

RACE OF THE POLEIS: ATHENS VS SPARTA

Directions: You are the Athenians, citizens of the great polis of Athens. Since you are so fond of education and learning, take this time to study your culture and history by reading the documents below and answering the questions that follow.

ATHENS

“Under the aristocracy, Athenian wealth and power grew. Yet discontent spread among ordinary people. Merchants and soldiers resented the power of the nobles. They argued that their service to Athens entitled them to more rights. Foreign artisans, who produced many of the goods that Athens traded abroad, were resentful that foreigners were barred from becoming citizens. Farmers, too, demanded change. During hard times, many farmers were forced to sell their land to nobles. A growing number even sold themselves and their families into slavery to pay their debts. **Solon**, a wise and trusted leader, was appointed archon, or chief official, in 594 B.C. Athenians gave Solon a free hand to make needed reforms. He outlawed debt slavery and freed those who had already been sold into slavery for debt. He opened high offices to more citizens, granted citizenship to some foreigners, and gave the Athenian assembly more say in important decisions.”

Source: “Solon’s Reforms,” Elizabeth Gaynor Ellis and Anthony Esler, World History, Prentice Hall

“Athenian reformers moved toward **democracy**, rule by the people. In Athens, citizens participated directly in political decision making... Around 500 B.C., the Athenian leader **Cleisthenes** (KLYS•thuh•NEEZ) introduced further reforms. He broke up the power of the nobility by organizing citizens into ten groups based on where they lived rather than on their wealth. He also increased the power of the assembly by allowing all citizens to submit laws for debate and passage. Cleisthenes then created the Council of Five Hundred. This body proposed laws and counseled the assembly. Council members were chosen by lot, or at random.”

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

“It’s the fairest way to organize a society that anyone in human history has ever conceived and realized, and we owe all of that, indirectly, to a small group, a handful of men, who lived in a place called Athens two and a half thousand years ago.”

Source: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard University

“By modern standards, Athenian democracy was quite limited. Only citizens could participate in government, and citizenship was restricted to landowning men. Women were excluded along with merchants and people whose parents were not citizens. So were the tens of thousands of Athenian slaves who lacked political rights as well as personal freedom, although it was their labor that gave citizens the time to participate in government. Still, Athens gave more people a say in decision making than any other ancient civilization.”

Source: “A Limited Democracy,” Elizabeth Gaynor Ellis and Anthony Esler, World History, Prentice Hall

“It’s not everyone. It’s primarily male landholders who can vote. Women were not part of the process at this point. Nonetheless it’s a dramatic shift from having strong men and tyrants. You have the ability for self-determination.”

Source: Dr. Patrick Hunt, Stanford University

“For the most part, only the sons of wealthy families received formal education. Schooling began around the age of seven and largely prepared boys to be good citizens. They studied reading, grammar, poetry, history, mathematics, and music. Because citizens were expected to debate issues in the assembly, boys also received training in logic and public speaking. And since the Greeks believed that it was important to train and develop the body, part of each day was spent in athletic activities. When they got older, boys went to military school to help them prepare for another important duty of citizenship—defending Athens. Athenian girls did not attend school.”

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

“I counseled [my wife] to oversee the baking woman as she made the bread; to stand beside the housekeeper as she measured out her stores; to go on tours of inspection to see if all things were in order as they should be. For, as it seemed to me, this would at once be walking exercise and supervision. And, as an excellent gymnastic, I recommended her to knead the dough and roll the paste; to shake the coverlets and make the beds; adding, if she trained herself in exercise of this sort she would enjoy her food, grow vigorous in health, and her complexion would in very truth be lovelier. The very look and aspect of the wife.”

Source: Xenophon, Athenian soldier and writer, from his book, The Economist, 5th c. BCE

1. What was the original form of government in Athens before democracy?
2. How did the reformer Solon bring Athens closer to Democracy?
3. How did the reformer Cleisthenes bring Athens closer to Democracy?
4. What does democracy mean?
5. Who could and could not participate in democracy?
6. How were Athenian boys educated?
7. What was the role of women in Athenian society?