

The Classical Period: The Golden Age of Greece

The **Classical Period** of Greece began about 800 B.C. and lasted until 323 B.C. Although there were periodic wars among the city-states, life was pretty good. Food was in abundance, craftsmen and artists produced objects that could be traded, and the Greeks had enough wealth to devote time to the arts, education, architecture, philosophy, and science. This is the period in which Greek culture reached its peak. It is sometimes called the Golden Age of Greece.

Government

Greeks in Athens valued the world's first democracy they had created. All citizens were members of the governing body called the **assembly**. A citizen was a free man over 21 who was born to Athenian parents. The assembly met every nine days to make decisions on laws, building, and other matters of interest. Each citizen was not only able to vote on the matters that came before the assembly, he also had a right to speak at the assembly in order to influence others.

Education

The Greeks understood that it was education that sustained their culture and their good life. However, only young men from wealthy families received an education. When a boy was seven, he was sent to a school. His education was divided into three sections: letters, music, and athletics. The first section of a boy's education, called the **letters**, is what we would call the basics today. Students learned to read, write, and do arithmetic. They also memorized poetry and learned the skill of debating. Music education consisted of learning about music and learning to sing and play a musical instrument. Greeks played the flute and stringed instruments. Girls were also trained to play these instruments. At age 14, boys began their athletic training. They practiced wrestling, jumping, running, and throwing a discus and javelin. This training prepared boys to fight in the army. At age 18, boys were trained as soldiers for two years.



The Parthenon

CLASSICAL GREEK CIVILIZATION AT A GLANCE

WHERE: On the mainland of Greece and surrounding islands. Their influence was expanded to colonies around the Mediterranean Sea.

WHEN: 800 B.C.—323 B.C.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Formed the world's first democracy
- Produced the first dramas and developed drama as art
- Built magnificent buildings
- Created beautiful statues
- Wrote literature, poetry, and drama that are so outstanding they are still studied today
- Took a scientific approach to the study of medicine
- Were the first to write histories
- Developed a method of classifying plants
- Developed rules for geometry and made other mathematical contributions



This stele shows the personification of **Demos** crowned by **Democracy**.

Children of poor parents and those of slaves were not educated. They began working early in their lives. Girls did not go to school either. Some parents taught them at home. Wealthy parents might hire tutors to teach their daughters to read and write. For the most part, a girl's education consisted of learning to run a home and developing domestic skills.

Religion

The Greeks valued religion. They had many gods who ruled every aspect of their lives. There was a god of war, a god of music, and so on. The king of the gods was Zeus. It was thought that Zeus and all other gods lived on Mount Olympus in the northern part of Greece. The Greeks built magnificent temples in which to worship their gods and made beautiful statues to honor them. They thought their gods were similar to humans, having the same emotions and human qualities. The stories of their gods are called **myths** and are still studied in school.

Drama

Drama, another important part of Greek life, grew out of religion. Greek playwrights developed the art of drama and wrote both **comedies** and **tragedies** in the honor of the gods. These dramas were performed at religious festivals. Some famous Greek playwrights were Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Aristophanes.



The Theater of Dionysus

Athletic Games

Athletic contests were held at religious festivals and even at funerals of famous people. The Greeks believed a person should have a healthy mind in a healthy body. Champion athletes were treated as national heroes. The **Olympic Games** originated in Olympia, Greece, in 776 B.C.

Science and Medicine

The Greeks also valued science and medicine. While the Greeks believed that sickness was a punishment of the gods, they did study sick people and diseases and develop treatments based on their research. A famous Greek physician was Hippocrates, who is known as the “Father of Modern Medicine.” He is remembered today for the **Hippocratic Oath**, which was named after him. It is an oath that deals with ethics in medicine. Modern doctors still take the Hippocratic Oath before they begin their practices.

Beauty and Knowledge

Magnificent temples, sculpture, painting, music, pottery, and dance flourished during the Classical Period of Greece. Knowledge was as important as beauty. Mathematicians and scientists such as Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and Euclid greatly expanded knowledge of the physical world. There were many great philosophers during this period. Some of the more famous were Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato.

Conflict Between Athens and Sparta

The city-states of Athens and Sparta, which represented two very different ideals, reached their peaks during this period. Both were strong militarily. While Athens had the best navy, Sparta had the best army. In an effort to protect itself from the Persians, the Athenians suggested the various city-states unite into a league. It was named the **Delian League**. The members of the league provided money for an even stronger navy that defeated the Persians in 486 B.C. Athens then sent their navy to attack smaller city-states in order to expand their empire. Sparta and many smaller city-states formed the **Peloponnesian League**. In 431 B.C., the Peloponnesian League declared war on the Delian League.

The **Peloponnesian War** lasted for 27 years. It was costly to all involved. Eventually, Sparta received help from the Persians, and they defeated the Athenians. Sparta began ruling over all of the city-states. Democracy had ended. The Spartans were not good at ruling, however, and for 30 years there were many battles and wars. Greece became so weak that a force from Thebes was able to defeat the Spartans.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Knowledge Check

Matching

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Classical Period | a. telling stories through acting and dialog |
| _____ 2. assembly | b. athletic contests started in Greece in 776 B.C. |
| _____ 3. letters | c. stories about the Greek gods |
| _____ 4. myths | d. time from 800 to 323 B.C. in Greece; also called the Golden Age of Greece |
| _____ 5. drama | e. the basics of education; reading, writing, and arithmetic |
| _____ 6. Hippocratic Oath | f. deals with ethics in medicine; doctors still promise to follow its principles |
| _____ 7. Olympic Games | g. a governing body in Athens consisting of all citizens |

Multiple Choice

8. What musical instruments did the Greeks play? Circle all that apply.
- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| a. accordion | b. stringed instruments |
| c. piano | d. flute |
9. Who was known as the "Father of Modern Medicine"?
- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| a. Hippocrates | b. Sophocles |
| c. Pythagoras | d. Plato |
10. What group did Sparta form that went to war with Athens and her allies?
- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| a. Delian League | b. Peloponnesian League |
| c. Corinthian League | d. Persian League |
11. Who was able to attend Greek schools?
- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| a. poor boys | b. girls |
| c. slaves | d. wealthy boys |

Constructed Response

12. How did government in Athens work? Use details from the reading selection to help support your answer.
