

# ANCIENT GREECE: WHERE DEMOCRACY BEGAN



Written by Robert E. Slavin and Kate Conway







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# Ancient Greece: Where Democracy Began

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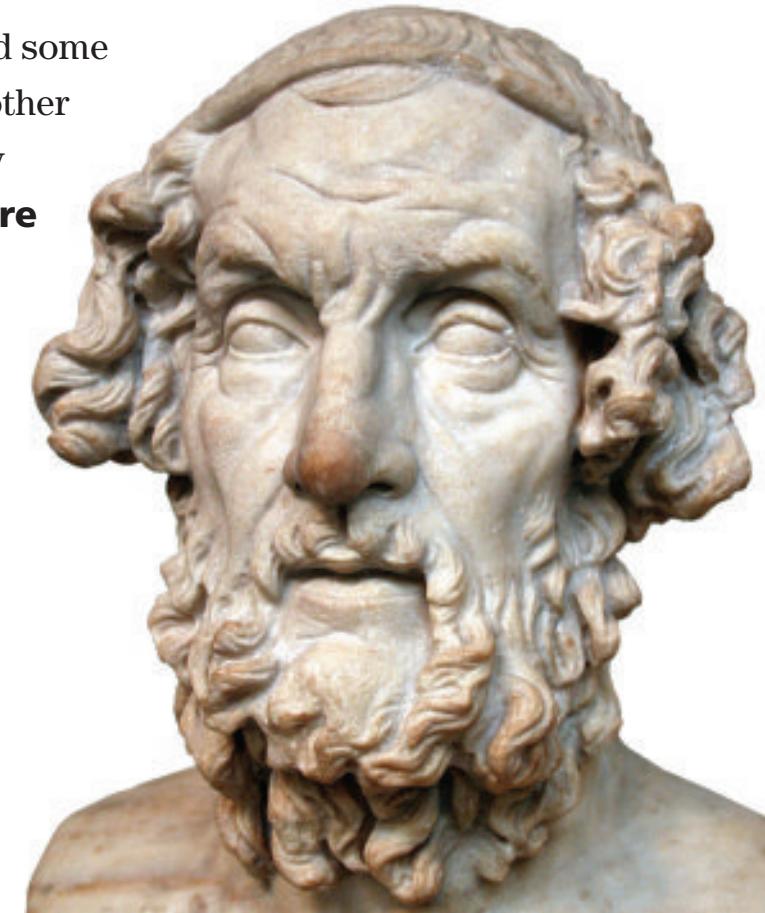
# INTRODUCTION

We are about to go on a journey that will take us back 3,000 years. Our destination? Ancient Greece.

What can we learn about a **civilization** that started so long ago? A lot! Greece gave us many great ideas that are still important today.

One of Greece's greatest ideas was **democracy**. Democracy is a type of **government**. It is used by many countries today. The United States of America and Canada are two such countries.

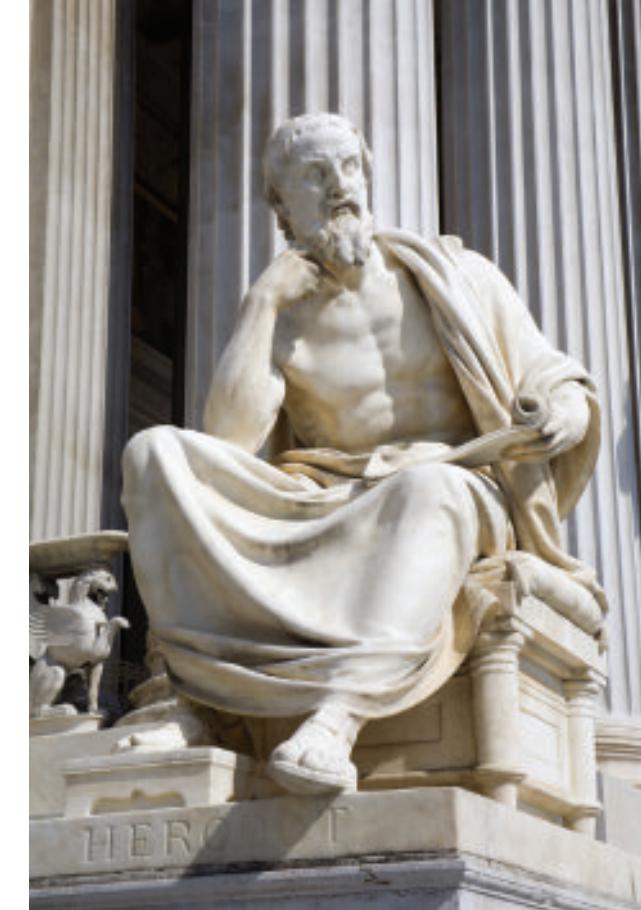
The Greeks had some great ideas in other areas too. They loved **literature** and the arts. Poems and stories by Greek writers such as Homer are still read and enjoyed thousands of years later.



**Fact:** The people of ancient Greece loved to tell stories about their gods and goddesses. We now call these stories **myths**. One very popular myth is about Perseus and Medusa. According to the story, Perseus was a Greek hero who was half god and half man. Perseus was the son of Zeus, the king of the gods. Medusa was a woman whose head was covered with snakes, and who had the power to turn men to stone by looking into their eyes. Perseus managed to kill the fearsome Medusa.



The Greeks wrote about history, **philosophy**, and art. Herodotus was the first historian. He has been called the “Father of History.” He collected facts, tested them, and wrote about what he found. The Greeks also made important discoveries in science, mathematics, and medicine.



