

Mineral Spotlight: Amethyst

Pretty, purple, and popular: this week's mineral is amethyst! Amethyst is purple, crystalline quartz (SiO_2). It is usually found in geodes, most commonly in Brazil, Uruguay, Siberia, and North America. The geodes form anywhere there was lava on or close to earth's surface, which left behind solidified bubbles, void spaces where geodic crystals can grow. Where does its purple color come from? Unexpectedly, impurities of iron give amethyst its characteristic color.

Because of its dreamy color and relatively common occurrence, amethyst has been a popular stone since ancient times. The ancient Mesopotamians used amethyst to create seals with which legal documents were signed, and the ancient Egyptians valued it as a decorative stone. The ancient Greeks believed drinking from amethyst cups would protect against drunkenness – a belief which, funnily enough, spilled over into the early Christian church. The mineral was adopted as a sign of the soberness bishops must achieve – even today, premium amethyst stones are called “bishop's grade”.

Some of the most popular pieces we have in the Museum are amethyst – namely, our four-foot tall amethyst geode. However, one of the first cases visitors encounter as they step into the Museum showcases raw amethyst and gold alongside a finished amethyst and gold jewelry set. Stop in to see it yourself!

This feature was posted on Dice Museum social media by Museum curator Jillian Herlinger on 8/2/2022.

