Programming Languages and Techniques (CIS120)

Lecture 27

March 31, 2014

Dynamic Dispatch and the Java ASM

Announcements

- Read Ch. 25
- HW 08 due tomorrow at midnight
- Midterm 2 is this Friday
- Review sessions:
  - Wednesday 7:00 – 9:00, Levine 101
  - Lab this week is review (bring questions!)

The .equals method in Java is roughly similar to OCaml's = operator.

```
1. True
2. False
3. It's complicated
```

The == operator in both OCaml and Java tests whether two compound values have identical structure.

1. True
2. False
3. It’s complicated

In Java, there is a class that is a subtype of any other class.

```
1. True
2. False
3. It's complicated
```

In Java, an interface can extend zero, one, or several other interfaces.

```
1. True
2. False
3. It’s complicated
```

In Java, a class can extend zero, one, or several other classes.

1. True
2. False
3. It’s complicated

In the Java ASM, large data structures such as object values are stored in the stack, not the heap

```
1. True
2. False
3. It’s complicated
```

In the OCaml ASM, bindings of variables to values in the stack are immutable, while in Java they are mutable.

```
1. True
2. False
3. It’s complicated
```

A Java variable of type String behaves like an OCaml variable of type string option ref.

1. True
2. False
3. It’s complicated

A Java array can be resized by assigning a new value to its length field.

1. True
2. False
3. It’s complicated

Recursive functions cannot be defined in Java.

```
1. True
2. False
3. It’s complicated
```

The Java Abstract Stack Machine and the Class Table

1. When do constructors execute?
2. How are fields accessed?
3. What code runs in a method call?

How do method calls work?

- What code gets run in a method invocation?

```
o.move(3,4);
```

- When that code is running, how does it access the fields of the object that invoked it?

```
x = x + dx;
```

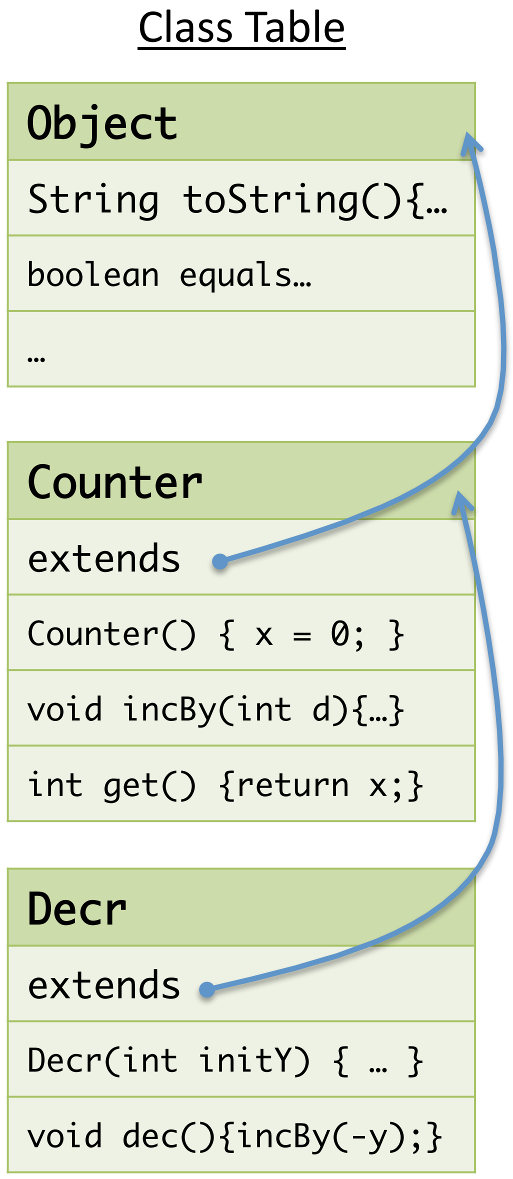
- When does the code in a constructor get executed?

- What if the method was inherited from a superclass?

ASM refinement: The Class Table

```
public class Counter {
  private int x;
  public Counter () { x = 0; }
  public void incBy(int d) { x = x + d; }
  public int get() { return x; }
}

public class Decr extends Counter {
  private int y;
  public Decr (int initY) { y = initY; }
  public void dec() { incBy(-y); }
}
```



The class table contains:

- The code for each method,
- Back pointers to each class's parent, and
- The class's static members.

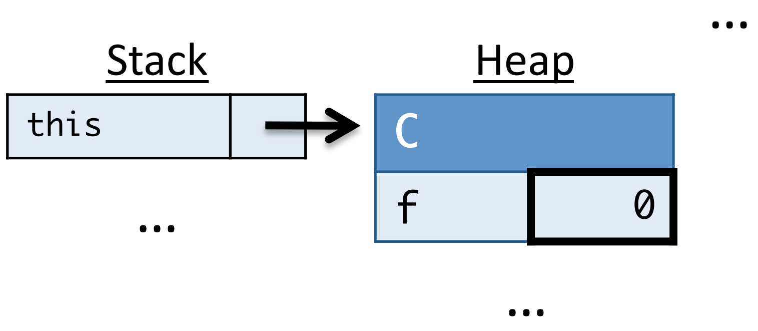
this

- Inside a non-static method, the variable `this` is a reference to the object on which the method was invoked.

- References to local fields and methods have an implicit "`this.`" in front of them.

```
class C {
    private int f;

    public int copyF(C other) {
        this.f = other.f;
    }
}
```



An Example

```
public class Counter {
  private int x;
  public Counter () { x = 0; }
  public void incBy(int d) { x = x + d; }
  public int get() { return x; }
}

public class Decr extends Counter {
  private int y;
  public Decr (int initY) { y = initY; }
  public void dec() { incBy(-y); }
}

// … somewhere in main:
Decr d = new Decr(2);
d.dec();
int x = d.get();
```

…with Explicit `this` and `super`

```
public class Counter extends Object {
  private int x;
  public Counter () { super(); this.x = 0; }
  public void incBy(int d) { this.x = this.x + d; }
  public int get() { return this.x; }
}

public class Decr extends Counter {
  private int y;
  public Decr (int initY) { super(); this.y = initY; }
  public void dec() { this.incBy(-this.y); }
}

// … somewhere in main:
Decr d = new Decr(2);
d.dec();
int x = d.get();
```

Constructing an Object

Workspace

Stack

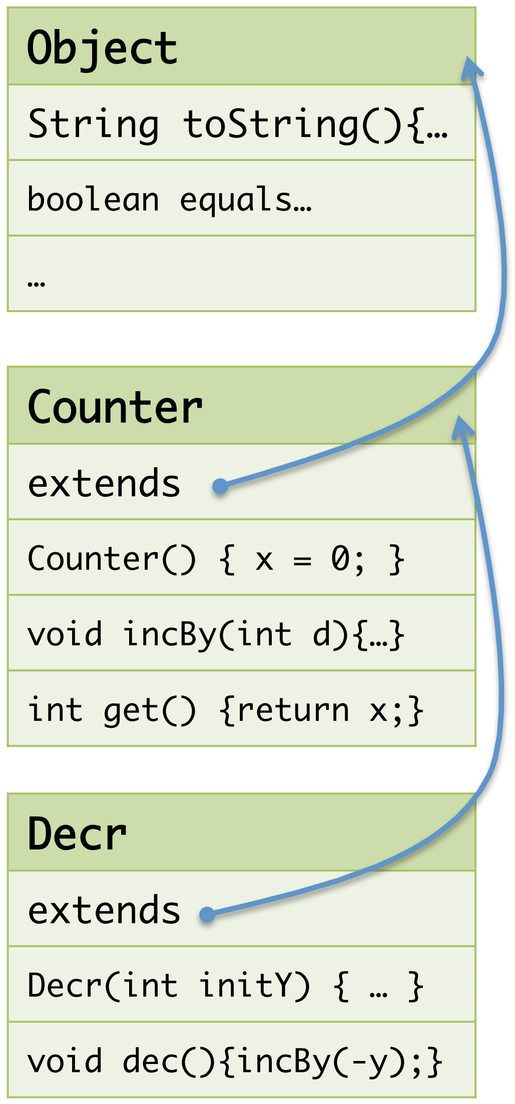
Heap

Class Table

```
Decr d = new Decr(2);
d.dec();
int x = d.get();
```

Invoking a constructor:

- allocates space for a new object in the heap
- includes slots for *all* fields of *all* ancestors in the class tree (here: x *and* y)
- creates a pointer to the class – this is the object's dynamic type
- runs the constructor body after pushing parameters and `this` onto the stack

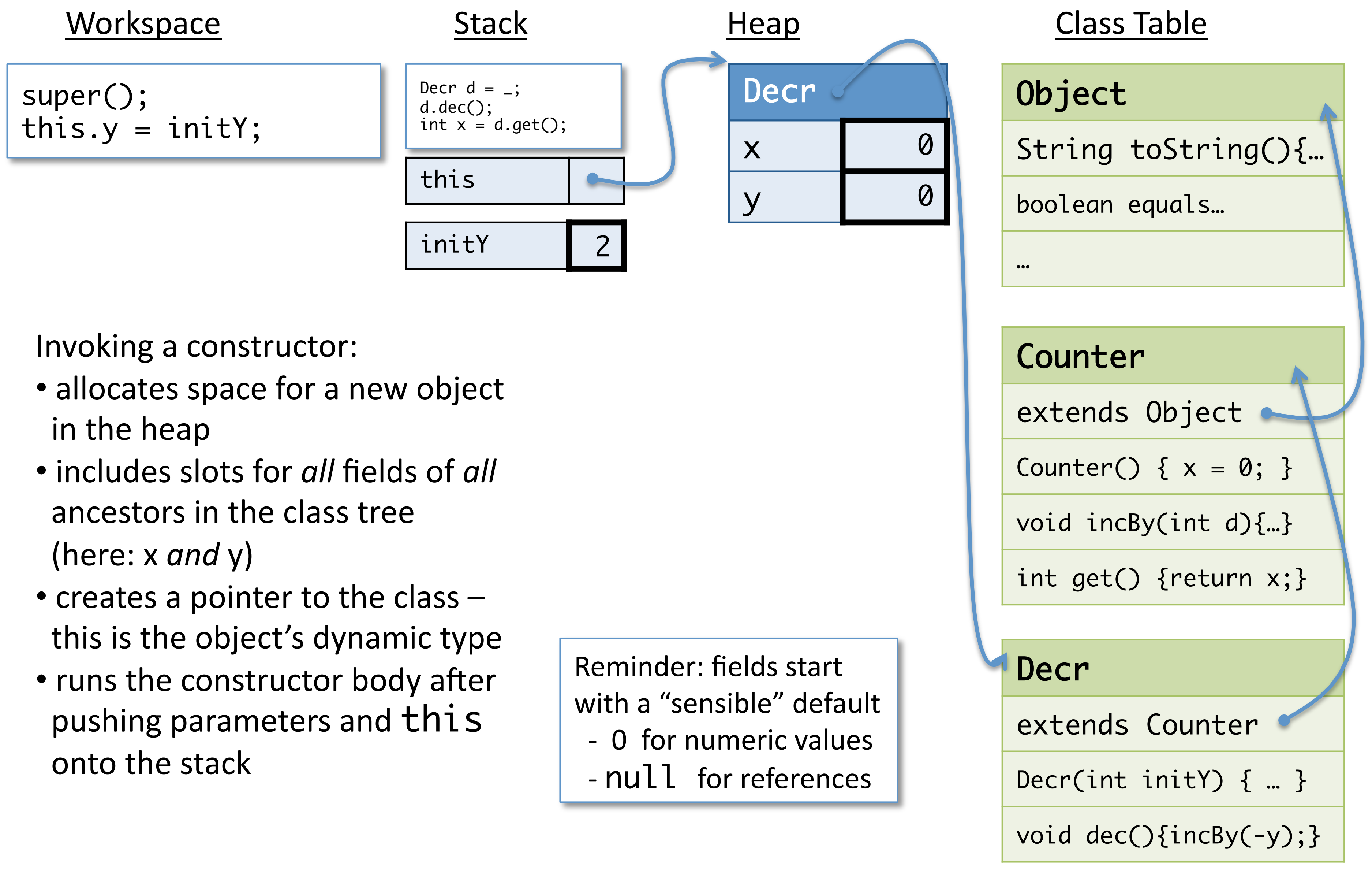


```
Object
String toString(){…
boolean equals…
…
```

```
Counter
extends
Counter() { x = 0; }
void incBy(int d){…}
int get() {return x;}
```

```
Decr
extends
Decr(int initY) { … }
void dec(){incBy(-y);}
```

