**Ancient Greek Toys**

**POWERPOINT NOTES**

1. Images painted on ancient Greek pottery (mostly red-figure vessels) and objects excavated archaeologically show that ancient Greek children played with a range of toys, many of which were very similar to those used today and throughout history. Ancient Greek children also commonly had pets, including dogs and birds. Let the children try to guess the toy on each of the following slides.
2. Sheep and goat bones were used to play a game called knucklebones. Materials such as metal, glass or stone were also used to make astragaloi (the Greek name for knucklebones). A number of games would have been played with them. In one game they would be rolled along the ground and the way they landed would have scored different points – a bit like the modern game of Pass the Pigs.
3. Evidence suggests the ancient Greeks played various ball games. Depending upon the game, both girls and boys, as well as adults, would have played with balls. Women are often shown juggling.
4. Spinning tops could have been used by both boys and girls, and probably also by adults. They were typically made from clay and had painted decoration.
5. Examples of ancient yoyos also survive and we see someone playing with a yoyo on this vase.
6. Children also played with miniature vessels. Small vessels usually copied the styles of larger day-to-day vessels very closely, probably so that children could imitate the actions of grown-ups.
7. Dolls are often associated with girls. Some dolls had moveable arms, which were probably attached to the body with strings. They were typically made from wood and therefore have not been preserved, but some were terracotta and possibly also leather, wax and fabric. Examples that have survived are naked, suggesting they could be dressed, in the way of modern dolls. Fabric clothes would not survive in the archaeological record. Jointed dolls are often excavated at sanctuary sites, indicating they also functioned as dedications (votives).
8. Most wheeled toys would have been made from terracotta (clay). Some have holes in them where they could have had strings attached so that they could be pulled along. The earliest examples of these are from the 11th century BC. Horses are particularly popular.
9. Rattles could be simple, but were often in the shape of animals in ancient Greece. They were made from terracotta and had pebbles inside to make sounds when shaken. The Greek writer Aristotle records that children were given rattles to occupy themselves so that they would not break other objects in the house.
10. Small terracotta animals such as the tortoise in the Shefton Collection are sometimes identified as toys (indeed some are rattles) but they could also be gifts for the gods.

**Now try the toys activity sheet**

**The Hidden Lives workshop in the Great North Museum includes an ancient and modern toys activity**