Some of Greece's great thinkers were called **philosophers**. They asked questions such as, “What is the right thing to do?” and “What is beauty?” They wrote about their ideas and talked to many people about them.



**Fact:** Many English words have been taken directly from the Greek language. Many English words were created by combining Greek words. Here are some of them.

acrobat	compass	octagon
anchor	democracy	oxygen
analogy	dinosaur	pentagon
arcade	fantasy	pirate
arctic	geometry	police
athlete	giant	pyramid
automobile	gnome	sphere
circle	history	telephone
	machine	



The Greeks had important ideas about buildings too. They created new designs for how things should be built. Many of today's building designs use ideas from Greek **architecture**.

Have you ever seen the **Olympic Games**? The first Olympic Games were held in Greece nearly 2,800 years ago. The modern Olympics are based on these ancient games.

There is much more to learn about this great empire and its people's ideas. Let's begin our journey!



## THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

Greece is a small country along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It is located between the Ionian Sea and the Aegean Sea.

Greece is made up of the mainland and more than one thousand small islands. In ancient times, the Greek empire spread much further.



 Modern Greece

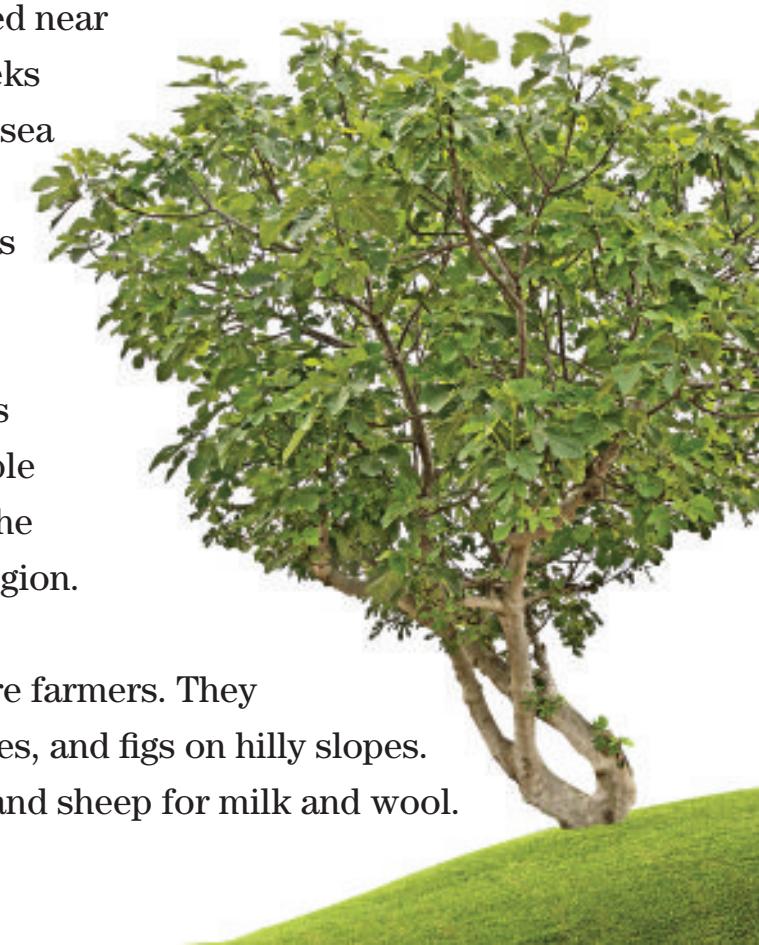


 Ancient Greek Empire





Like today, many Greeks in ancient times lived near the sea. The Greeks depended on the sea to make a living. Many were sailors and fisherman. They caught fish and traded across the sea with people from all around the Mediterranean region.



Other people were farmers. They grew olives, grapes, and figs on hilly slopes. They kept goats and sheep for milk and wool.



Music and the arts were very important in Greece. Learning was highly valued. Greek history and culture were taught to children from the time they were very young.



## A Day in the Life



Ou'lete! My name is Aristotle, just like the famous philosopher. I'm ten years old, and I live in Athens. Most days, I go to school. My friends and I learn about the history and culture of Greece. Our teacher shows us how to write numbers and letters and how to play the lyre. The lyre is a musical instrument that many people in Athens can play. My favorite thing to learn about is literature. I love to hear the stories that our teacher tells us about gods and heroes. Heracles is my favorite because he was so strong and mighty!

I have two sisters. Helen is six and Diana is eight. They don't go to school because most Greek girls stay at home to learn from their mothers how to take care of the family. While I am at school, they cook, take care of the garden, clean, and wash our clothing. Where we live is warm most of the time, so we usually wear sandals and tunics. Our tunics are white, loose, and wrap over one of our shoulders. When my sisters get older, they will marry and leave their toys at Artemis' temple. Then they will be like our mother and will have a home and children of their own.

My father is a fisherman, and he is teaching me to be a fisherman

too. Someday, I will teach my son how to fish.

I also hope to be in the Olympics. My father says that I am very fast and I could compete in the games when I am a man.

I will be able to vote when I get older. The Greek citizens of Athens get to select our leaders and to make important decisions. My sisters won't be able to vote because only men have that right.

I am going out to help my father pick figs from our fig trees. Thank you for visiting me in Greece!

# HISTORY

The Greeks were determined to build their empire. They wanted Greece to rule much of the world's land.

## Growing the Empire

One of Greece's greatest enemies was Persia. The Persian Empire was one of the largest and most powerful empires in the world. The Persians wanted to **conquer** Greece.