Allocating Space on the Heap



```
super();
this.y = initY;
```

```
Decr d = _;
d.dec();
int x = d.get();
```

this	●
initY	2

Decr	
x	0
y	0

Object
String toString(){…
boolean equals…
…

Counter
extends Object
Counter() { x = 0; }
void incBy(int d){…}
int get() {return x;}

Decr
extends Counter
Decr(int initY) { … }
void dec(){incBy(-y);}

Invoking a constructor:

- allocates space for a new object in the heap
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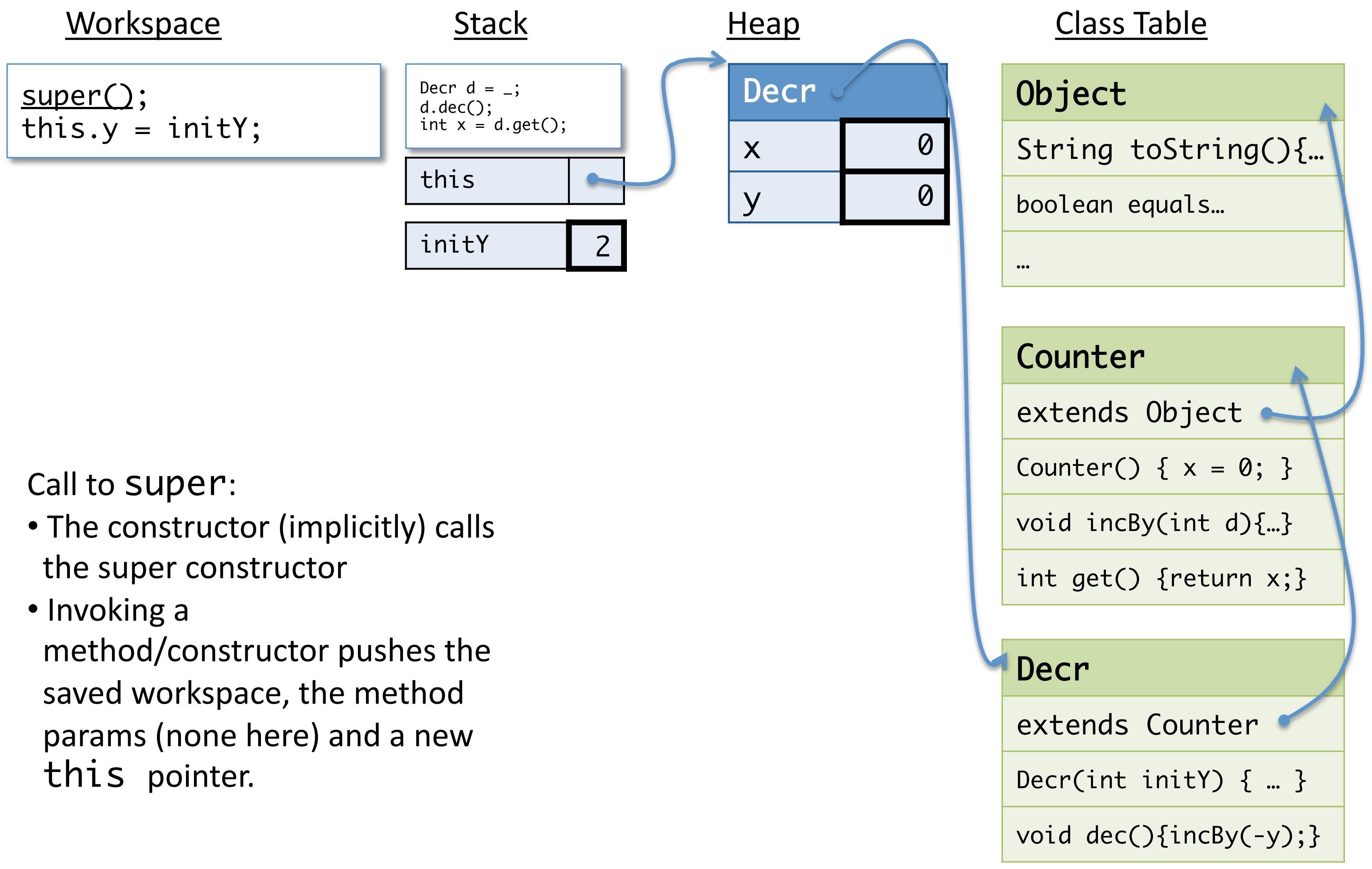
- creates a pointer to the class – this is the object's dynamic type
- runs the constructor body after pushing parameters and `this` onto the stack

Reminder: fields start with a "sensible" default
- 0 for numeric values
- `null` for references

Calling super



Workspace:

```
super();
this.y = initY;
```

Stack:

```
Decr d = _;
d.dec();
int x = d.get();
```

this	●
initY	2

Heap:

Decr	
x	0
y	0

Class Table:

```
Object
String toString(){…
boolean equals…
…
```

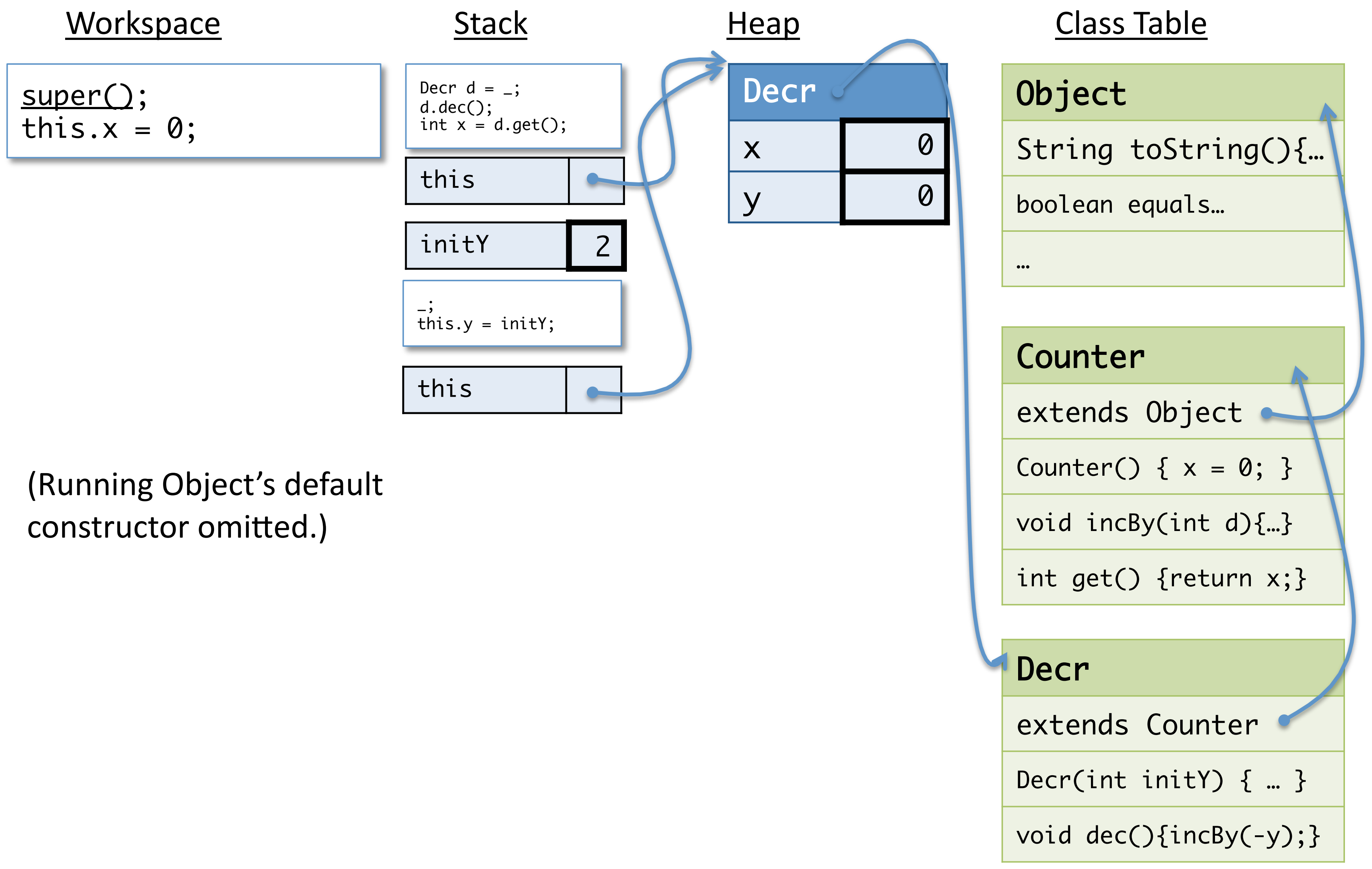
```
Counter
extends Object
Counter() { x = 0; }
void incBy(int d){…}
int get() {return x;}
```

```
Decr
extends Counter
Decr(int initY) { … }
void dec(){incBy(-y);}
```

Call to `super`:

