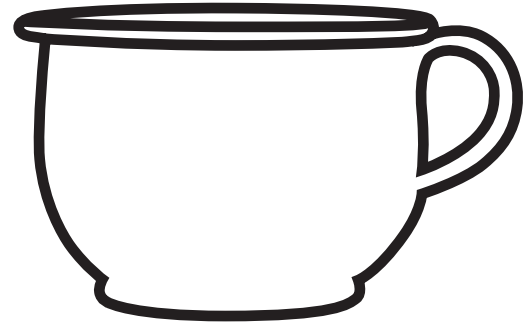


# Chamber Pot Puzzle

Archaeologists sometimes put broken chamber pots and other vessels back together to learn more about each object and the people who used them. The style and decoration of each chamber pot can tell how old it is, where it came from, how much it was used, and more. The number of chamber pots found at one residence can even tell how many people lived there or how much money they had. Put your artifact mending skills to the test by decorating your own chamber pots, cutting them into pieces, and then trying to put them back together again.

## What you will need:

- Scissors
- Colored markers
- Tape
- Three plain paper bowls or cups, or a printer to print three copies of the coloring sheet on the next page



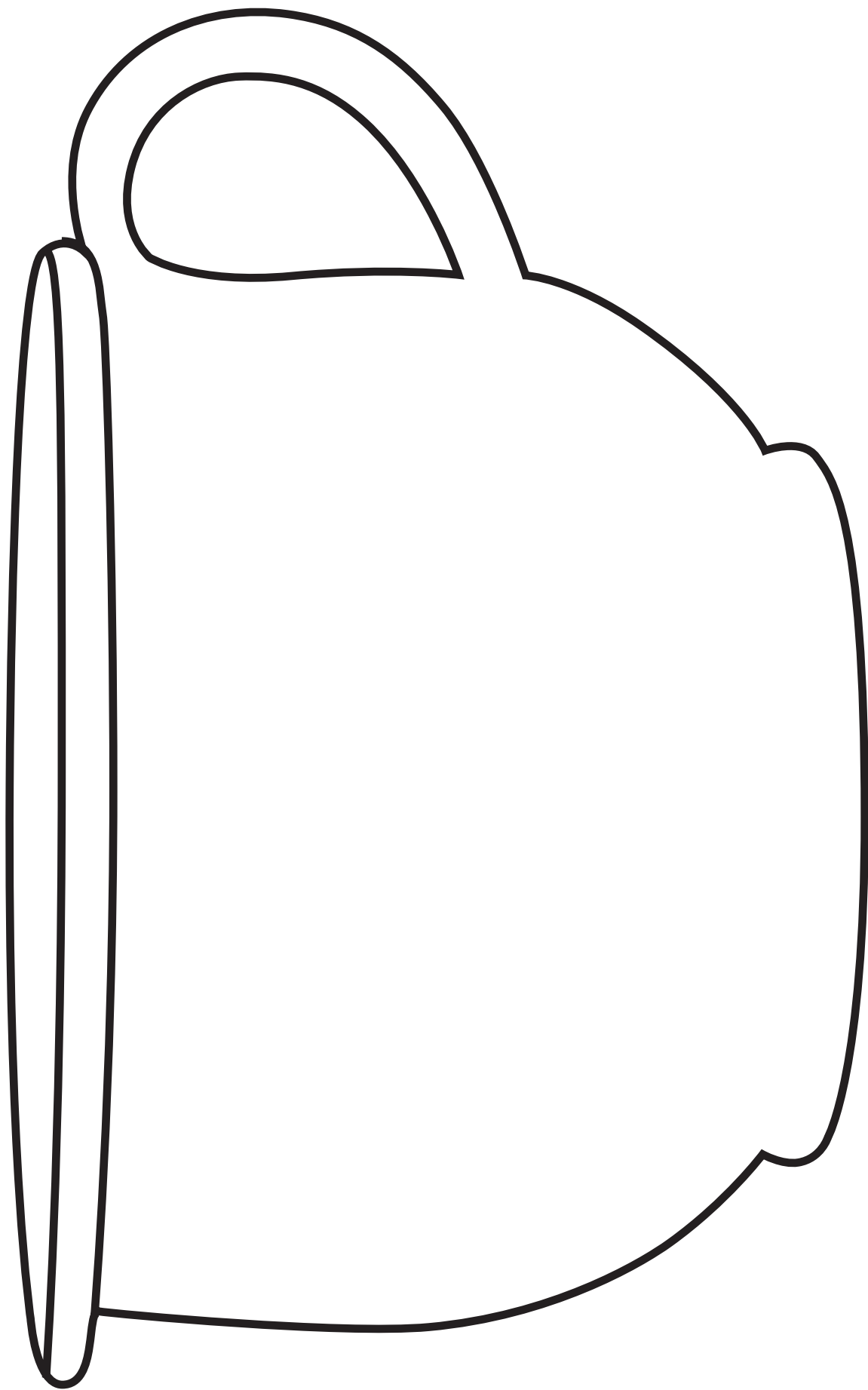
## Make a puzzle

1. **Decorate your chamber pots.** Use colored markers to decorate the three chamber pots (cups, bowls, or coloring sheets) in different ways. Hint: Make your designs very different from each other. For example, if you decorate one with blue circles, decorate the next one with a different color or pattern.
2. **“Break” your pots.** Archaeologists rarely find a whole chamber pot in the ground. Use scissors to cut each chamber pot into five or six pieces and then mix the pieces all together.
3. **Sort your sherds.** The process of putting pieces of broken chamber pots and other vessels back together again is called mending. Every broken piece, or “sherd,” is first sorted by the material type and decoration to figure out which pieces belong to which vessel. Sort your pieces based on the marker decoration. In the end, you should have three piles of paper sherds.
4. **Crossmend!** Archaeologists use non-damaging tape to fit each piece together and temporarily hold them in place. Put each chamber pot back together again by matching each piece and then taping them together. Hint: If you are using paper bowls or cups it helps to start at the bottom, or “base,” of the vessel and work your way up to the top, or “rim.”