The Greeks and Persians fought several big battles. The Persian army was much bigger than

the Greek army, but the Greeks beat them every time. The Greeks were great warriors.

The Greeks sailed the Mediterranean Sea to trade and to find new land. They started many **colonies**. They had colonies in France, Italy, Sicily, and North Africa. The Greeks used these colonies to spread their language and culture far beyond Greece.



## The Golden Age

Many of the ideas in this book started during the Golden Age of Greece. The Golden Age was from 480 BCE to 323 BCE. During this time, many people were very interested in different ways of thinking. Greek culture, government, writing, and art were at their best.

## The End of the Empire

In 146 BCE, the Roman Empire conquered Greece. The Romans greatly admired and respected Greek ideas and culture. They adopted many Greek ideas such as the Greek gods. They also copied some of their building styles. The Romans spread Greek culture throughout Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa.

**490 BCE**  
The Greeks defeat the Persians at the Battle of Marathon.

**480 BCE**  
The Golden Age begins

**431 BCE – 404 BCE**  
Sparta and Athens fight the Peloponnesian War.

**359 BCE**  
Phillip II becomes king of Greece. He unites all of the city-states except for Sparta.



**Fact:** What made Alexander so great? He never lost a battle! Alexander was successful because he used new strategies of warfare. Although Alexander the Great died at the age of thirty-three, he had a huge impact on Greece.



**336 BCE**  
Alexander the Great becomes king.

**334 BCE**  
Greece takes over the Persian Empire.

**323 BCE**  
Alexander the Great dies.



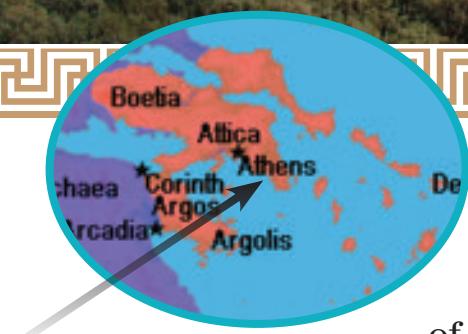
## CITY-STATES

Take a look at this map. It shows the different areas of ancient Greece. These different areas were called **city-states**.

All city-states shared the same language. They also had the same Greek traditions and culture. But every city-state ruled itself. Each had its own laws. The city-states often fought each other over land.

Most of the cities in ancient Greece were built around an **agora**. An agora is an outdoor marketplace. People would go to the agora to **barter** for goods. People would also gather there to talk to one another. Here is a picture of what a city in ancient Greece looked like. Do you see where the agora would have been located in the center?





The largest city-state in ancient Greece was **Athens**. It is one of the oldest cities in the world.

Athens began more than 7,000 years ago. It is where most of the important Greek ideas began. This city was well known for its art, music, writing, thinking, and learning. Athens is where

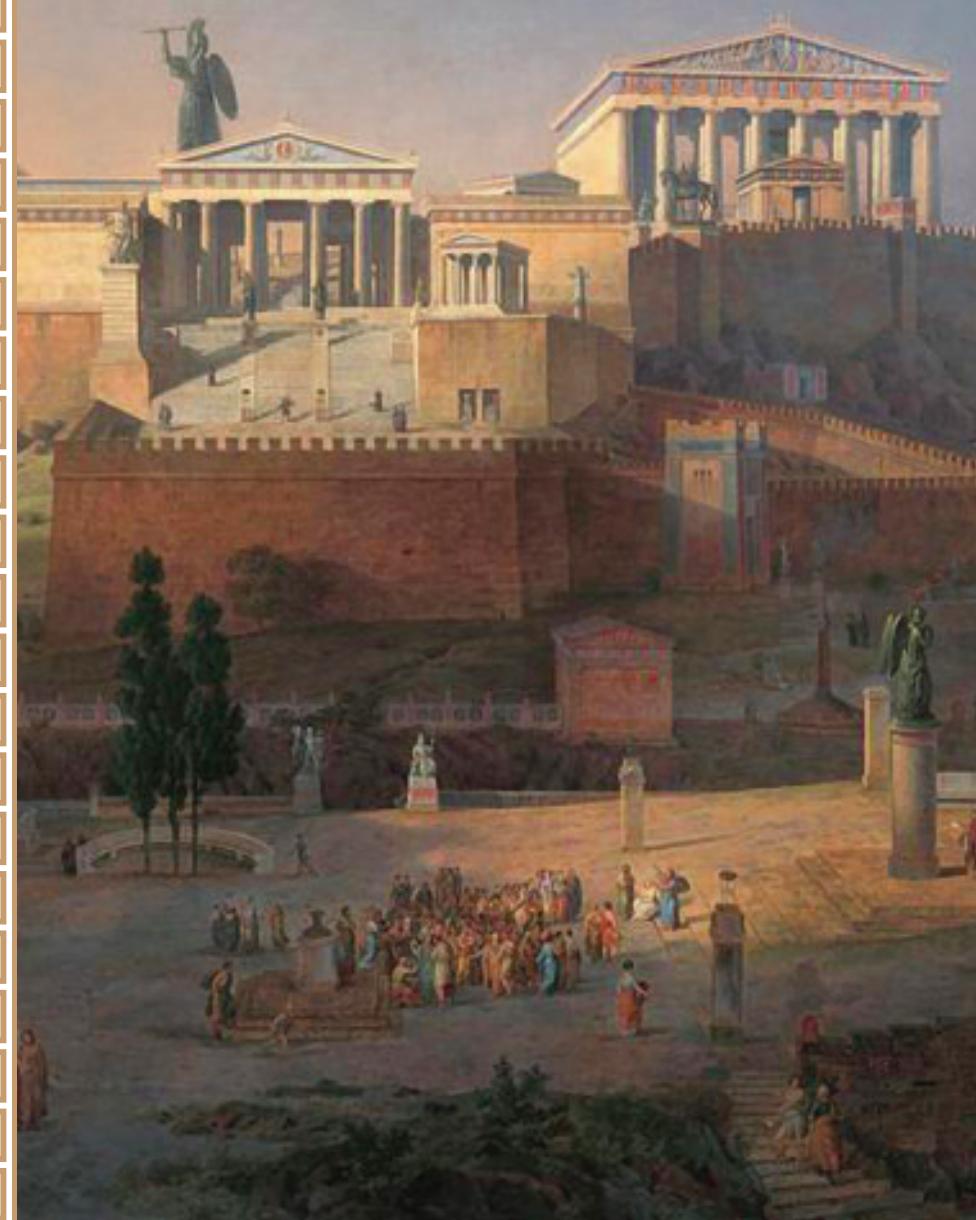
democracy was born. In a democracy, people have a say in the way the government is run. Citizens vote in elections. They vote for the people they want to rule them. Even though only free men who owned land were allowed to vote, Athens is still considered the first real democracy.