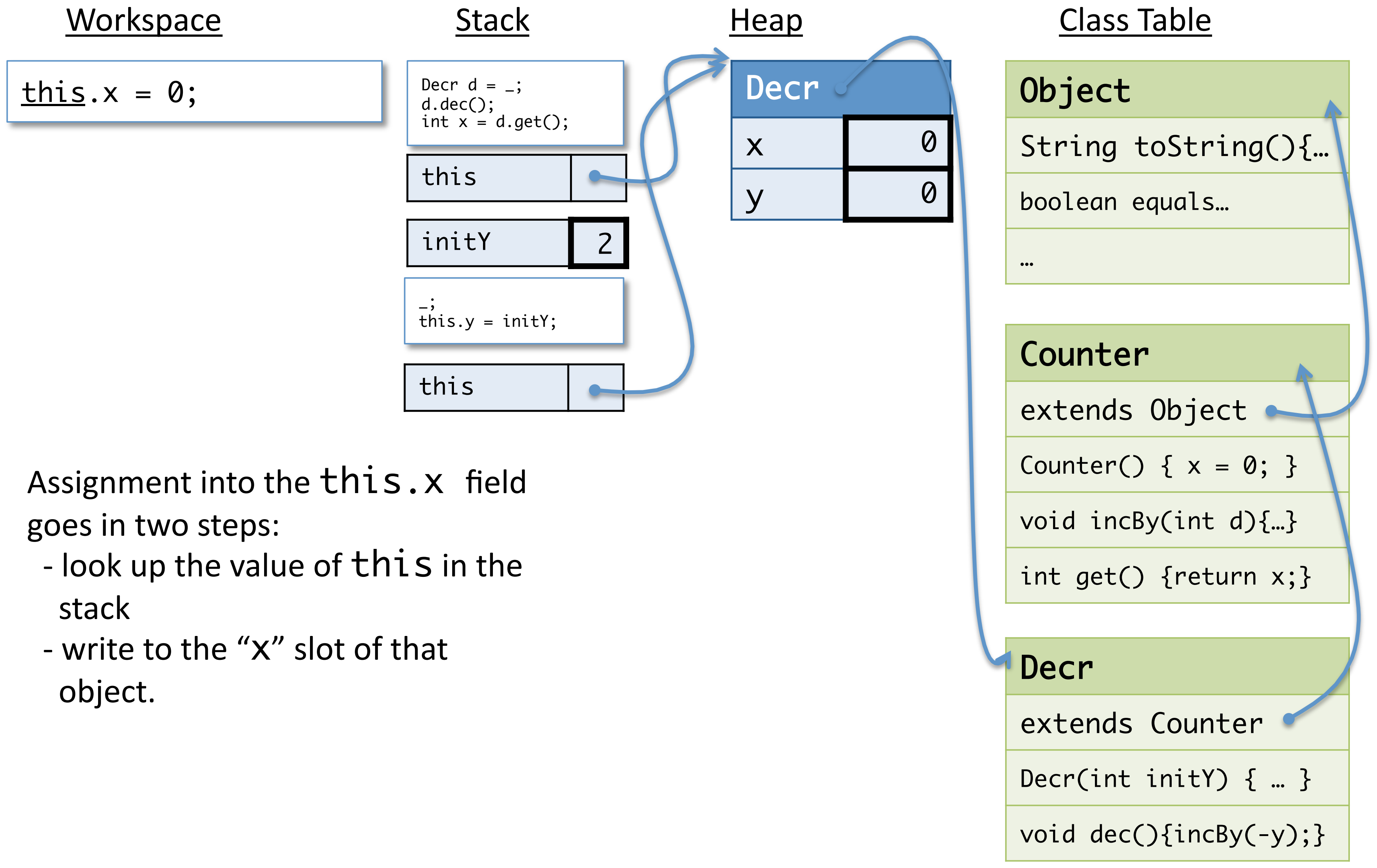
- The constructor (implicitly) calls the super constructor
- Invoking a method/constructor pushes the saved workspace, the method params (none here) and a new `this` pointer.

Abstract Stack Machine



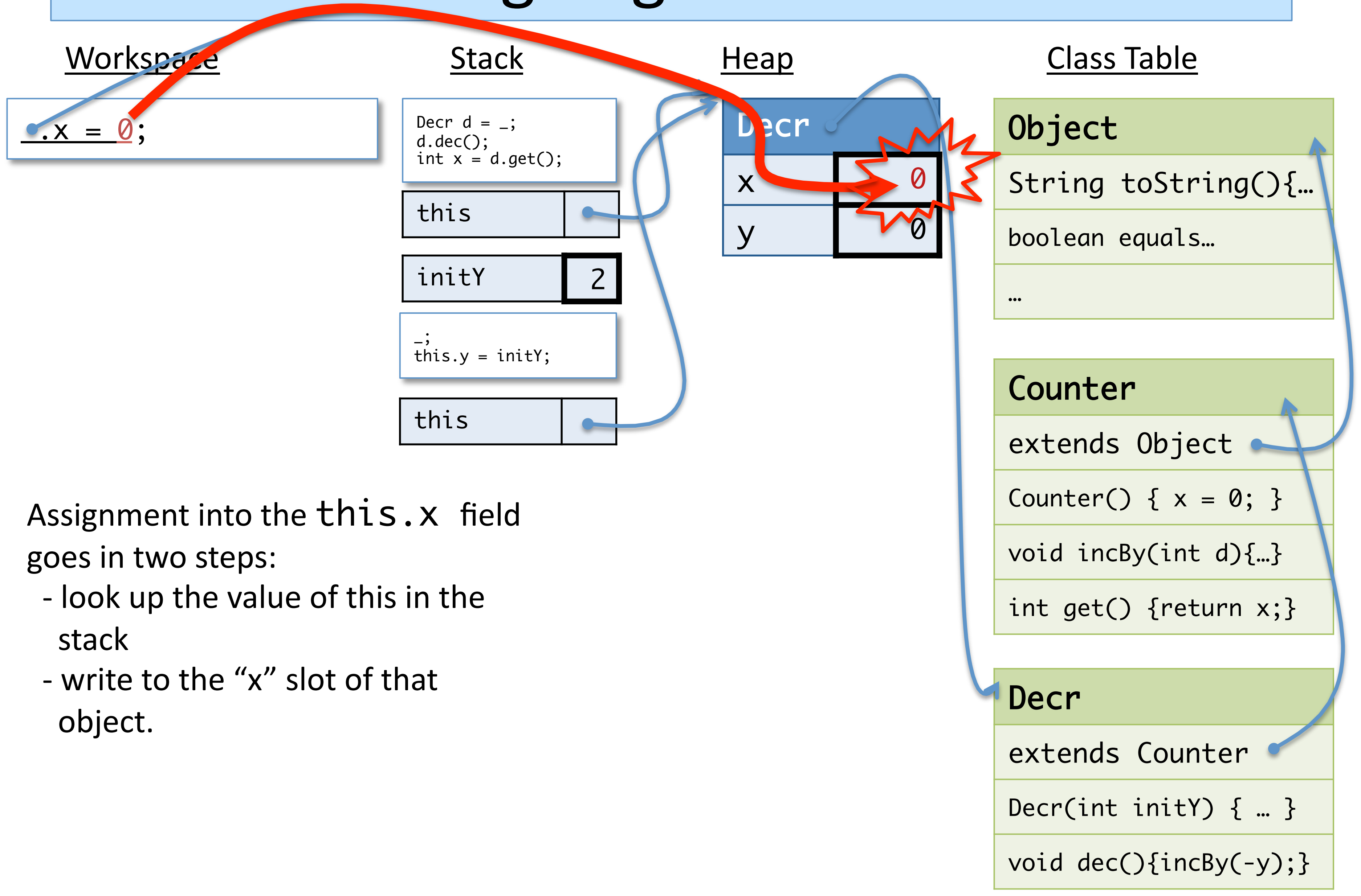
(Running Object's default constructor omitted.)

Assigning to a Field



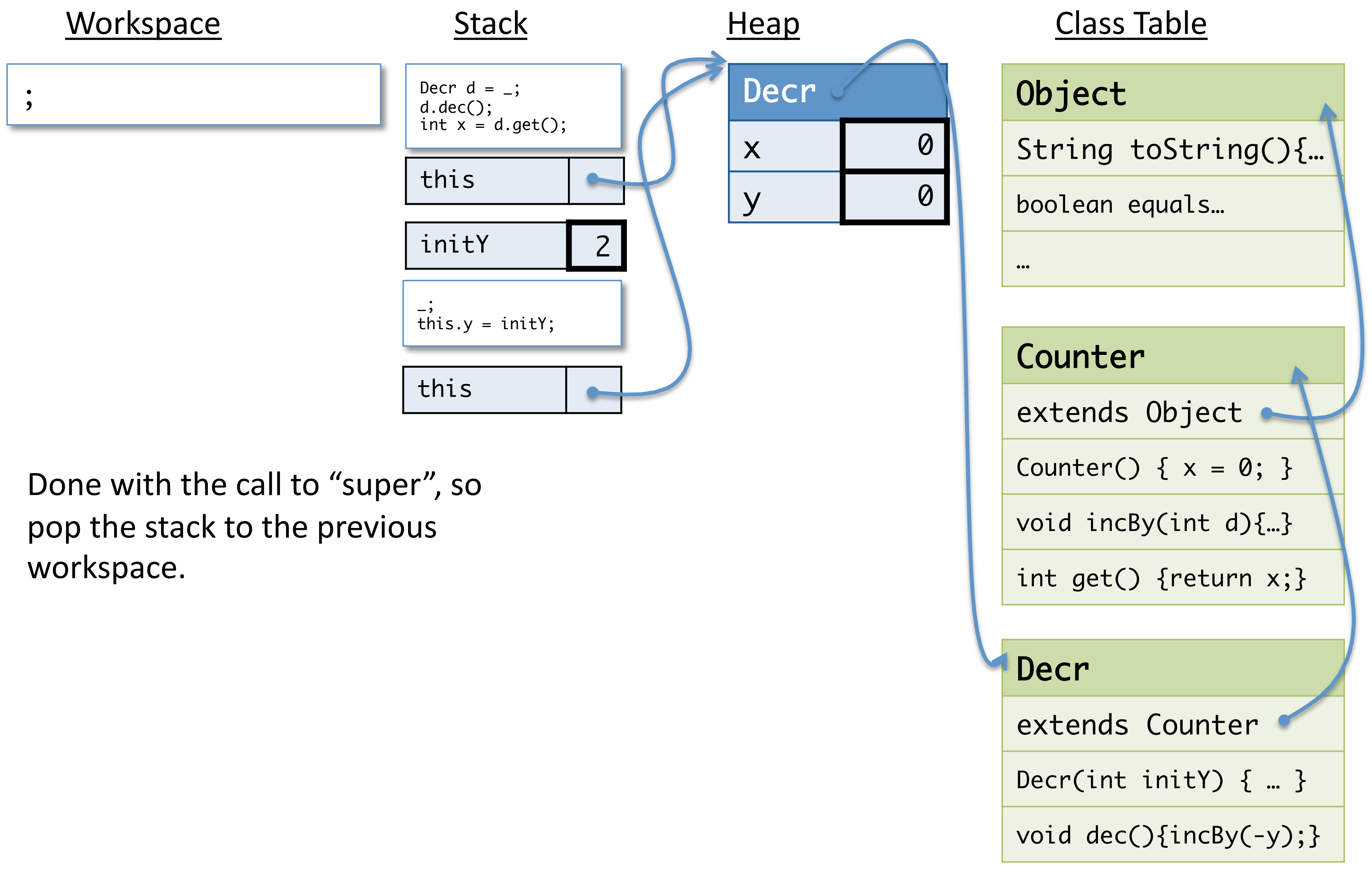
Assignment into the `this.x` field goes in two steps:
- look up the value of `this` in the stack
- write to the "x" slot of that object.

