



Year 4

Ancient Greece Reading Booklet

Lesson Series:

- 1. Ancient Greek City States**
- 2. Athens - The birthplace of democracy**
- 3. Sparta**
- 4. Persian Wars**
- 5. Alexander the Great**
- 6. Greek Philosophy**
- 7. Greek Gods/Greek Mythology**

Name: _____

Class: _____

Lesson 1 - Ancient Greek City States

The Ancient Greek civilization emerged after 800 BCE and reached its peak around 330 BCE with the conquests of Alexander the Great.

Read this

Greece is a peninsula which means the Ancient Greeks had easy access to water. Many Greeks lived close to the sea, on islands, near harbours or near rivers. Naturally, many Greeks were explorers and traders.

City-states or polis formed, cut off from one another by the land. There grew to be over 1,000 city-states (polis) in Ancient Greece, but the main poleis were Athína (Athens) and Spárti (Sparta).

Each city-state ruled itself. They differed greatly from each other. The Greek city-states were independently governed in different ways. Kings led some, others by oligarchies (where a small number of men held power on a council), and Athens developed democracy, where its citizens (selected men, not women or slaves) could vote.



Lesson 2 - Athens

The birthplace of democracy

Read this

Athens is famous throughout the world for having been the first state to have been governed according to democratic principles. However, it was not democracy as we know it.

Britain is a representative democracy, where Members of Parliament are elected every five years to represent a local area. Athens was a direct democracy, where every decision taken by the ruling council could be approved or vetoed by citizens.

Citizens made up only a small minority of Athens' population, as slaves and women were not allowed to vote. If the citizens of Athens did not like their leader, they could vote to get rid of them. This was known as ostracising as they would vote using a piece of broken pottery called ostraca or ostrakon (plural).



Lesson 3 - Sparta

Read this

Sparta was a city state built on the banks of the Eurotas River in Southern Greece; this gave Sparta a source of freshwater.

Sparta was famous for its warriors. The secret to Sparta's military success was an extremely tough child-rearing regime, where children were taken from their homes aged seven, and intensively trained to be a soldier. Spartan boys started their military training at age 7 when they left home and entered the Agoge.

The boys lived communally under austere conditions. They were subjected to continual physical challenges, competitions (which could involve violence), given meagre rations and expected to become skilled at stealing food, among other survival skills.

Spartans were extremely disciplined and disliked the luxury and indulgence of the Athenians. This attitude towards life is what gives us the word 'spartan' today, meaning plain, simple, with no luxuries.



Lesson 4 - Persian Wars

Before the reign of Alexander the Great, the Persian Empire controlled much of Eastern Europe, Asia and North Africa.



Persia was based around modern-day Iran, and their forces conquered a number of Greek cities on the Ionian coast in modern-day Turkey. In 499 BC, these Greek cities under Persian rule revolted, and the Athenians sent ships across the Aegean to support their Greek brothers. This angered the Persian King Darius, so he invaded mainland Greece in 492 BC. This led to a bitter thirty-year war, during which Sparta and Athens united to fight their common enemy.

It would result in a startling success for the Greeks. The Persian Wars involved two famous battles that are still remembered today. After the battle of Marathon, an Athenian named Pheidippides, whose job it was to run great distances to deliver messages, ran 26 miles to Athens to tell the city that the Persians had been defeated. He then dropped dead. Ever since a race of 26 miles has been known as a marathon.

The battle of Thermopylae was a last stand by the Spartan army against the Persians, guarding a narrow strip of land between the mountains and the sea. The Spartan code meant they all fought to the death. Most of what we know about the Persian Wars comes from the writing of Herodotus, who wrote a detailed investigation of the Persian Wars.

Historians think he was a child during the wars, so the investigation took place some years later and may have been largely based on accounts told through oral history. The word 'history' comes from an Ancient Greek word meaning to question, to investigate. Herodotus called his work about the Persian Wars, 'The Histories' meaning 'The Questions'.



Lesson 5 - Alexander the Great

Alexander became king of Macedonia aged 19 in 336BC, and by the age of 21 he had conquered the whole of Greece.



Alexander was incredibly ambitious, and history tells of his cruelty and ruthlessness in his effort to unite each of the Greek city-states into one Empire. When the Greek city-state of Thebes rebelled against Alexander, he burned the city to the ground and sold the population of 30,000 citizens into slavery. This sent a clear message to the rest of Greece that Alexander was not to be opposed.

The story of the Gordian knot, which Alexander untangled by slicing in half, is often told to illustrate Alexander's ruthless ambition. The knot, located in Gordian, the capital of the kingdom of Phrygia, located in modern-day Turkey, was tied in a very complicated manner. It was said that whoever untied the knot would become ruler of all of Asia, or 'have the world as their kingdom'.



Lesson 6 - Greek Philosophy

While the Romans saw more military success and achieved an empire of greater size, the Greeks always held intellectual dominance, founding the basic principles of science, mathematics and medicine.



Greek philosophers liked to ask questions about life. Three of the most important Greek philosophers were: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. All three studied in Athens; Plato as a pupil of Socrates, and Aristotle as a student of Plato.

Philosophy means a love of wisdom. Philosophy was the way Greeks attempted to make sense of the world in a non-religious way. This means that rather than using myths and stories to understand the world, they would use their intelligence and reasoning skills. Philosophers question important issues such as what it means to be a good person, what truth means and how to lead a good life.



Socrates

Lesson 7 - Greek Gods/Greek Mythology



The Ancient Greeks held polytheistic beliefs, meaning they worshipped many gods. The Ancient Greeks believed that their gods lived in a palace of clouds above the highest mountain in Greece, Mount Olympus.

The Greek Gods were powerful and controlled different aspects of life, including the weather, the sea, the sun, love, wisdom and the afterlife. Many of the Greek Gods feature in Greek mythology. Zeus was the King of the Greek Gods. He was the god of the sky, and he controlled the weather. When he was angry, he could throw lightning bolts. He was known for punishing people who lied or broke promises.

Zeus was married to Hera, Goddess of women, families and marriage. The Ancient Greeks worshipped Hera and built temples to honour her. Poseidon was Zeus' brother and God of the Sea and Earthquakes. His trident was his weapon, and he could use it to destroy any objects and cause the ground to shake. Hades was another of Zeus' brothers. He ruled the Underworld, the place of the dead and was accompanied by his three-headed dog. Athena was Zeus' daughter; she was the God of wisdom and warfare. Greek religion influenced the later Roman religion which had its own version of many of the Greek Gods.

The Ancient Greeks told many stories of adventurers, monsters, bravery and triumph of good over evil. These stories, or myths, were a way for the Ancient Greeks to explain the world around them, to understand the passing seasons, to explain where life had come from and where one goes after death.



Mythology

Myths also gave moral advice on the best way to live. There is no single source for the Greek myths, they were passed on through an oral tradition, and it was only after many years that some were written down. The Greek Gods are central to many Greek myths, but the stories also contain human heroes too. Greek myths also feature creatures who are half-human, half-animal; centaurs (half man-half horse), sphinx (half woman-half lion), and harpies (half bird-half woman). Mythical monsters include: the Minotaur, cyclops, Gorgons (Medusa was a well-known Gorgon) and dragons.