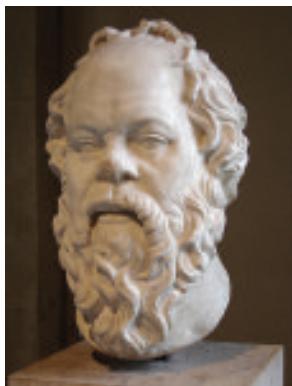
Many other countries had a **monarchy** or **dictatorship**. In those countries, one person had all the power. In Athens, the people shared the power. They voted

on how much to pay in taxes, whether to go to war, and many other important questions. If they did not like what the ruler was doing, they could vote him out.

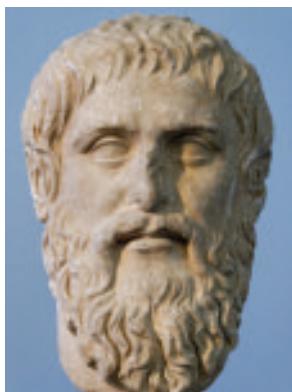
**Fact:** Every year, one person in Athens could be ostracized. If a person was ostracized, it meant that they were thrown out of Athens for ten years. Every male citizen could write down the name of a person on a broken piece of pottery. The names were then counted, and the person who got the most votes had to leave Athens. Sometimes, ostracized people were allowed to come back early if they were needed.

*This is The Acropolis. The Acropolis was a kind of fort. It was built on a hill in the middle of Athens to protect the important buildings there.*





*Socrates*



*Plato*

There were several buildings and statues that made up the Acropolis. The most famous building in the Acropolis was the Parthenon. The

Parthenon is a large stone temple. It was built to honor Athena. Athena is the Greek goddess of learning. If you go

to Athens, you can see the Parthenon. It is still standing! Many other temples were also built in Athens.



*Aristotle*

**Fact:** Knowledge and learning were especially important to the people of Athens. In fact, Athens has been called the birthplace of philosophy because some of the first great thinkers were Athenians. The most famous of the Greek philosophers were Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. These philosophers wrote and discussed their ideas. Socrates taught Plato, and Plato taught Aristotle. Great thinkers often teach small groups of students. These teachings helped to pave the way for the first public schools.





This is a map of another Greek city-state. This is **Sparta**. Sparta was the second-largest city-state. It was very different from Athens. They did not have a democracy. Spartans had a king, which is the head of a monarchy.

The Spartans had a very skilled military. They were always preparing for war. Their schools taught boys to fight.

Boys in Sparta started their military training as early as six years old. Spartan boys lived in barracks. They were taught to be tough, and they were strong soldiers. They often slept on the ground and even marched barefoot! When a Spartan boy graduated

from school, the king removed a stone from the city wall. He said that the soldiers were the walls of the city.

All Spartan citizens were expected to be highly

trained in warfare, or the ways of war. Spartans had to be strong. When a Spartan boy turned twenty, he had to take a test to prove his strength and worth. If he passed, he was a warrior.



*Spartan helmet*

All men remained in the military and lived in the barracks until they were thirty years old. Only then did

they become citizens of Sparta. Military men could marry, but they often lived in the barracks instead of with

their families. They had to continue serving the military until they were sixty years old.

Women in Sparta had more rights than women in other parts of ancient Greece. They could travel outside of the city and even own land.



## GODS AND HEROES

Do you like stories about superheroes? Many of today's superhero tales come from the stories told by the Greeks. Their superheroes were gods and goddesses.

The people of ancient Greece loved to tell stories about their gods and heroes. We call these stories **myths**, and we still read Greek myths today. The gods in myths acted a lot like ordinary people except that they had special powers. The gods would often fight with one another or with humans. They would also get involved in human problems. The gods took sides in battles, helped the heroes that they liked, and felt human emotions, such as anger, sadness, and jealousy.





Each year, the Greeks visited a special place in the mountains called **Delphi**. Delphi was thought to be holy. The Greeks built many temples to their gods there. The people believed that an **oracle** in Delphi could predict the future. Many myths tell stories about heroes who misunderstand the oracle's predictions.