Assigning to a Field



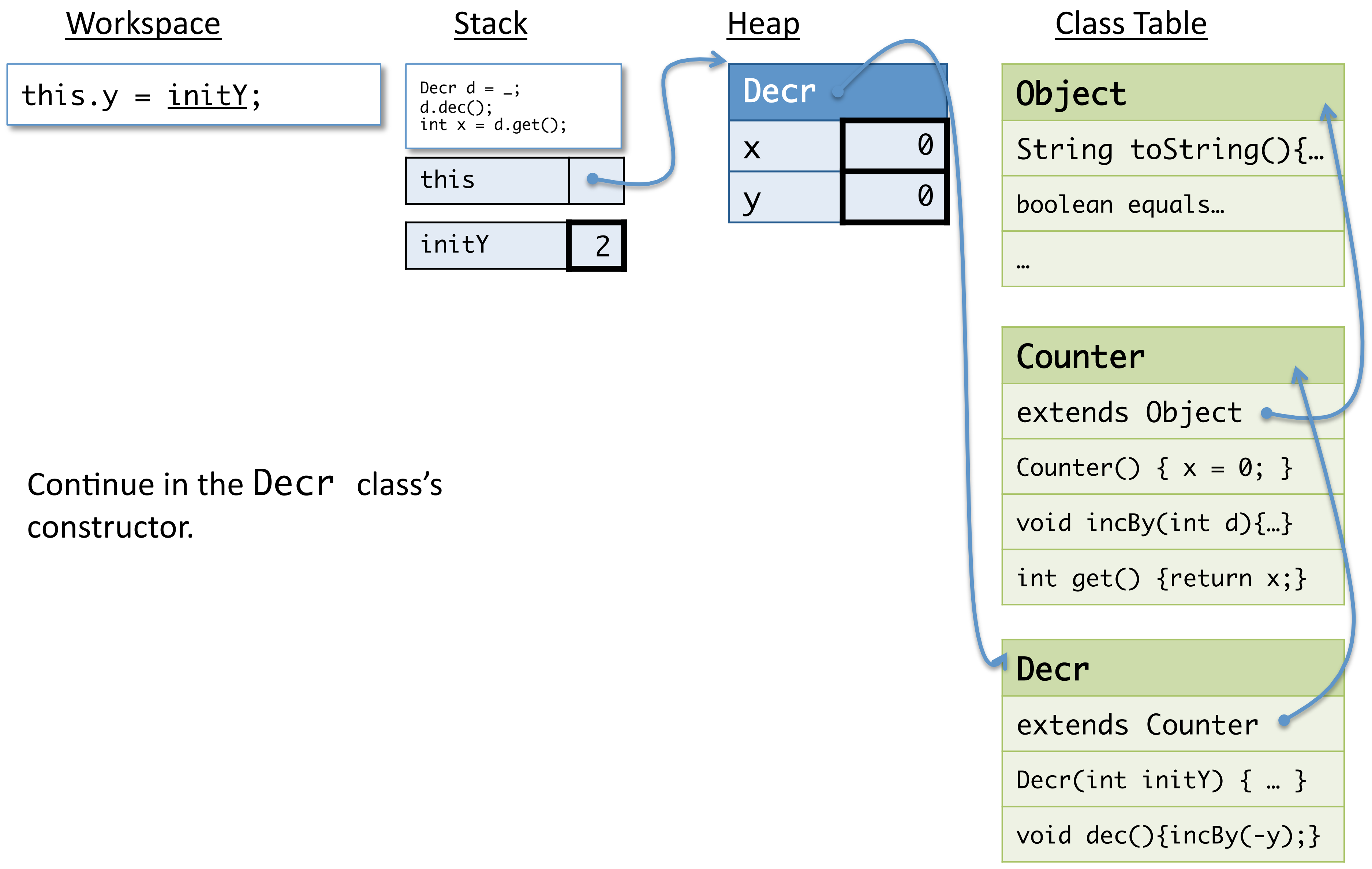
Assignment into the `this.x` field goes in two steps:
- look up the value of this in the stack
- write to the "x" slot of that object.

Done with the call



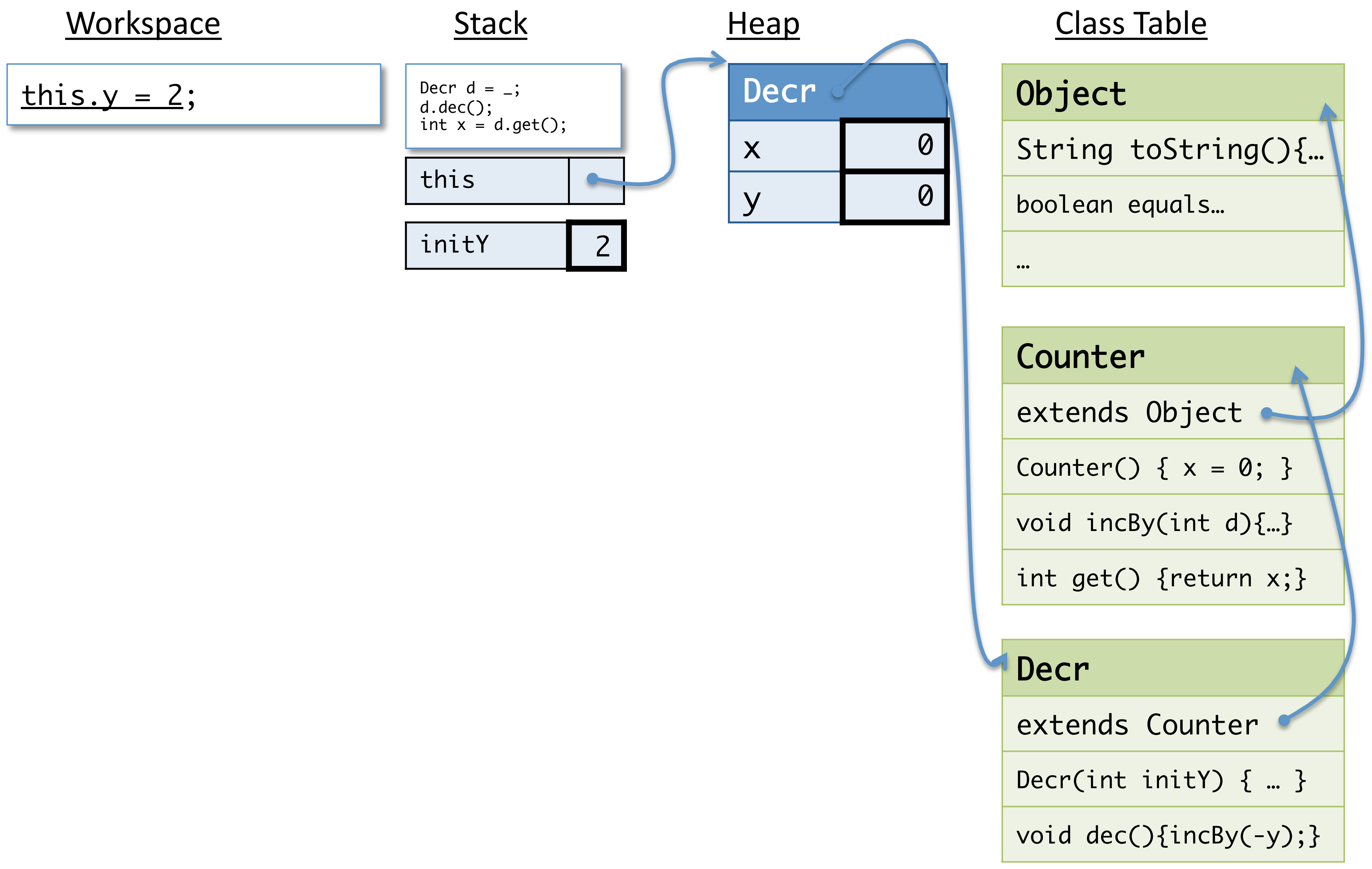
Done with the call to “super”, so pop the stack to the previous workspace.

Continuing

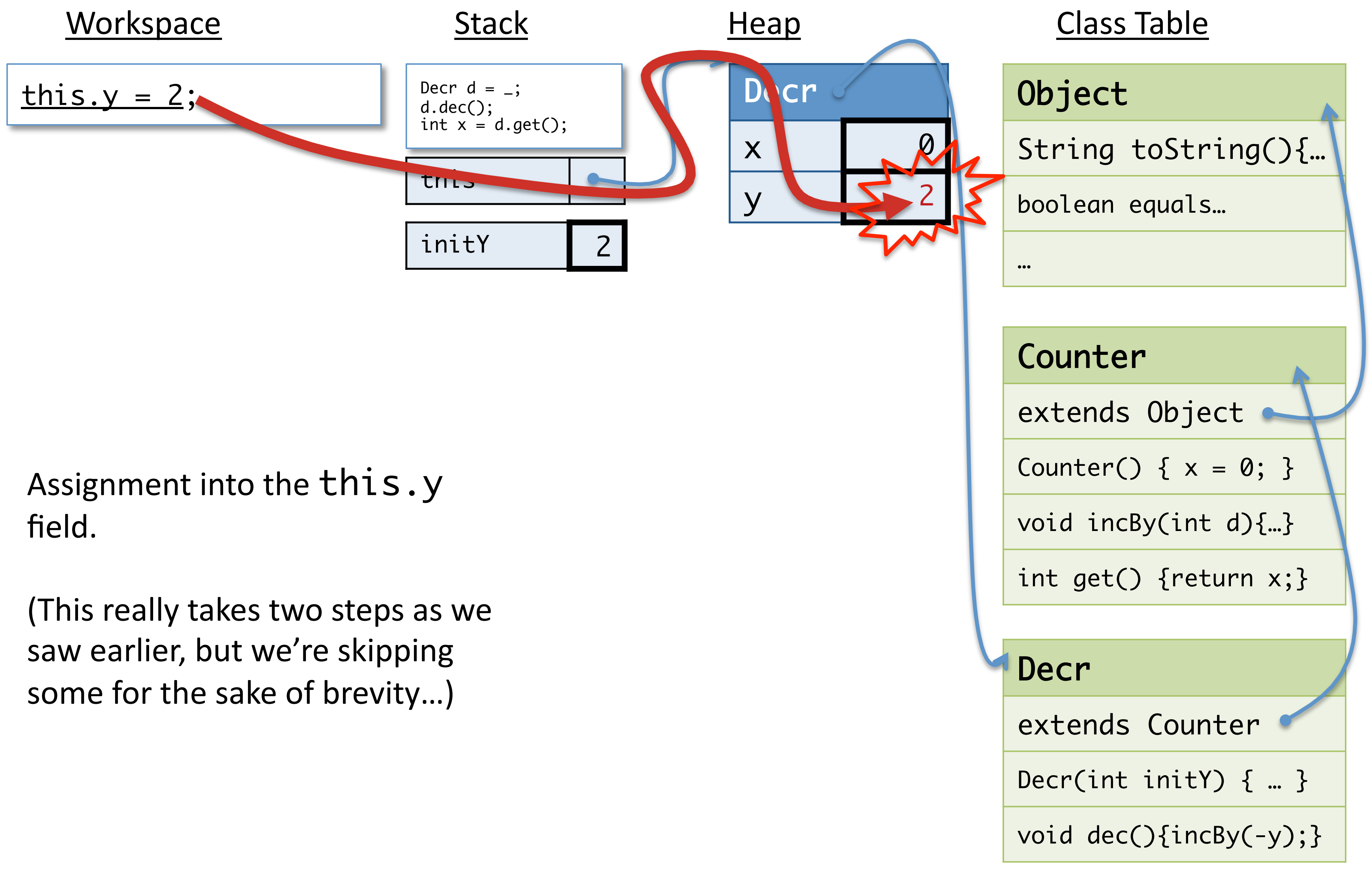


Continue in the Decr class's constructor.

