

Greek Philosophy and History

Guide to Reading



History Social Science Standards

WH6.4 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Ancient Greece.

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Section 1 discussed early Greek artists and writers. Many of them made the years between 500 and 350 B.C. the Golden Age for Greece. Greek thinkers and historians produced works that shape people's views of the world today.

Focusing on the Main Ideas

- Greek philosophers developed ideas that are still used today. (page 393)
- Greeks wrote the first real histories in Western civilization. (page 397)

Meeting People

Pythagoras (puh•THA•guh•ruhs)

Socrates (SAH•kruh•TEEZ)

Plato (PLAY•TOH)

Aristotle (AR•uh•STAH•tuhl)

Herodotus (hih•RAH•duh•tuhs)

Thucydides (thoo•SIH•duh•DEEZ)

Content Vocabulary

philosophy (fuh•LAH•suh•fee)

philosopher (fuh•LAH•suh•fuhr)

Sophist (SAH•fihst)

Socratic method (suh•KRA•tihk)

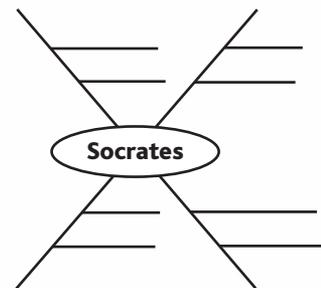
Academic Vocabulary

reject (ree•JEHKT)

accurate (A•kyuh•ruht)

Reading Strategy

Categorizing Information Use diagrams like the one below to show the basic philosophies of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Who & When?

500 B.C.



435 B.C.
Herodotus writes history of Persian Wars

400 B.C.



399 B.C.
Socrates sentenced to death

300 B.C.



335 B.C.
Aristotle opens the Lyceum in Athens



Greek Philosophers

Main Idea Greek philosophers developed ideas that are still used today.

Reading Connection What is right? What is wrong? What makes a government good? Read to learn how the ancient Greeks tried to answer similar “big” questions.

The word **philosophy** (fuh•LAH•suh•fee) comes from the Greek word for “love of wisdom.” Greek philosophy led to the study of history, political science, science, and mathematics. Greek thinkers who believed the human mind could understand everything were called **philosophers** (fuh•LAH•suh•fuhrs).

Many philosophers were teachers. One Greek philosopher, **Pythagoras** (puh•THA•guh•ruhs), taught his pupils that the universe followed the same laws that governed music and numbers. He believed that all relationships in the world could be expressed in numbers. As a result, he developed many new ideas about mathematics. Most people know his name because of the Pythagorean theorem that is still used in geometry. It is a way to determine the length of the sides of a triangle.

Who Were the Sophists? The **Sophists** (SAH•fihsts) were professional teachers in ancient Greece. They traveled from city to



▲ This artwork shows Greek philosophers involved in a discussion. **Where does the word philosophy come from?**



Greek Philosophers

	Sophists	Socrates	Plato	Aristotle
Thinker or Group				
Main Idea	Sophists like Libanius (above) thought that people should use knowledge to improve themselves. They believed that there is no absolute right or wrong.	He was a critic of the Sophists. Socrates believed that there was an absolute right and wrong.	He rejected the idea of democracy as a form of government. Plato believed that philosopher-kings should rule society.	Aristotle taught the idea of the "golden mean." He believed observation and comparison were necessary to gain knowledge.
Important Contribution	They developed the art of public speaking and debate.	He created the Socratic method of teaching.	He described his vision of the ideal government in his work the <i>Republic</i> .	He wrote over 200 books on philosophy and science. He divided all governments into three basic types.
Influence on Today	The importance of public speaking can be seen in political debates between candidates.	His methods influenced the way teachers interact with their students.	He introduced the idea that government should be fair and just.	His political ideas still shape political ideas today.

city and made a living by teaching others. They believed students should use their time to improve themselves. Many taught their students how to win an argument and make good political speeches.

Sophists did not believe that gods and goddesses influenced people. They also **rejected** the concept of absolute right or wrong. They believed that what was right for one person might be wrong for another.

The Ideas of Socrates One critic of the Sophists was **Socrates** (SAH • kruh • TEEZ). Socrates was an Athenian sculptor whose true love was philosophy. Socrates left no writings behind. What we know about him we have learned from the writings of his students.

Socrates believed that an absolute truth existed and that all real knowledge was within each person. He invented the **Socratic method** (suh • KRA • tihk) of teaching still used today. He asked pointed questions to force his pupils to use their reason and to see things for themselves.

Some Athenian leaders considered the Socratic method a threat to their power. At one time, Athens had a tradition of questioning leaders and speaking freely. However, their defeat in the Peloponnesian War changed the Athenians. They no longer trusted open debate. In 399 B.C. the leaders accused Socrates of teaching young Athenians to rebel against the state. A jury found Socrates guilty and sentenced him to death. Socrates could have fled the city, but

he chose to remain. He argued that he had lived under the city's laws, so he had to obey them. He then drank poison to carry out the jury's sentence.

The Ideas of Plato One of Socrates' students was **Plato** (PLAY•TOH). Unlike Socrates, we are able to learn a lot about Plato from his writings. One work Plato wrote is called the *Republic*. It explains his vision of government. Based on life in Athens, Plato decided that democracy was not a good system of government. He did not think that rule by the people produced fair or sensible policies. To him, people could not live good lives unless they had a just and reasonable government.

In the *Republic*, Plato described his ideal government. He divided people into three basic groups. At the top were philosopher-kings, who ruled using logic and wisdom. Warriors made up the second group. They defended the state from attack.