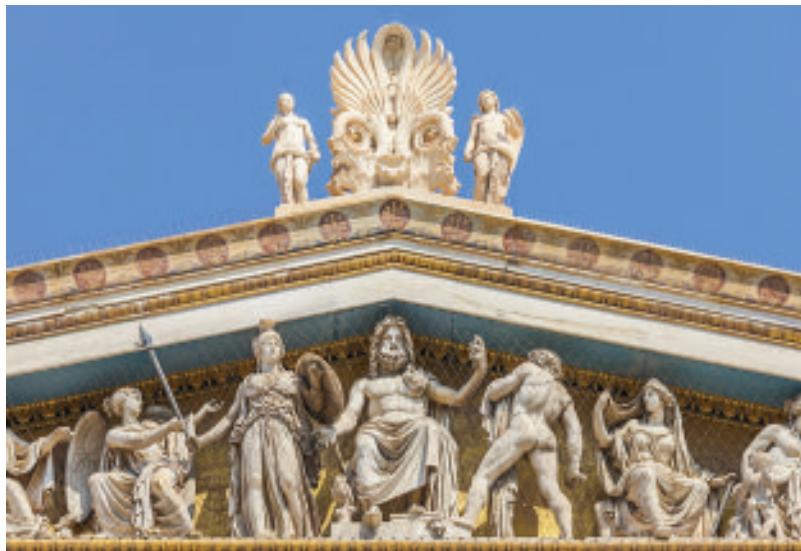
One of the most famous Greek heroes is Heracles. Heracles was half man and half god. His father was the king of all the gods. Heracles was the strongest man in the world.



### Fact:

The Romans also had stories about Heracles. They called him Hercules.





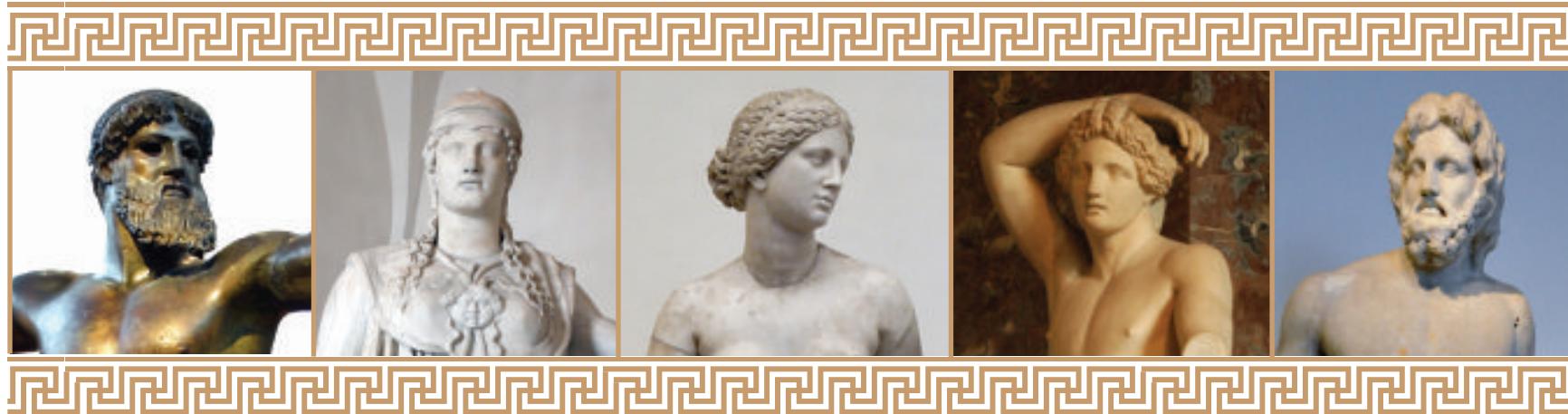
The people of ancient Greece worshiped many gods and goddesses. The Greeks built statues of their gods and goddesses. They believed that each god was responsible for something special. The Greeks prayed to their gods and goddesses for help. Temples were also built to honor the gods.

Do you see the tall mountain in this picture? That is Mt. Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. The Greeks believed their gods and goddesses lived on Mt. Olympus.

**Fact:** The people of ancient Greece built many temples to honor their gods. In these temples, priests would offer animal sacrifices to the gods in hopes of good favor from them. Sacrifices would be offered for victory in battle, a safe journey, or a good harvest.



*Mt. Olympus*



**Zeus**, the father of the gods, was the god of the sky. The Greeks believed that Zeus caused thunder and lightning. When Zeus was angry, he threw thunderbolts! Watch out!

**Athena** was the Greek goddess of learning and wisdom. The city of Athens was named for her.

**Aphrodite** was the goddess of love and beauty.



**Apollo** was the god of music, poetry, and the sun. The people of ancient Greece believed that the sun was Apollo driving a golden chariot across the sky.

**Poseidon** was the god of the sea. Sailors in a storm at sea would pray to Poseidon to calm the waves and protect their ship.

## ARCHITECTURE

The Greeks were some of the greatest builders of the ancient world. Many of the buildings from ancient Greece still stand today.

