The Greeks also applied observation, reason, and logic to the study of history. **Herodotus** is often called the “Father of History” in the Western world because he went beyond listing names of rulers or the retelling of ancient legends. Before writing *The Persian Wars*, Herodotus visited many lands, collecting information from people who remembered some of the actual events he chronicled. In fact, Herodotus used the Greek term *historie*, which means inquiry, to define his work. Our *history* comes from this word, but its definition has evolved today to simply mean the recording and study of past events.

Herodotus cast a critical eye on his sources, noting bias and conflicting accounts. However, despite this special care for detail and accuracy, his writings reflected his own biased view that the war was a clear moral victory of Greek love of freedom over Persian tyranny. He even invented conversations and speeches for historical figures. He also included in his writings the gossip, myths, and rumors he had heard through his travels. For this reason, some have called him the “Father of Lies.” However, Herodotus felt that even information that may be inaccurate had value to the reader, to provide a fuller and more interesting story. Unlike later historians, his writing was meant not only to be informative, but also entertaining.

Another historian **Thucydides**, who was a few years younger than Herodotus, wrote about the Peloponnesian War, a much less happy subject for the Greeks. He had lived through the war and vividly described the war’s savagery and corrupting influence on all those involved. Although he was an Athenian, he tried to be fair to both sides. Many consider Thucydides the true “Father of History” because he was far more concerned with accuracy and objectivity (lack of bias) than Herodotus (who he often criticized). He only including what he felt sure about and trying to give an account of only the facts without including his own opinions.

Both writers set standards for future historians. Herodotus stressed the importance of research. Thucydides showed the need to avoid bias.

**So who deserves to be called the true “Father of History?”** Take a look at the excerpts below and decide.

### HERODOTUS ON THE GRECO-PERSIAN WARS

The losses on either side at the Battle of Marathon were as follows: about 6,400 Persian soldiers fell, while only 192 died on the Athenian side...An Athenian call Epizelus...lost his sight, even though he had not been wounded...anywhere on his body...I have it on hearsay that the story he used to tell...was as follows: he was confronted by a huge man in heavy armor, whose beard overshadowed his whole shield; but this phantom passed by him and killed them man next to him.

Do you think the number of casualties (deaths) reported by Herodotus is accurate? Why?

Herodotus admits that the story he is reporting is based on hearsay. Do you think that makes him a good historian or a bad historian? Explain why?
Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, beginning at the moment that it broke out, and believing that it would be a great war and more worthy of relation than any that had preceded it. This belief was not without its grounds.

Why did Thucydides write his historical account?

As to the speeches that were made either before or during the war, it was hard for me, and for others who reported them to me, to recollect the exact words. I have therefore put into the mouth of each speaker the sentiments proper to the occasion, expressed as I thought he would be likely to express them, while at the same time I endeavored (tried hard), as nearly as I could, to give the general purport of what was actually said. Of the events of the war I have not ventured to speak from any chance information, nor according to any notion of my own; I have described nothing but what I either saw myself, or learned from others of whom I made the most careful and particular enquiry. The task was a laborious (difficult) one, because eyewitnesses of the same occurrences gave different accounts of them, as they remembered or were interested in the actions of one side or the other.

What efforts did Thucydides make to be accurate, while still giving a full story?

So who deserves to be called the true “Father of History?” Herodotus or Thucydides?