Born to a powerful Athenian family, Pericles showed interest in philosophy and art even as a young man. Once he had become an adult, Pericles became involved with a number of influential politicians who were working to make Athens more democratic. A gifted public speaker, Pericles used his talents to challenge aristocrats who thought their money and influence should allow them to rule the city. Pericles was a firm believer in the superiority of Athens over other Greek city-states. He was instrumental in forming the Athenian Empire and ordered the building of the Parthenon. When the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta broke out, Pericles devised the Athenian strategy of withdrawing inside the city walls. The navy could bring food and supplies to Athens even if the Spartans surrounded the city. Ultimately, that plan led to his death. Overcrowding in the city led to the outbreak of plague, and Pericles was among its victims.

Source: “Building Democracy,” Roger B. Beck et al., World History: Patterns of Interaction, McDougal Littell

Selection from “The Funeral Oration of Pericles” recorded in History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides

"Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability that the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. And, just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other. We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbor if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks that, though they do no real harm, still do hurt people's feelings. We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect. "We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break... Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics -- this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all. We Athenians, in our own persons, take our decisions on policy or submit them to proper discussions: for we do not think that there is an incompatibility between words and deeds; the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been property debated... Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece, and I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person, and do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility. And to show that this is no empty boasting for the present occasion, but real tangible fact, you have only to consider the power which our city possesses and which has been won by those very qualities which I have mentioned."
First, let us consider what is the purpose of a state, and how many forms of government there are by which human society is regulated. We have already said, in the first part of this treatise (written argument)... that man is by nature a political animal. And therefore, men, even when they do not require one another's help, desire to live together...and are also brought together by their common interests... well-being... is certainly the chief end, both of individuals and of states...

The conclusion is evident: that governments which have a regard to the common interest are constituted (created) in accordance with strict principles of justice, and are therefore true (honest/good) forms; but those which regard only the interest of the rulers are all defective and perverted forms, for they are despotic (oppressive, tyrannical), whereas a state is a community of freemen. . . .

Of forms of government in which one rules, we call that which regards the common interests kingship or royalty; that in which more than one, but not many, rule, aristocracy; and it is so called, either because the rulers are the best men, or because they have at heart the best interests of the state and of the citizens. But when the citizens at large administer the state for the common interest, the government is called by the generic name—a constitution...

Of the above-mentioned forms, the perversions are as follows: of royalty, tyranny; of aristocracy, oligarchy; of constitutional government, democracy. For tyranny is a kind of monarchy which has in view the interest of the monarch only; oligarchy has in view the interest of the wealthy; democracy, of the needy; none of them the common good of all.

Source: “Aristotle,” Elizabeth Gaynor Ellis and Anthony Esler, World History, Prentice Hall (adapted)