greek writing on it. When it was written down, no gaps were put between words like we do today. This makes it hard for scholars to translate sometimes! Why do you think they didn’t use gaps between words? What other materials did people write on in the ancient world?
Useful Questions

- What other alphabets and forms of writing do you know about?
- What was the earliest form of writing?
- Why not make up your own alphabet or code and write secret messages to your friends?

Useful Websites

Ancient scripts:  
http://www.ancientscripts.com/index.html

Typography on the BBC website:  
http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/art/howto/typography/history.shtml

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The Creative Minds project works with museums and archives across the Yorkshire region, to provide young people with learning opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (S.T.E.M.). This ground-breaking project is the first of its kind in the country and is managed by MLA Yorkshire. This pack was developed by Creative Minds with funding from Yorkshire Forward.
Greek writing - worksheet 1

This is the Greek alphabet (the first letters are the capital letters, the second are lower case):

A α B β Γ γ Δ δ
alpha beta gamma delta
A a B b G g D d

Ε ε Ζ ζ Η η Θ θ
epsilon zeta eta theta
E e Z z H h TH th

Ι ι Κ κ Λ λ Μ μ
iota kappa lambda mu
I i K k L l M m

Ν ν Ξ ξ Ο ο Π π
nu xi omicron pi
N n X x / ks O o P p

Ρ ρ Σ σ / ζ Τ τ Υ υ
rho sigma tau upsilon
R r S s T t Y / U y / u

Φ φ Χ χ Ψ ψ Ω ω
phi chi psi omega
F / PH f / ph CH ch PS ps O o

Note about sigma: σ is used in the middle of a word, ζ is used at the end of a word both represent the letter ‘s’.
Greek writing - worksheet 2

The word ‘alphabet’ comes from the names of the first two letters of the Greek alphabet. Write them down here:

_________   ________

How many letters are there in the Greek alphabet? _________

How many letters are there in our alphabet? _________

Try and write your name in Greek here:

_______________________      ________________________

Lots of words have survived from ancient Greek in the English we speak now. Here are some of those words written in Greek. Write the letters of our alphabet underneath to work them out. Watch out for Greek letters that are two letters in our alphabet.

ε χ ο   δ ρ α μ α   κ ο σ μ ο ζ

_____     _______     _________

ο λ υ μ π ο ζ   ο ρ κ ε σ τ ρ α   σ κ ε ν ε

____________   _______________     _______
There are lots more words that come from Greek in English. Try writing these words using the Greek alphabet:

*Demokratia* ____________________
– in English this translates as ‘democracy’.

*Demos* means ‘people’
*Kratia* means ‘power’

So the word ‘democracy’ literally means ‘people power’.

*Philosophia* ____________________
– in English this translates as ‘philosophy’.

*Philos* means ‘love’
*Sophia* means ‘wisdom’

So the word ‘philosophy’ literally means ‘love of wisdom’.

*Strategos* ____________________
– in English this translates as ‘strategy’.

*Strategos* was the name given to a general in the army
So our word ‘strategy’ comes from the Greek word for general.

*Archaeologia* ____________________
– in English this translates as ‘archaeology’.

*Arche* means beginning
*Ologia* means knowledge

So the word ‘archaeology’ means ‘knowledge about the beginning [long ago]’.

*Hippopotamos* ____________________
– in English this translates as ‘hippopotamus’.

*Hippo* means ‘horse’
*Potamos* means ‘river’

So the word ‘hippopotamus’ means ‘river horse’.

I wonder if you can find out about any more? Think of the words you know ending in ‘ology’ – they have all come from Greek!