

RACE OF THE POLEIS: ATHENS VS SPARTA

Directions: You are the Spartans, mighty warriors of the military polis of Sparta. Since your life is dedicated to preparing for battle, consider this the first step in your training for war. Read the documents below and answer the questions that follow.

SPARTA

“Around 725 B.C., Sparta conquered the neighboring region of Messenia and took over the land. The Messenians became **helots**, peasants forced to stay on the land they worked. Each year, the Spartans demanded half of the helots’ crops. In about 650 B.C., the Messenians, resentful of the Spartans’ harsh rule, revolted. The Spartans, who were outnumbered eight to one, just barely put down the revolt. Shocked at their vulnerability, they dedicated themselves to making Sparta a strong city-state.”

Source: “Sparta Dominates the Messenians,” Roger B. Beck et al., World History: Patterns of Interaction, McDougal Littell

“The Spartan emphasis on war was not created out of any particular fondness for fighting. Instead, it was seen as the only way to keep order in society. The helots outnumbered Spartan citizens by about seven to one and were always ready to rebel against their rulers. The only way the Spartans could see to keep the helots in check was to have a strong army. To support their military lifestyle, the Spartans demanded strength and toughness from birth”

Source: “The Might of Sparta,” Susan Ramirez et al., World History: Human Legacy, Holt

“Young men were taken away from their families and lived a very, what we call a Spartan life, a life without luxury, and a life of deprivation, and a life of training and testing their courage.”

Source: Dr. Peter Aicher, University of Southern Maine

“A Spartan boy is tough as nails to be able to sleep outside when it was raining and even snowing, to have to forage, to even steal your own food.”

Source: Dr. Patrick Hunt, Stanford University

“Instead of softening the boys’ feet with sandals, he required them to harden their feet by going without shoes. He believed that if this habit were cultivated, it would enable them to climb hills more easily and descend steep inclines with less danger, and that a youth who had accustomed himself to go barefoot would leap and jump and run more nimbly than a boy in sandals. And instead of letting them be pampered in the matter of clothing, he introduced the custom of wearing one garment throughout the year, believing that they would thus be better prepared to face changes of heat and cold.”

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

“In Athens, the girls who are destined to become mothers and are brought up in the approved fashion, live on the very plainest fare, with a most meager allowance of delicacies. Wine is either withheld altogether, or, if allowed them, is diluted with water. The rest of the Greeks expect their girls to imitate the sedentary life that is typical of handicraftsmen -- to keep quiet and do wool-work. How, then, is it to be expected that women so

brought up will bear fine children? But Lycurgus (of Sparta) thought the labor of slave women sufficient to supply clothing. He believed motherhood to be the most important function of freeborn woman. Therefore...he insisted on physical training for the female no less than for the male sex: moreover, he instituted races and trials of strength for women competitors as for men, believing that if both parents are strong they produce more vigorous offspring.”

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

“From around 600 until 371 B.C., Sparta had the most powerful army in Greece. However, the Spartan people paid a high price for their military supremacy. All forms of individual expression were discouraged. As a result, Spartans did not value the arts, literature, or other artistic and intellectual pursuits. Spartans valued duty, strength, and discipline over freedom, individuality, beauty, and learning.”

Source: “Spartan Daily Life,” Roger B. Beck et al., World History: Patterns of Interaction, McDougal Littell

“Politically, Sparta was led by two kings who served as military commanders. Over time, responsibility for making decisions fell more and more to an elected council of elders. It was considered an honor to take a seat on this council and help run the city.”

Source: “The Might of Sparta,” Susan Ramirez et al., World History: Human Legacy, Holt

1. How did the Spartans come to power?
2. How was it possible that all Spartan men were soldiers? Who did the rest of the jobs in society?
3. Why did Sparta have to become a military power?
4. How were Spartan boys educated?
5. What was the role of women in Spartan society?
6. What was the form of government in Sparta?