Abstract Stack Machine



Assigning to a field



```
this.y = 2;
```

```
Decr d = _;
d.dec();
int x = d.get();
```

```
Object
String toString(){…
boolean equals…
…
```

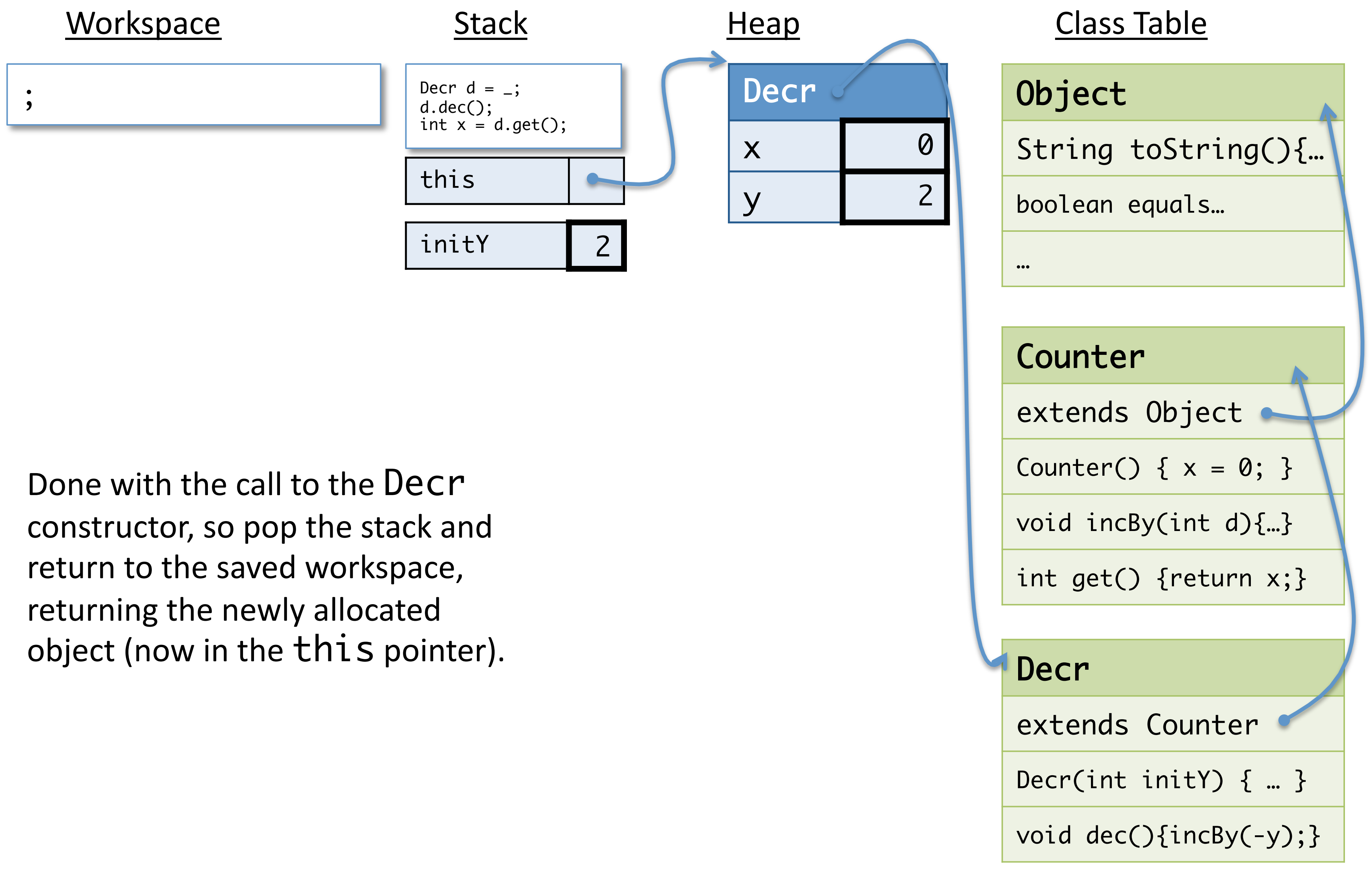
```
Counter
extends Object
Counter() { x = 0; }
void incBy(int d){…}
int get() {return x;}
```

```
Decr
extends Counter
Decr(int initY) { … }
void dec(){incBy(-y);}
```

Assignment into the `this.y` field.

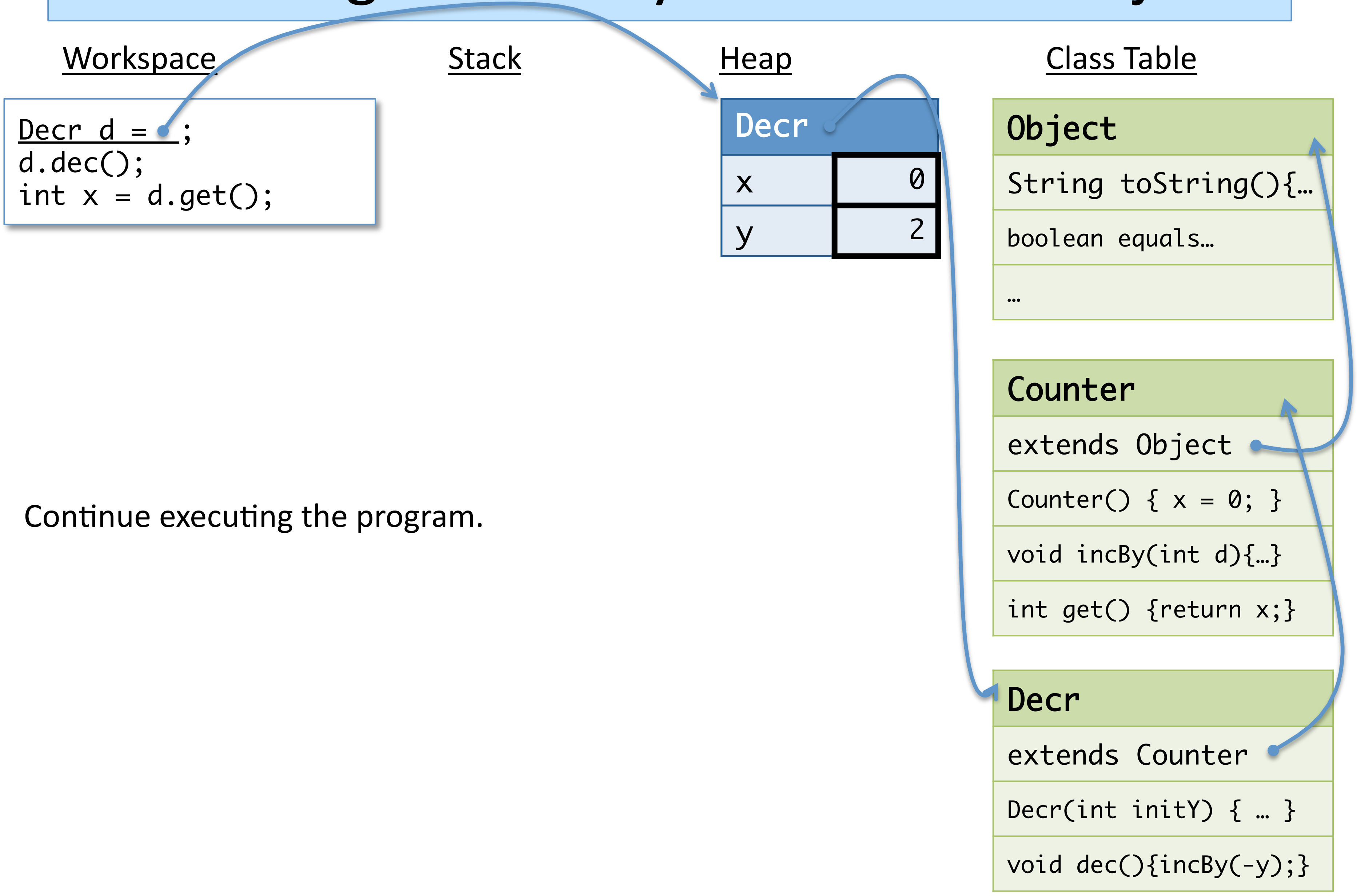
(This really takes two steps as we saw earlier, but we're skipping some for the sake of brevity…)

Done with the call



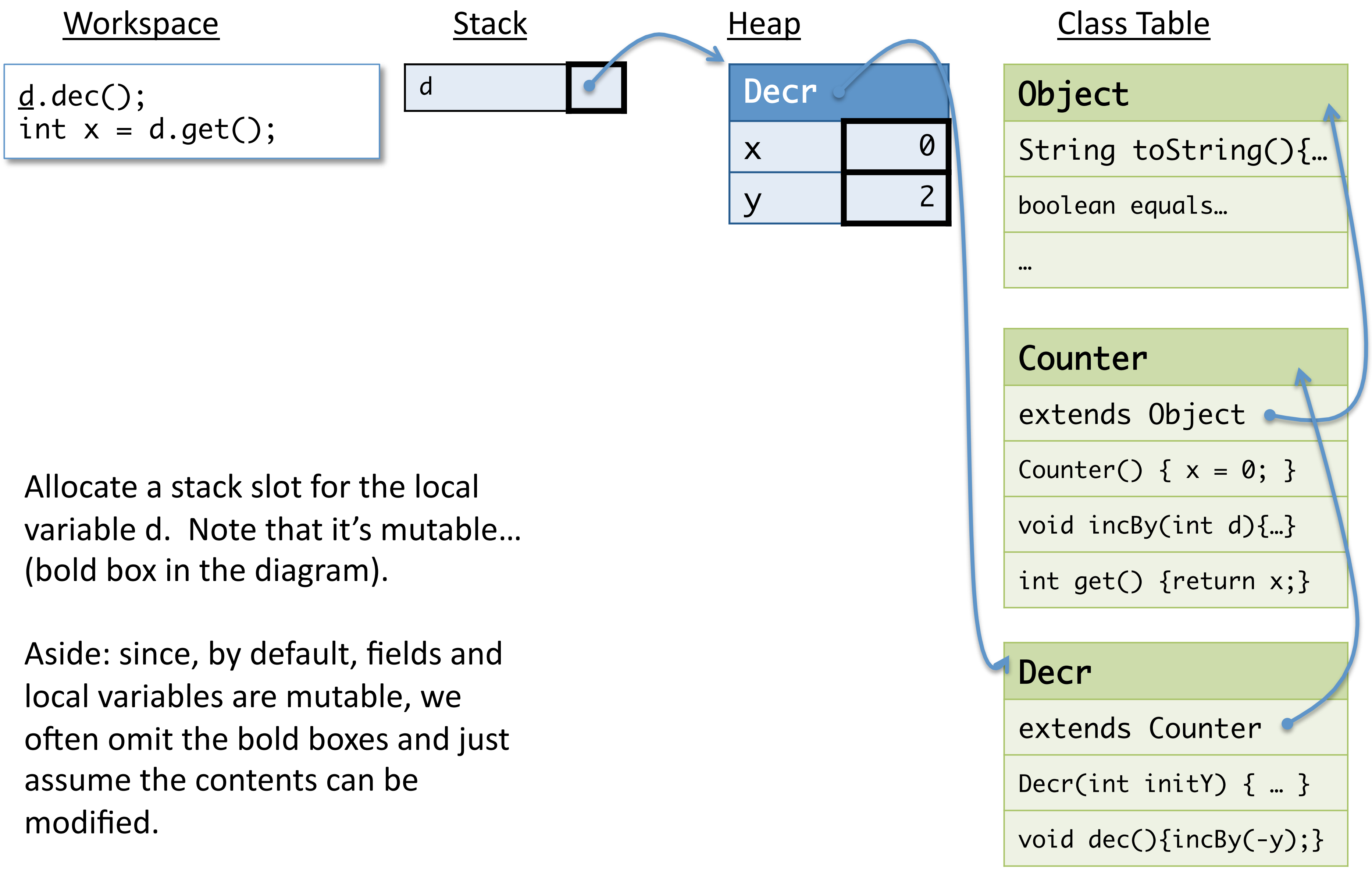
Done with the call to the `Decr` constructor, so pop the stack and return to the saved workspace, returning the newly allocated object (now in the `this` pointer).