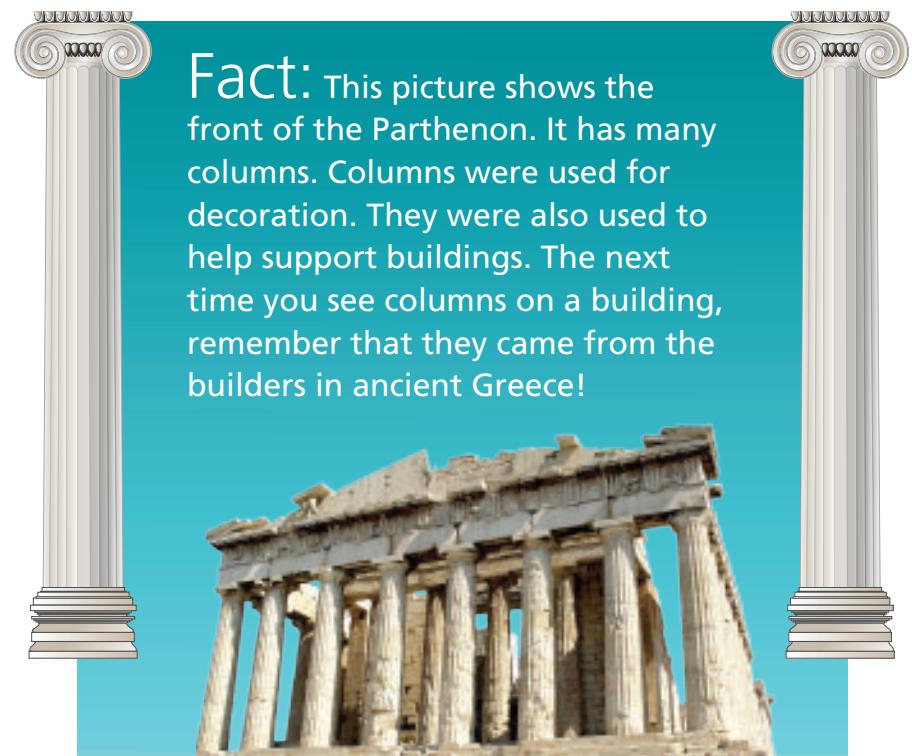
The Greeks built huge stone temples with marble fronts to honor their gods. Many temples had a long row of stairs leading up to them. They had tall columns and roofs that looked like triangles.



The Greeks are famous for their statues. They built huge sculptures out of marble and bronze. Many statues were of great leaders or athletes.



**Fact:** This picture shows the front of the Parthenon. It has many columns. Columns were used for decoration. They were also used to help support buildings. The next time you see columns on a building, remember that they came from the builders in ancient Greece!





Amphitheater

Every town in ancient Greece and in its colonies had an **amphitheater**. Amphitheaters were big outdoor theaters where meetings were held. Plays were put

on there too. The theaters were usually shaped like a semicircle with rows of seats surrounding a stage. Greeks loved to go to the theater to see plays performed. They also

gathered to listen to speakers. Several of these open-air theaters can still be seen today. Ancient Greeks also built stadiums that they called **hippodromes**.

Horse races and chariot races were held in these outdoor stadiums. Hippodromes were very long, with one end rounded like an oval and the other end straight like a rectangle.



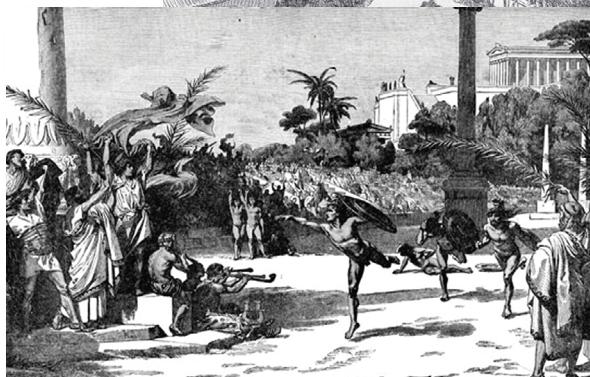
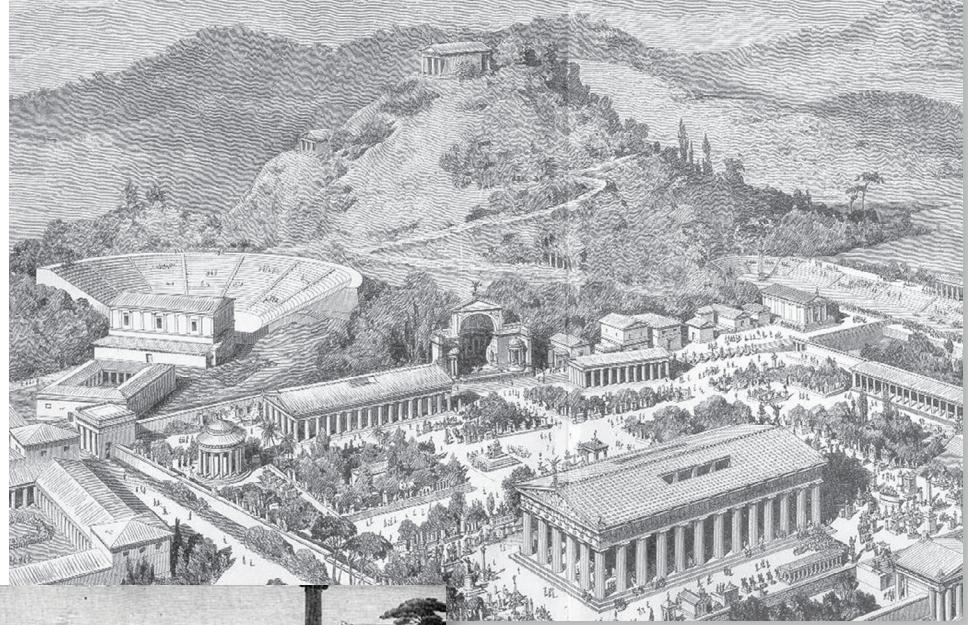
Hippodrome

## ANCIENT OLYMPICS

The first Olympic Games were dedicated to Zeus, the father of the Greek gods. They were held to show off the strength of the human body. They were also held as a way to unite the city-states.