The third group included the rest of the people. They were driven by desire, not by wisdom like the first group or courage like the second. These people produced the state's food, clothing, and shelter. Plato also believed that men and women should have the same education and an equal chance to have the same jobs.

Who Was Aristotle? Plato established a school in Athens known as the Academy. His best student was **Aristotle** (AR•uh•STAH•tuhl). Aristotle wrote more than 200 books on topics ranging from government to the planets and stars.

In 335 B.C. Aristotle opened his own school called the Lyceum. At the Lyceum, Aristotle taught his pupils the "golden mean." This idea holds that a person should do nothing in excess. For example, a person

should not eat too little or too much but just enough to stay well.

Aristotle also helped to advance science. He urged people to use their senses to make observations, just as scientists today make observations. Aristotle was the first person to group observations according to their similarities and differences. Then he made generalizations based on the groups of facts.

Like Plato, Aristotle wrote about government. He studied and compared the governments of 158 different places to find the best form of government. In his book *Politics*, Aristotle divided the governments into three types:

- Government by one person, such as a monarch (king or queen) or a tyrant
- Government by a few people, which might be an aristocracy or an oligarchy
- Government by many people, as in a democracy

Aristotle noticed that governments run by a few people were usually run by the rich. He noticed that most democracies were run by the poor. He thought the best government was a mixture of the two.

Aristotle's ideas shaped the way Europeans and Americans thought about government. The founders of the United States Constitution tried to create a mixed government that balanced the different types Aristotle had identified.

 **Reading Check Contrast** How did Aristotle's idea of government differ from Plato's?



Web Activity Visit ca.hss.glencoe.com and click on *Chapter 8—Student Web Activity* to learn more about ancient Greece.



PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

Plato c. 428–347 B.C.

Aristotle 384–322 B.C.

Plato was from a noble Greek family and had planned a career in politics. However, he was so horrified by the death of his teacher, Socrates, that he left politics and spent many years traveling and writing. When Plato returned to Athens in 387 B.C., he founded an academy, where he taught using Socrates' method of questioning. His academy drew bright young students from Athens and other Greek city-states. Plato looked for truth beyond the appearances of everyday objects and reflected this philosophy in his writing and teaching. He believed the human soul was the connection between the appearance of things and ideas.

Plato and Aristotle—two of the greatest ancient Greek philosophers—met as teacher and student at Plato's Academy in Athens. Aristotle left his home in Stagira and arrived on the Academy's doorstep when he was eighteen years old. He remained at Plato's Academy for 20 years, until the death of his teacher. Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not come from a noble family. His father was the court physician to the king of Macedonia. At an early age, Aristotle's father introduced him to the topics of medicine and biology, and these became his main interests of study. Aristotle sought truth through a systematic, scientific approach. He liked to jot down notes and details about different topics—from weather to human behavior—and arrange them in categories. He did not trust the senses' ability to understand the universe.



Plato ▲



▲ Aristotle

After Plato's death, Aristotle traveled for about 12 years. He also tutored the future Alexander the Great. Later in his life, he returned to Athens and opened his own school, the Lyceum. He made his school the center for research in every area of knowledge known to the Greeks.

Then and Now

Aristotle spent 20 years at Plato's Academy. What present-day careers or subjects of study require lifelong learning?



WH6.4.8 Describe the enduring contributions of important Greek figures in the arts and sciences (e.g., Hypatia, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Thucydides).

Greek Historians

Main Idea Greeks wrote the first real histories in Western civilization.

Reading Connection How would the United States be different if we did not know our history? Read to learn how the Greeks began to write history.

In most places in the ancient world, people used legends and myths to explain their past. No one tried to explain the past by studying events. Then, in 435 B.C., a Greek named **Herodotus** (hih • RAH • duh • tuhs) wrote the history of the Persian Wars.

In his book, Herodotus tried to separate fact from legend. He asked questions, recorded answers, and checked the truthfulness of his sources. Although his history includes some errors and uses gods and goddesses to explain some events, many European and American historians consider him the “father of history.”

Many historians consider **Thucydides** (thoo • SIH • duh • DEEZ) the greatest historian of the ancient world. Thucydides fought in the Peloponnesian War. Afterward, he wrote his *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

Unlike Herodotus, Thucydides saw war and politics as the activities of human beings, not gods. He also stressed the importance of having **accurate** facts:

“Either I was present myself at the events which I have described or else I heard of them from eye-witnesses whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible.”

—Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Reading Check Identify How did Thucydides view war and politics?

Section 2 Review

History online
Study Central Need help with Greek philosophy and history? Visit ca.hss.glencoe.com and click on Study Central.

Reading Summary

Review the **Main Ideas**

- The ideas of Greek philosophers, including Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, still affect modern thinking about education, government, and science.
- Herodotus and Thucydides are considered western civilization’s first historians. They believed that people could understand the present by studying the past.

What Did You Learn?

1. Who were the Sophists and what were their beliefs?
2. Before Herodotus, how did Greeks explain the past?
4. **Science Connection** How are Aristotle’s teachings related to the scientific method used by scientists today? **CA 6RC2.3**

Critical Thinking

5. **Contrast** What is different about the works of Herodotus and Thucydides? **CA 6RC2.2**
6. **The Big Ideas** How did the ideas of Greek philosophers affect Greek society? **CA HI2.**
7. **Persuasive Writing** Do you agree with Plato’s vision of the ideal state in the *Republic*? Write an editorial expressing your viewpoint. **CA 6WA2.5**

