

## Greek Games

Just like children of today, children in ancient Greece enjoyed playing a variety of games. Apparently Greek parents viewed games as a good way for their children to develop certain skills, just like parents do today. Greek games seem to have been much more competitive than modern children's games, though, where the important thing is usually to have fun. Greeks wanted to win! To make sure they won, Greeks were not shy about tricking their opponent.



Many artefacts, such as vases, show children at play. But archaeologists aren't sure if they really were playing, or if these games were actually part of a religious ceremony.

One common children's game in ancient Greece was ephedrismos, which was a kind of piggyback game. Artefacts such as vases often show children playing this game. Another popular game was ostrakinda, a game in which a shell was painted black one side. The black side was "night," and the unpainted side was "day." Children divided into two teams, one for "night" and one for "day." The shell was thrown and the team whose colour came up had to chase the other team. Juggling was also encouraged among children as a way to improve their motor skills.



Another popular game was morra. In this game, two players made a fist behind their backs, and then, when a signal was

given, they extend their hands, showing a certain number of fingers. The first player to call out the correct number of fingers was the winner!

If you enjoy ball games, be glad you live in modern times! Greek children enjoyed ball, too, but they often used pig bladders for a ball! This involved blowing up the bladder, then shaping it by holding it over a fire and rubbing them into the desired shape. Sometimes they painted the blown-up bladders to make them look better. There were numerous ball games for Greek children, including episkyros, which was something of a cross between rugby and American football.

#### **Here are some other Greek ball games:**

- **Ourania:** a simple game in which a player threw a ball into the air and other players tried to catch it.
- **Aprrhaxis:** this game involved bouncing a ball and keeping it bouncing!
- **Passe-boule:** this was similar to basketball. It involved trying to throw a ball through a hole in an upright board. Sound familiar?



Games were not limited only to children.

Adults in Greece loved their games as well. The Greeks apparently had a love of gambling, and may have invented dice. (One Greek writer claimed that they did, but the Egyptians may have beaten them to it!) Their dice were like ours. They were small cubes with the numbers positioned so that the ones on opposite sides added up to seven. But unlike modern dice, ancient Greek dice were usually made of ivory or bone.