The games were held in the city of Olympia. Olympia was located at the bottom of Mt. Olympus, the home of the Greek gods.

The first Olympic Games were held in 776 BCE. The only event was a short foot race. Soon, other events were added. Boxing and wrestling were added as Olympic sports. So were chariot racing and the **pentathlon**.



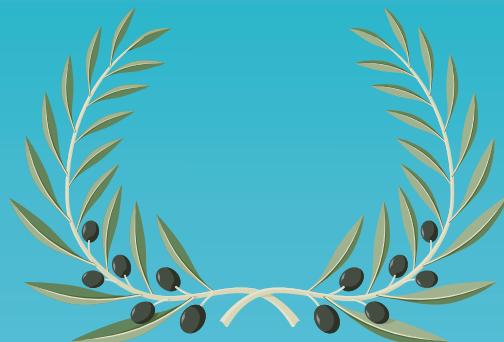
**Fact:** Athletes in the ancient games did not wear any clothes!

**Fact:** The pentathlon is a contest with five different events. Athletes compete in pentathlons today, but the events are very different.

The Pentathlon	
Ancient Olympics	Modern Olympics
long jump	horse jumping
javelin (spear) throw	pistol shooting
discus throw	fencing
running	swimming
wrestling	running

**Fact:** If you were one of the athletes who won an event in the ancient Olympic Games, you would have been considered a great hero! The victors received an olive wreath, intertwined olive branches shaped into a circle. In the ancient Olympic Games, there were no gold, silver, or bronze medals. There was only one winner per event. Winners often received large amounts of money from their hometowns, vats of olive oil, and even had statues made in their honor.

The 2004 Summer Olympics were held in Athens. Olive wreaths were given out in honor of the ancient tradition.



Over the years, the games became bigger, and athletes from all over Greece and its colonies came to compete. Only Greek men could compete. Unmarried women could watch the games but married women could not.

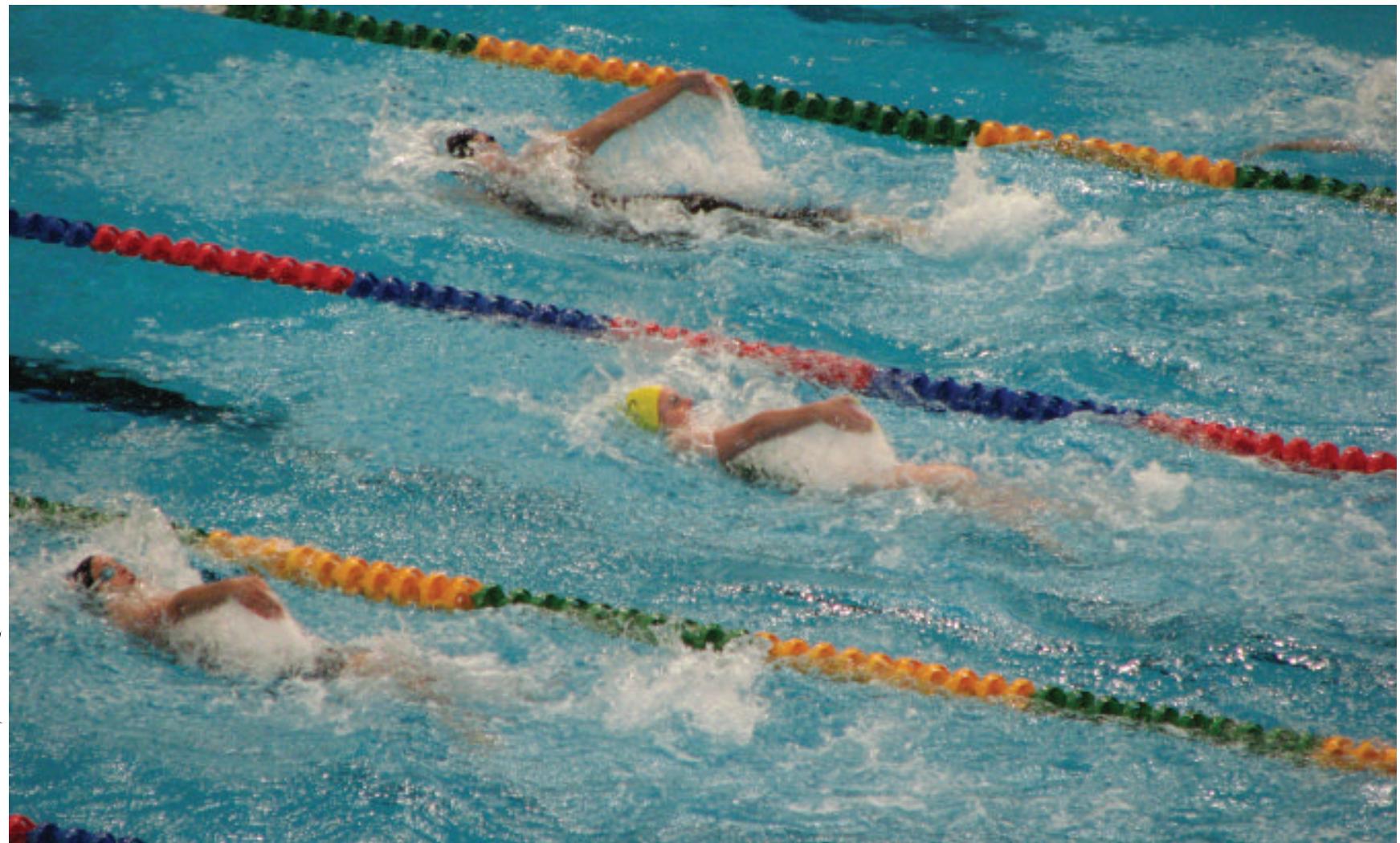


The Olympic Games were held every four years. They lasted up to five days. During this time, wars between city-states were suspended so all male Greeks could attend.

