

# COMPARING ATHENS & SPARTA

## Government

The citizens of Athens introduced a new form of government that would have a tremendous influence on future western civilization: democracy. Democracy, or “rule by the people,” was created to avoid the power struggle between the rich and poor. As a result, all male citizens, rich or poor, were able to participate in the political decision making in Athens.

When Pericles ruled Athens from 461-429 B.C., in what is regarded as the Golden Age, he further strengthened their government by introducing the concept of direct democracy, a form of government in which citizens rule directly and not through representatives. Few other city-states practiced this style of government. All males, 18 years or older and born of citizen parents, were eligible to become public officials. Laws were voted on and proposed directly by the assembly, and they had an executive branch composed of a council of 50 men.

The city state of Sparta, however, built a military state on the Peloponnesus, the large peninsula in Southern Greece. Two groups governed Sparta: an Assembly, which was composed of all free adult males, and a Council of Elders. The Council proposed laws on which the Assembly voted. Two kings ruled over Sparta’s military. At the age of 7, boys left home and began rigorous military training. From 600 to 371 B.C., Sparta had the most powerful army in Greece, but they paid a high price for that position. All forms of individual expression were discouraged. Spartans valued duty, strength, and discipline over individuality, beauty, and freedom.

## The Role of Women

Athenian women were expected to remain out of sight and quietly raise children. Women were excluded from citizenship, could not vote, and generally had few rights. Athenian women focused their attention on child rearing, weaving cloth, preparing meals, and managing the household. In addition to having no part in government, women had very little to do with the city’s intellectual life.

In addition to the men, Spartan women & girls also experienced rather harsh lives. Although they did not receive military training, they ran, wrestled, and took part in athletic contests. Like the men, they learned to put service to Sparta above family. As adults, women managed the family estates while their husbands served the polis. Although women did not have the right to vote, their roles in Spartan society surprised men from other Greek city-states. In most of the other Greek city-states, women were required to stay inside their homes most of their lives. They could not go anywhere or do anything without their husband's permission. But in Sparta, things were very different for women who were citizens. They were free to move around and visit neighbors without permission.

## Education and the Military

In ancient Athens, the purpose of education was to produce citizens trained in the arts, and to prepare citizens for both peace and war. From age 6 to 14, boys went to a neighborhood primary school or to a private school. In school, they learned two important things - the words of Homer, a famous Greek epic poet, and how to play the lyre. Their male teachers also taught drama, public speaking, government, art, reading, writing, and math. When males turned 18, they entered military school for two additional years until they graduated at age 20. Girls were not educated at school, but many learned to read and write at home in the comfort of their courtyard.

In ancient Sparta, the purpose of education was to produce a well-drilled, well-disciplined marching army. Spartans believed in a life of discipline, self-denial, and simplicity. They were very loyal to the state of Sparta. When babies were born in ancient Sparta, Spartan soldiers would come to the house and if the baby did not appear healthy and strong, it was taken away and left to die on a hillside or taken away to be trained as a slave (a helot). Spartan boys were sent to military school at age 6 or 7. They were taught survival skills and other skills necessary to be a great soldier. Spartan soldiers spent most of their lives with their fellow soldiers. Even if they were married, they did not live with their wives and families. At age 60, a Spartan soldier could finally retire and live in their home with their family.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



# Athens and Sparta



**Directions:** Due to the mountainous terrain of Greece, many independent city-states developed. Two major city-states were Athens and Sparta. These city-states, although both Greek in culture, developed vastly different ways of life. Now that we have reviewed these two city-states, read each characteristic below and decide if it fits best with Athens or Sparta.

Characteristic	Athens or Sparta?
Very militaristic in every aspect of society.	
Located on the Peloponnesus	
Had a representative government to lead the city	
No democracy	
Citizens participated directly in decision-making	
Did not value things such as the arts, literature, or intellectual pursuits	
First democracy	
All forms of individual expression were discouraged	
Valued education - wealthy boys trained to be good citizens	
Solon made democratic reforms and outlawed debt slavery	
Valued duty strength, and discipline over freedom, individuality, and learning	
Draco made a legal code that said all citizens were equal under the law, but death was the punishment for most crimes	
Reformers like Cleisthenes increased the power of assembly by allowing all citizens to submit laws	
Girls were trained for the military too and had many rights	
Service to the state was above all else, even above the family	
Rhetoric (the art of skillful speaking) was important to society	
Girls did not go to school-were trained to be good mothers and wives	
Men were encouraged to steal to develop good cunning	
Encouraged trade and travel	
Valued individual expression	
Did not allow people to trade and travel	
Boys began their military training at age 7	
Used helots to work the land, which were very similar to slaves.	
Men expected to serve in the military until age 60	