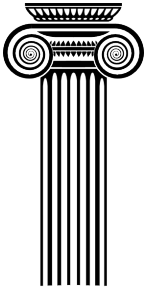


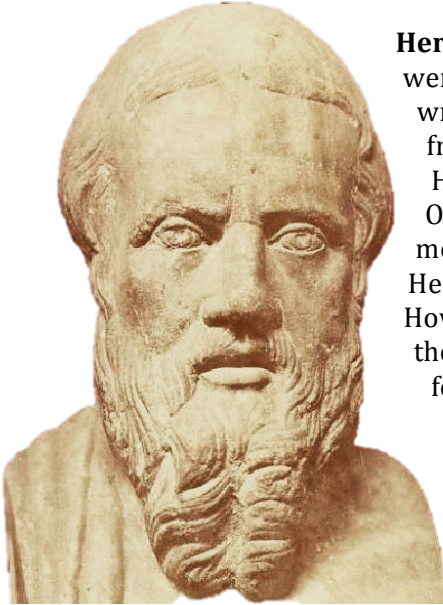
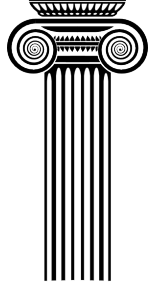
# HERODOTUS & THUCYDIDES: FATHERS OF HISTORY

**Directions:** Read about Herodotus and Thucydides and answer the questions that follow.



Humans have always told stories about the past. Throughout most of human history, this took the form of oral storytelling that would be passed down as traditions from generation to generation. With the development of writing, people began to record information such as records of rulers from many generations or religious myths. Some writings even mention battles, but usually only to praise the ruler for a great victory, not to preserve knowledge of the past. The Greeks were the first people to record true history. But who really started it? Was it

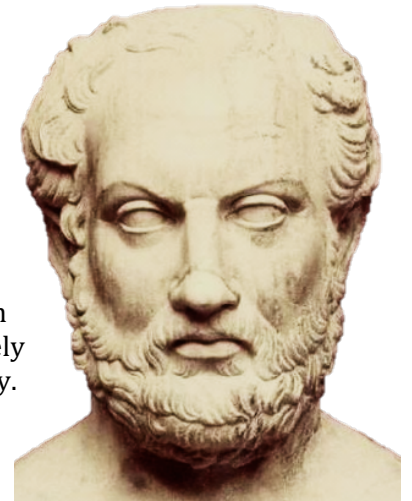
**Herodotus or Thucydides?**



**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 biased and conflicting accounts. However, he did not exclude such sources from his writing, but rather encouraged the readers to decide for themselves what to believe. In fact, despite his 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 also added his own creative elements to his accounts of events, going so far as to invent conversations and speeches for historical figures from his own imagination. He 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 between the two Greek powers of Athens and Sparta, 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 wrote only about events that occurred during his lifetime that he could verify through examination of written records and eyewitness accounts. His goal was to be completely unbiased, and in this way he pioneered the historical method used by historians today.

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



**Source: “The Glory That Was Greece,” *World History*, Ellis and Esler (adapted)**

1. How would you describe the way Herodotus approached the study of history?

2. How would you describe the way Thucydides approached the study of history?

3. Whose approach do you like better, and why?

## IDENTIFY THE SOURCES

**Directions:** Read each selection below, and based on what you know about the two historians, identify which one of them, Herodotus or Thucydides, was the author of the quote and explain how you know.

“[The Spartan King] Cleomenes lost his mind, and died so miserably. But his own countrymen say that his madness... [was] from the habit of drinking wine unmixed with water, which he learned from the Scythians... When the Scythians came to Sparta... [King] Cleomenes was with them constantly; and becoming somewhat too friendly, learned from them to drink his wine without water, a practice which is thought by the Spartans to have caused his madness... That is what the Spartans say... but in my opinion I think his death was a punishment on him (from the gods) for [betraying his Co-Ruler] Demaratus.”

Herodotus or Thucydides? How do you know?

As far as 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 remember 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 tried, as nearly as I could, to give the general meaning of what was actually said. Of the events of the war, I have not ventured to speak from any [unreliable] information, nor according to any thoughts 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 difficult, because eyewitnesses of the same events gave different accounts of them, as they remembered or were interested in the actions of one side or the other.

Herodotus or Thucydides? How do you know?

[The Persian King Xerxes called one of his soldiers]...and asked him...what was going on with the Spartans. "I told you about these men before," [the soldier] said..."These men have come to fight us for the past... but you can rest assured that if you defeat these men and the force that awaits you in Sparta, there is no other race on earth that will take up arms and stand up to you, my lord, because you are now up against the noblest and most royal city in Greece, and the bravest men."

Herodotus or Thucydides? How do you know?

Based on everything you have learned, who deserves to be called the true “Father of History?” Explain.