Returning the Newly Constructed Object



Continue executing the program.

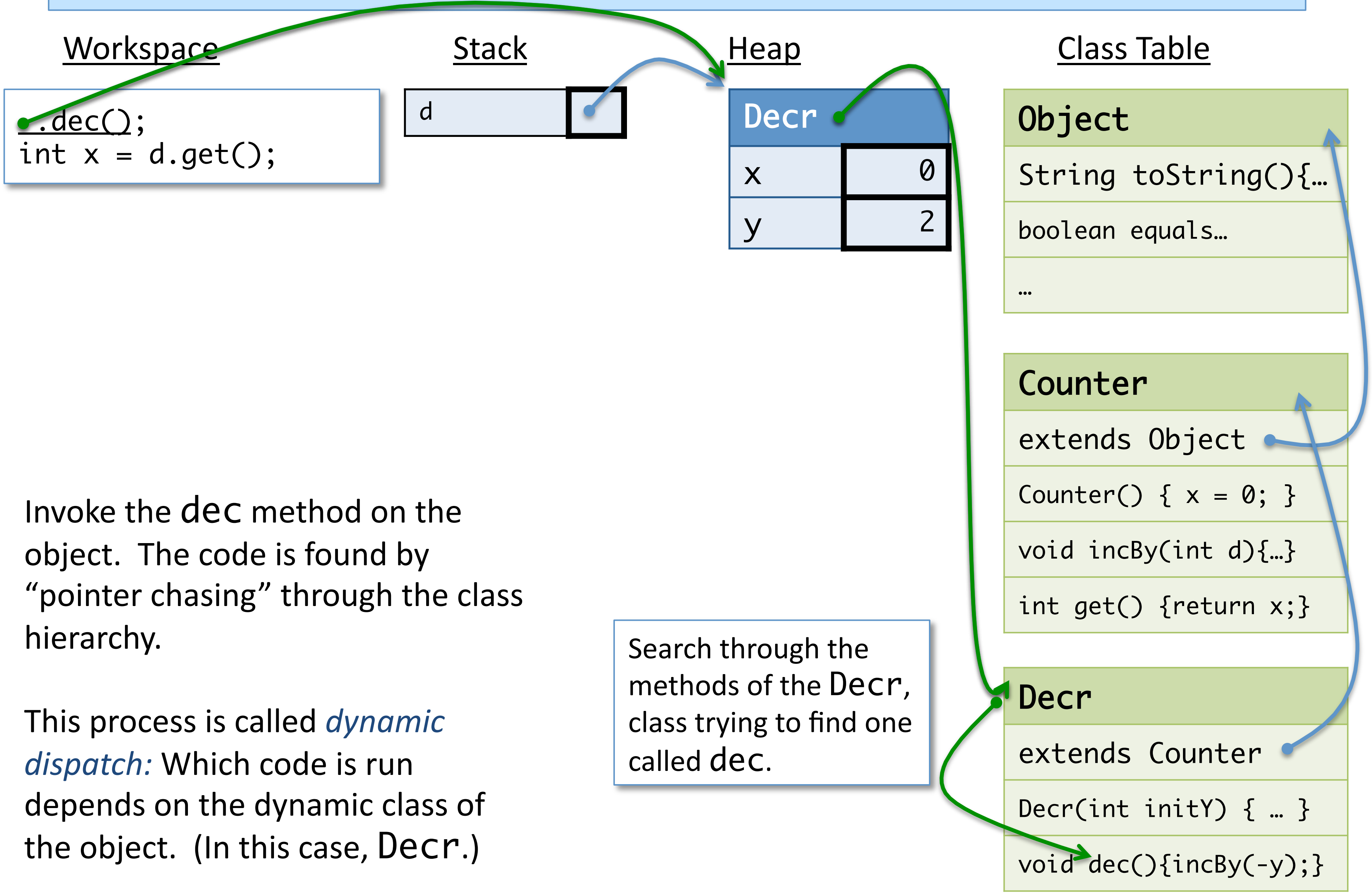
Allocating a local variable



Allocate a stack slot for the local variable d. Note that it's mutable… (bold box in the diagram).

Aside: since, by default, fields and local variables are mutable, we often omit the bold boxes and just assume the contents can be modified.

Dynamic Dispatch: Finding the Code

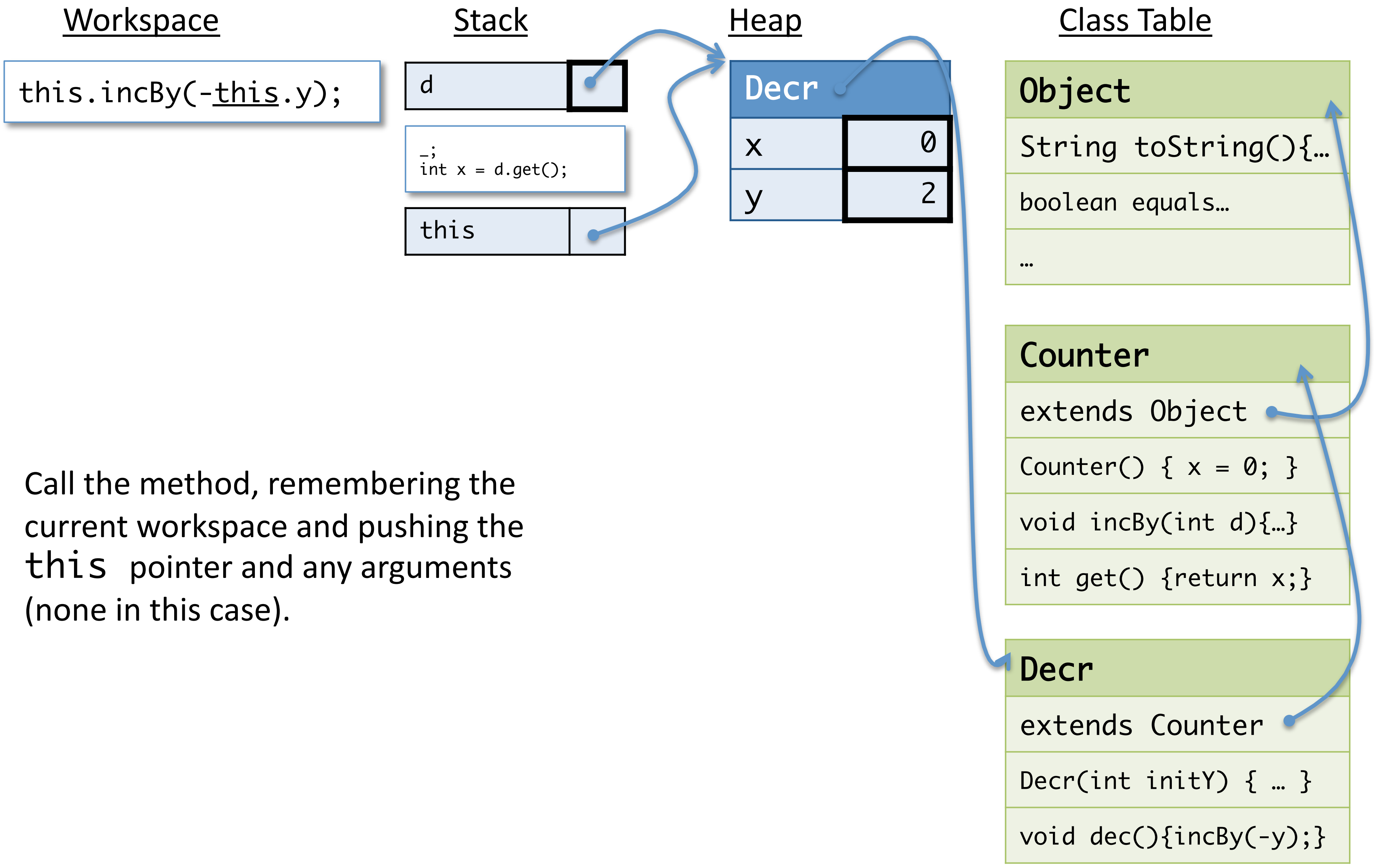


Invoke the dec method on the object. The code is found by "pointer chasing" through the class hierarchy.

This process is called *dynamic dispatch:* Which code is run depends on the dynamic class of the object. (In this case, Decr.)

Search through the methods of the Decr, class trying to find one called dec.