## Take it further!

Before indoor plumbing, chamber pots and privies were used as toilets. It wasn't until the start of the Alexandria Water Company in 1852 that some Alexandrians were able to start installing indoor plumbing in their houses. By the late 19th century, the City began to asking Alexandrians in Old Town to join the new sewer system. City archaeologists have found many examples of chamber pots ranging in style and decoration and dating from the mid-18th century to late-19th century. Carefully piecing them back together can provide information about how many people were living in a residence, how much money they may have had, and when indoor plumbing and sewer systems first became available in the area.

In 2018 archaeologists excavated a well and found many broken pieces of chamber pots. After carefully sorting the pieces and mending them back together again, archaeologists found that at least nine chamber pots had been thrown into the well over a short period of time. Getting rid of so many chamber pots all at once likely marked the end using chamber pots in that household and the beginning of using the municipal sewer system.



# Spot the Pot!

Historical records like maps, photographs, newspapers, land and tax records, letters, and artwork can show what life was like in the past. These paintings and illustrations show everyday objects, including chamber pots. Can you spot the pot in each image below? Check your answers on the last page. Hint: Chamber pots were often kept on the floor and were emptied outside after being used.



Teniers, David. *A Tavern Interior with Peasants Playing Cards*. ca. 1644-5, Private collection.







*With joy and Satisfaction blest  
The Innocent retire to rest—  
For what can equal his content  
Who virtuously the Day has spent?*



# **HIGH LIFE at MIDNIGHT.**



*Not so the Sons of Riot live,  
Their Sports no real Comfort give,  
Whole Nights consumed in public News,  
Diseases, Quarrels, Death ensue.*

Published according to Act of Parliament Sep. 1. 1769. Price 1s. but given gratis to the Purchasers of the Court Miscellany.

*High Life at Midnight. 1769, Library of Congress.*







Jan Steen, *The Physician's Visit*, ca. 1655, Collection of the Wellington Museum, Victoria and Albert Picture Library, London.





# Spot the Pot: Answers