After nearly twelve **centuries**, the Olympic Games were ended. They were banned by a Roman emperor. But the games didn't disappear forever. In 1896, the

modern Olympic Games were started in Athens. In 1900, female athletes were invited to participate. Today men and women from all over the world compete in

sporting events at the Olympic Games.



## GREECE TODAY

Modern-day Greece is a small country in the Mediterranean Sea. Its capital is Athens, the once great city-state of ancient Greece.

Many reminders of ancient Greece can still be seen today. Greece is one of the world's most popular places to visit. Each year, millions of **tourists** go to Greece. They visit the ruins of ancient buildings and learn about the Greeks' amazing ancient civilization.

If you know where to look, you can see ancient Greece all around us today.



**Fact:** The marathon is an Olympic event. Marathon runners race 26.2 miles. This race was inspired by the legend of Pheidippides, an ancient Greek messenger.

In 490 BCE, the Greeks fought the Persians in the Battle of Marathon. The Greeks won. They sent Pheidippides to announce the victory. Pheidippides ran about twenty-five miles from Marathon to Athens without stopping. When he arrived in Athens, he exclaimed, "We won!" Then he collapsed and died.





*U.S. Capitol*

One place you can find Greek ideas is in Washington, D.C. Many important buildings in our nation's capital reflect

designs from ancient Greece. The U.S. Capitol is held up by big columns. The Supreme Court building has big columns too, and it's topped with a triangular roof. This ancient Greek influence is meant to symbolize democracy.

Our nation's government is based on democracy.

Democracy is the most important idea that the Greeks gave the world.

Whenever people vote for their leaders, they can thank the Greeks.

Marble and bronze sculptures created by the Greeks can be found in museums. Artists today study these great works of art. Students read and watch Greek plays. Did you know the Greeks gave us comedy?



*Supreme Court Building*

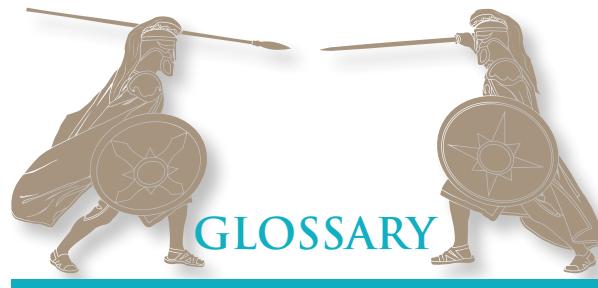
They realized plays would be a lot more entertaining if they could make people laugh! They also gave us tragedies.

The Greeks also gave the world the first alphabet with vowels. Imagine reading with no vowels. The word *alphabet* comes from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet—*alpha* and *beta*.

Greece gave us so much! *Efharistó*, Greece! Thank you from the people of the modern world!

**Fact:** Some of the English alphabet came from the Greek alphabet! Do you see any Greek letters that look familiar?

A	B	Γ	Δ	E	Z
Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta	Epsilon	Zeta
H	Θ	I	K	Λ	M
Eta	Theta	Iota	Kappa	Lambda	Mu
N	Ξ	O	Π	P	Σ
Nu	Xi	Omicron	Pi	Rho	Sigma
T	Υ	Φ	Χ	Ψ	Ω
Tau	Upsilon	Phi	Chi	Psi	Omega



**agora:** An outdoor marketplace.

**amphitheater:** Outdoor theater shaped like a semicircle.

**architecture:** Style of building.

**Athens:** The largest city-state in Ancient Greece; the capital of modern Greece.

**barter:** To trade.

**BCE:** Before the Common Era.

**century:** One hundred years.

**city-state:** A city with its own government.

**civilization:** Culture or society in a region.

**colonies:** Places under control of another country. People from the ruling country live in colonies.

**conquer:** To beat in war; to overtake.

**Delphi:** A holy town in Greece.

**democracy:** A government in which the people have the power.

**dictatorship:** A government in which one person has all the power.

**empire:** A group of nations under one ruler.

**government:** The group of people who make the laws and decisions for a nation, state, or community.

**hippodrome:** Stadium for horse and chariot racing.

**historian:** A person who studies the past.

**literature:** Stories, poems, plays, and other writing.

**monarchy:** A government ruled by a king or queen.

**myths:** Legends and stories from a culture, usually about heroes or gods.

**Olympic Games:** Competition of sporting games held every four years.

**ou'lete:** Hello to more than one person in the ancient Greek language.

**oracle:** A priest, priestess, or shrine dedicated to a god who gives advice.

**Parthenon:** The temple of Athena built on The Acropolis in Athens.

**pentathlon:** A contest of five sporting events.

**philosophy:** The study of the nature of knowledge, truth, and beauty.

**philosophers:** People who study the nature of knowledge, truth, and beauty.

**Sparta:** A city-state in ancient Greece known for its warriors.

**The Acropolis:** A fortress on a hill in Athens.

**tourists:** People who visit another city or country for fun.





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