Dynamic Dispatch: Finding the Code



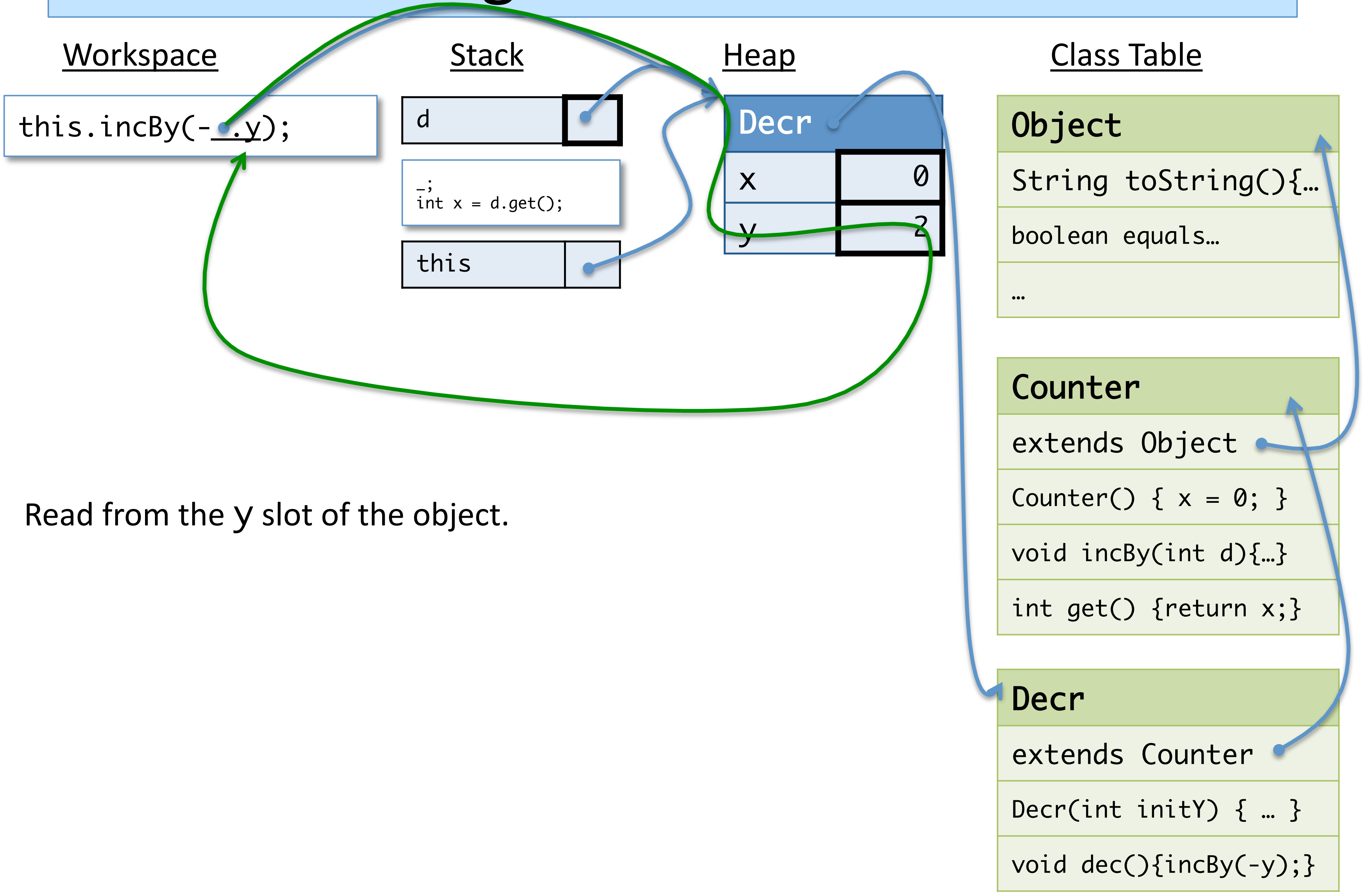
```
this.incBy(-this.y);
```

```
_;
int x = d.get();
```

```
String toString(){…
Counter() { x = 0; }
void incBy(int d){…}
int get() {return x;}
Decr(int initY) { … }
void dec(){incBy(-y);}
```

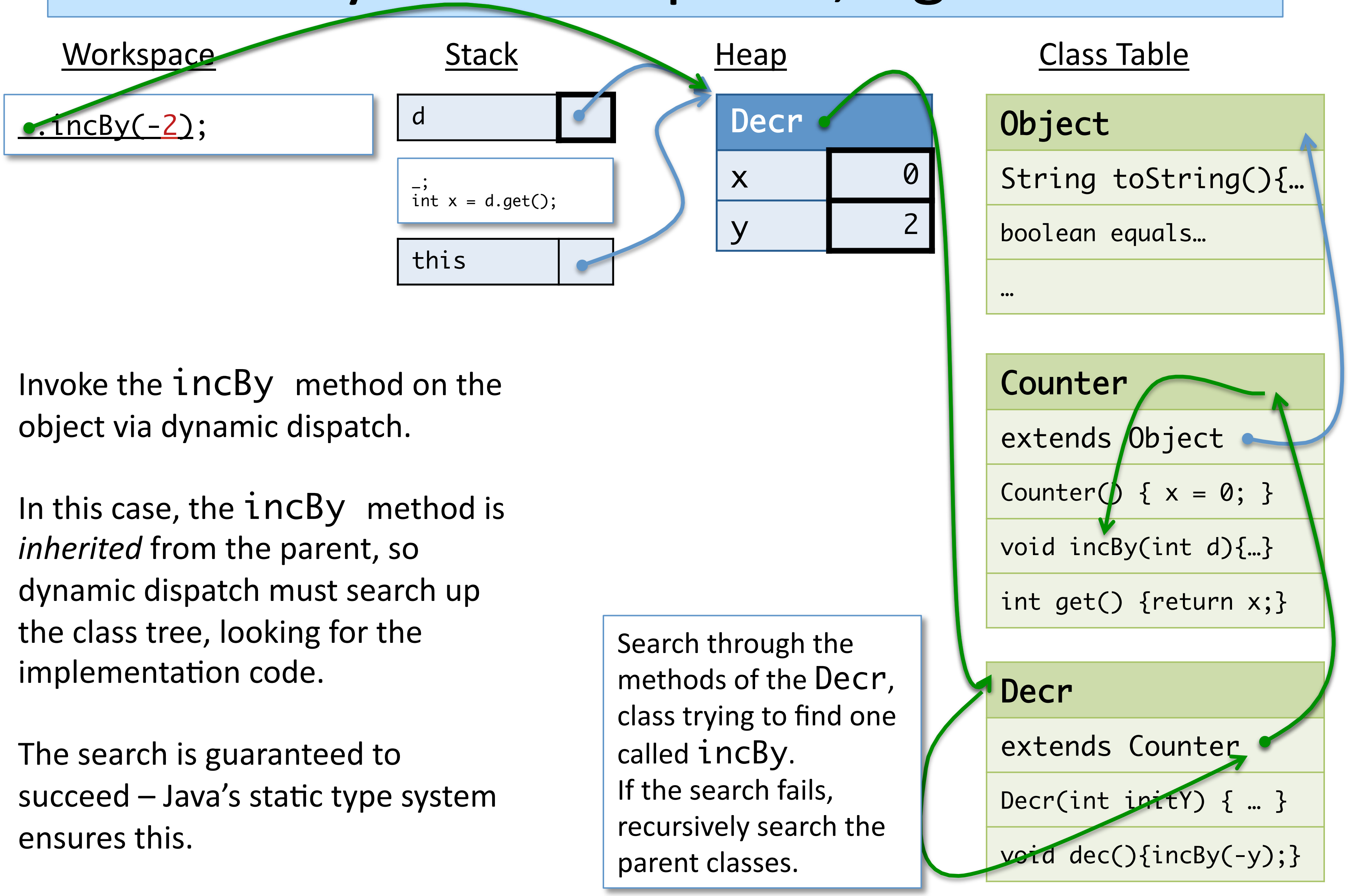
Call the method, remembering the current workspace and pushing the `this` pointer and any arguments (none in this case).

Reading A Field's Contents



Read from the y slot of the object.

Dynamic Dispatch, Again



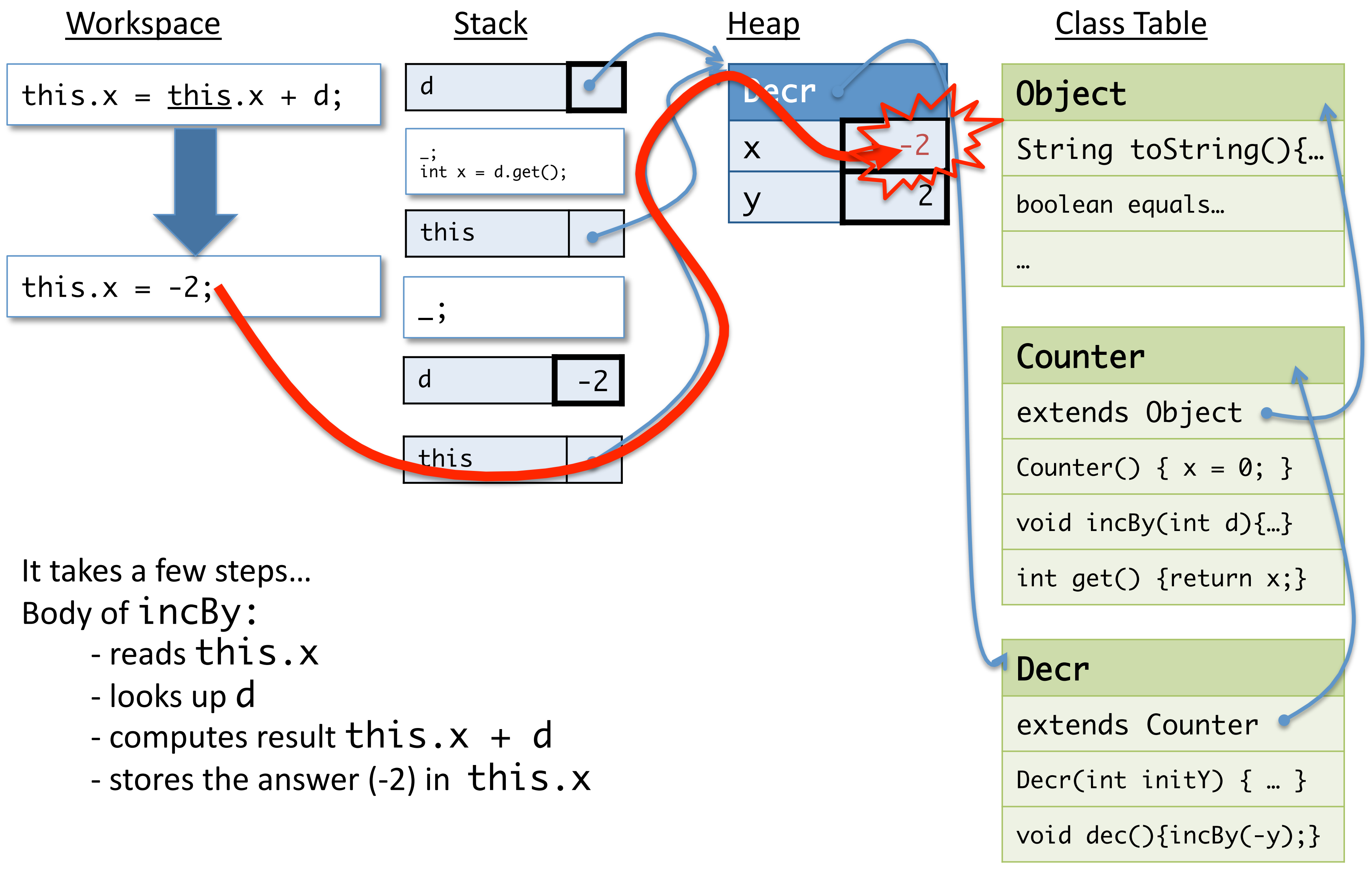
Invoke the `incBy` method on the object via dynamic dispatch.

In this case, the `incBy` method is *inherited* from the parent, so dynamic dispatch must search up the class tree, looking for the implementation code.

The search is guaranteed to succeed – Java's static type system ensures this.

