

Life in Ancient Greece

The ancient Greeks lived over 3000 years ago. Many of their ideas and inventions still influence how we live today.

Society

There was not one country called 'ancient Greece'. Instead, Greece was made up of 'city states', each with its own government, army and laws. A city state – or 'polis' – included the city at the centre of it as well as the surrounding villages and countryside.

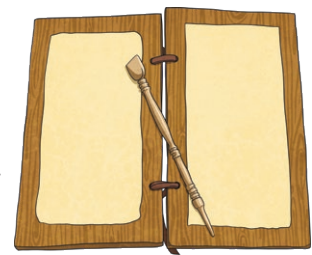


Important and powerful city states of ancient Greece included Athens, Sparta and Corinth. These city states often fought against each other and usually only joined together if they were threatened by a bigger enemy.



Education

From the ages of seven to fifteen, boys in most ancient Greek city states went to school, where they learnt to read and write. In school, boys mostly wrote on a tablet (a wooden frame filled with beeswax) using a **stylus**. When they wanted to start again, they held the wax near to the fire so it melted away what they had written. They also learnt about music and how to play an instrument, such as a **lyre**. In addition, boys were taught maths and physical skills: using a bow and arrow and a sling, wrestling and swimming. Most schools had a 'palaestra', which was a training ground for physical education, close to the school



tablet and stylus



In most city states, girls did not attend school. Some were taught to read and write at home. In many cases, girls were only taught the skills they would need for looking after a family, such as cooking and making clothes.

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The Olympic Games

The first recorded Games were in 776 BC, in the Greek city of Olympia, as part of a festival to honour the Greek god, Zeus. Married women were not allowed to compete or even attend the Games. Just before each Olympics, a **truce** was called to stop the city states fighting so that people could travel to the Games safely.

Events included boxing, wrestling, running, jumping, throwing and chariot racing. The toughest running race was the 'hoplitodromos', in



which competitors wore armour and carried a shield. Winners of the events were given a **wreath** of leaves and a hero's welcome back home, including free meals and the best seats at the theatre!



theatre mask

Greek Theatre

Theatre was a very popular form of entertainment in ancient Greek times. Theatres were generally built into a hillside with rows of stone benches in a semicircle, one above the other, and the stage at the bottom of the hill. Some theatres in large cities could hold more than 10 000 people! All of the actors were men and they wore costumes and masks to play different characters. The masks had a variety of exaggerated expressions on them to help the audience understand the characters.

Glossary

lyre – Instrument made from the shell of a tortoise with strings made from the guts of sheep.

stylus – Rod made from wood or metal which was scraped into the wax of a tablet.

truce – Agreement between enemies to stop fighting or arguing for a while.

wreath – Arrangement of flowers or leaves in the shape of a ring.



Questions

1. Find and copy **one** word that means the same as 'city state'.

2. Which of these was **not** an ancient Greek city state? Tick **one**.

☐ Sparta

☐ Greece

☐ Athens

☐ Corinth

3. Draw **four** lines to match each item to its description.

lyre

wooden frame filled with beeswax used for writing on

tablet

stringed musical instrument

palaestra

wooden or metal rod used for writing with

stylus

training ground for physical education

4. How was life different for boys and girls in most ancient Greek city states?

5. Why did a truce have to be called before each Olympics?

6. Find and copy **one** word that shows lots of people enjoyed going to the theatre in ancient Greek times.

7. What did the actors in ancient Greek theatres wear?

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8. Why are some words written in **bold** in the text?