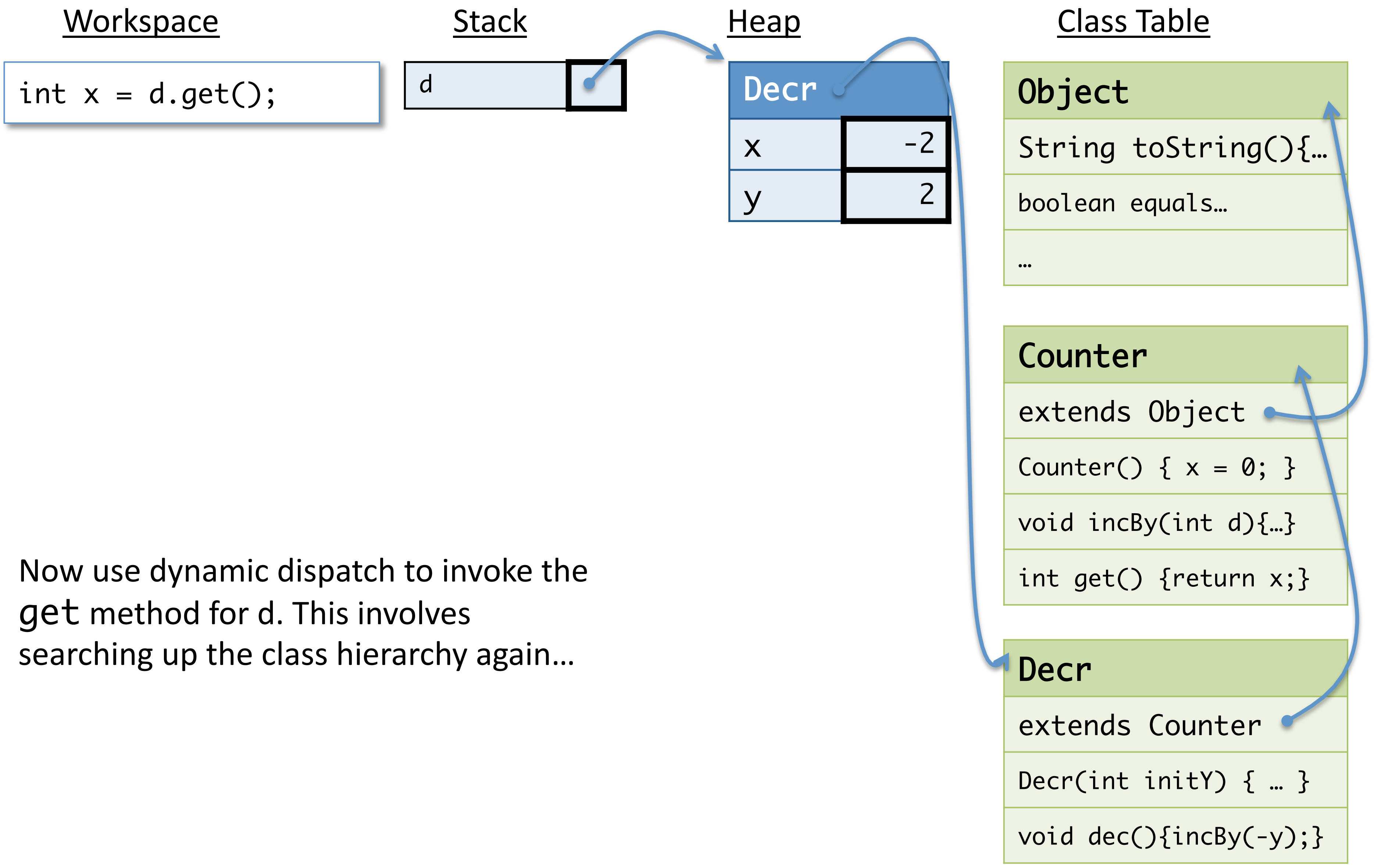
Search through the methods of the `Decr`, class trying to find one called `incBy`.
If the search fails, recursively search the parent classes.

Running the body of incBy



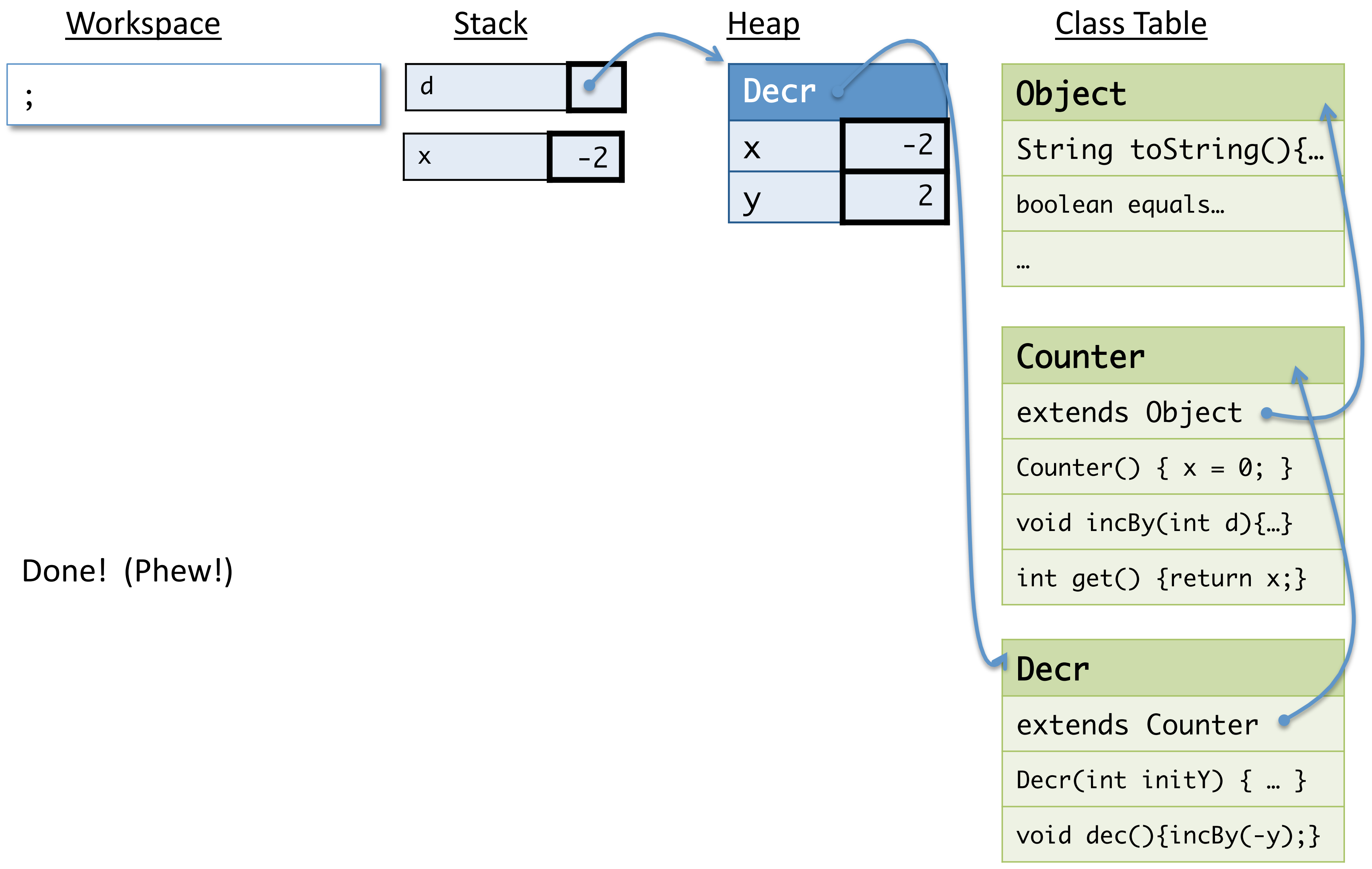
It takes a few steps…
Body of `incBy`:
- reads `this.x`
- looks up `d`
- computes result `this.x + d`
- stores the answer (-2) in `this.x`

After a few more steps…



Now use dynamic dispatch to invoke the `get` method for d. This involves searching up the class hierarchy again…

After yet a few more steps…



Done! (Phew!)

Summary: `this` and dynamic dispatch

- When object's method is invoked, as in `o.m()`, the code that runs is determined by `o`'s *dynamic* class.
  - The dynamic class, represented as a pointer into the class table, is included in the object structure in the heap
  - If the method is inherited from a superclass, determining the code for `m` might require searching up the class hierarchy via pointers in the class table
  - This process of *dynamic dispatch* is the heart of OOP!

- Once the code for m has been determined, a binding for `this` is pushed onto the stack.
  - The `this` pointer is used to resolve field accesses and method invocations inside the code.

Static members & Java ASM

Static Members

- Classes in Java can also act as *containers* for code and data.
- The modifier `static` means that the field or method is associated with the class and *not* instances of the class.

You can do a static assignment to initialize a static field.

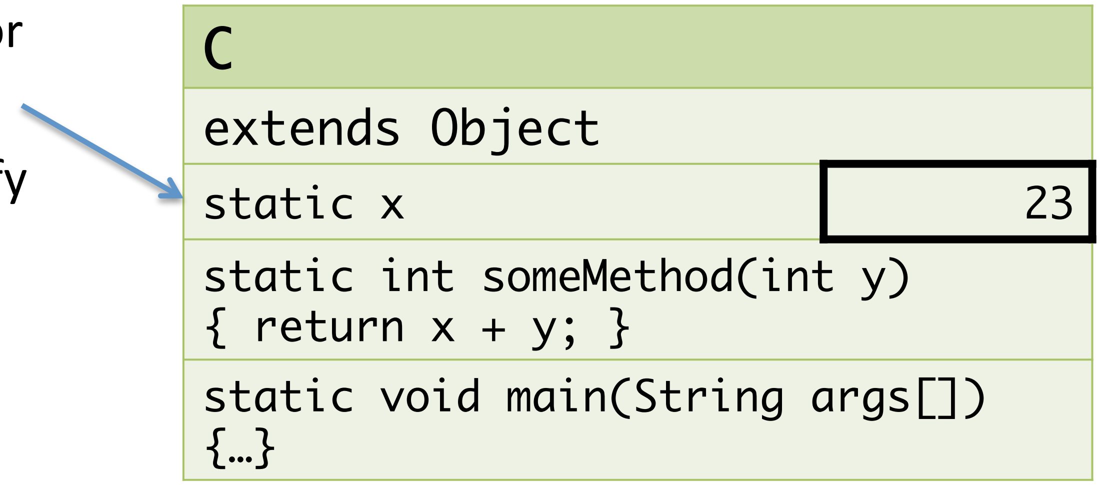
```
public class C {
   public static int x = 23;
   public static int someMethod(int y) { return C.x + y; }
   public static void main(String args[]) {
     …
   }
}

C.x = C.x + 1;
C.someMethod(17);
```

Access to the static member uses the class name `C.x` or `C.foo()`

Class Table Associated with C

- The class table entry for C has a field slot for x.
- Updates to `C.x` modify the contents of this slot: `C.x = 17;`



- A static field is a *global* variable
  - There is only one heap location for it (in the class table)
  - Modifications to such a field are globally visible (if the field is public)
  - Generally not a good idea!

Static Methods (Details)

- Static methods do *not* have access to the `this` pointer
  - Why? There isn't an instance to dispatch through.
  - Therefore, static methods may only directly call other static methods.
  - Similarly, static methods can only directly read/write static fields.
  - Of course a static method can create instance of objects (via `new`) and then invoke methods on those objects.

- Gotcha: It is possible (but confusing) to invoke a static method as though it belongs to an object instance.
  - e.g. `o.someMethod(17)` where `someMethod` is static
  - Eclipse will issue a warning if you try to do this.