

History
UNFOLDING

ANCIENT GREECE



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Introduction

The Triumph of the Ancient Greeks

Long before ancient Greek civilization began to develop, mighty empires had arisen in many other parts of the world. The Greeks would learn much from these other civilizations. Yet they always seemed to create something new out of what they learned. Great epics, written history, drama, science, mathematics, medicine—all these and more were a part of the great burst of creativity that took place in ancient Greece.

In other words, ancient Greece is not famous for its great wealth or power. It is famous, above all, for its ideas, its art, and its ideals of beauty and human striving. Many modern fields of knowledge really began with the Greeks. And what those Greeks accomplished still astonishes people all over the world today.

It is impossible to do justice in just 12 illustrations to all that the ancient Greeks achieved. But the 12 we have chosen focus on many of the central themes in the history of this great civilization. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three of the illustrations to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The Aegean Setting

The illustrations in this lesson focus on the geographical setting and the economic basis for the rise of ancient Greece. Unlike the great river-valley civilizations, the Greeks were forced to look outward across the sea. As a result, a spirit of adventure seemed to motivate them from the beginning.

Myths of a Heroic Age

The ancient Greeks told many dramatic stories about their gods. In this lesson, the focus is on the human qualities of those gods—and the god-like abilities and aspirations of various human heroes. In these myths, the Greeks expressed a sense that what is noblest about human beings is their capacity to strive and achieve at the highest level.

The Greek City-State

The key political units of ancient Greece, its city-states, were small. And ancient Greece as a whole rarely remained united for very long. Because of this variety, constant political experimentation could occur—including experimentation with a form of government called democracy.

Greece's Cultural Triumph

The best in body and in spirit—this could be the motto of ancient Greece. Whether in the physical contests of the Olympic games, or in the give-and-take of Platonic dialogue, the ancient Greeks believed in striving after the highest ideals. It is in the realm of these ideals—in art, ethics, science and ideas—that the real glory of Greece can be found.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

OBJECTIVE

1. Students will better understand how Greece's location, climate, and natural features helped to shape the kind of civilization that developed there in ancient times.
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The Aegean Setting

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

The first great civilizations grew up in fertile valleys along rivers. Egypt emerged on the Nile, early Mesopotamian cultures along the Tigris and Euphrates, the Indus civilization on the river of that name, and ancient China along the Huang-He—rivers provided the well-watered fertile soil that such civilizations needed. As this photo makes clear, Greece was different. Mountains divide mainland Greece into many separate regions. Its rocky hills and narrow valleys all seem to lead to the coast. To trade, Greeks were forced to look outward to the sea, to the islands of the Aegean Sea, and to other cultures along the coasts of the Mediterranean. This meant that ancient Greece would differ in many ways from other early civilizations.

Illustration 2

Unlike ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia, ancient Greece did not have enough fertile land to support large numbers of people. Still, most of its citizens had to make their living by farming. This illustration shows some Greek men using sticks to gather olives. Most olives were crushed to produce oil, which was used in cooking, lighting, and in many other ways. Grains such as wheat and barley were used to make the bread that was the main food in the Greek diet. Grapes were used to make wine. Many other kinds of fruits and vegetables were grown, and farm animals such as pigs, goats, sheep, cows, and horses were raised. As this illustration suggests, farming methods and tools were simple. Oxen and mules, along with human muscle, were practically the only sources of power.

Illustration 3

Greece's rocky lands made farming difficult. Yet after about 2000 BCE, the growth of an amazing civilization began in this region. From the start, trading and seafaring skills were key to this rising civilization's wealth and power. This illustration is a later artist's recreation of Piraeus, the port for the city-state of Athens. The Greeks traded pottery, wine, woolen cloth, tools, weapons, and other goods for timber, metals, and other resources. As Greece's population grew, many overcrowded Greek cities also set up colonies all over the Mediterranean region and far up into the Black Sea. These further helped the Greeks develop their great trading empire.

Lesson 1 – The Aegean Setting

Illustration 1



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Discussing the Illustration

1. This photo shows Lindos and an ancient fortified area on a hilltop. Lindos is on the island of Rhodes at the southeastern edge of a sea that is a part of the Mediterranean Sea. Can you name it?
2. Many Greek cities had fortified hilltops like this one. They often contained temples to the city's god or goddess and other religious or defensive buildings. What name is used for these fortified areas?
3. Most great civilizations before Greece grew up in the valleys of great rivers. Why do you think this was so? Much of ancient Greece looks like Lindos. Given that fact, how did the geography of ancient Greece differ from that of the ancient river-valley civilizations?
4. The rocky hills, the mild climate, and the sea all affected the way of life of the ancient Greeks. What effects might these things have had on the Greeks? How might they have affected farming, trade, warfare, government, and other aspects of life?

Follow-up Activities

1. Rocky hills, a ragged coastline, and many small islands helped cause ancient Greece to be divided up into many small city-states and islands. Create a detailed map of one of these islands, or of one of the main city-states on the mainland such as Athens, Thebes, Corinth, or Sparta. Show nearby mountains and hills, rivers, fertile lands, lands used for olive trees and grape vines, pasture lands, ports, etc. Show your map in class and use it to talk about how geography may have affected life in that city-state.
2. **Small-group activity:** Many ancient Greek cities had an acropolis like the one in the above photo. The most famous acropolis was the one in Athens. Learn more about this acropolis. Ask your teacher or librarian to help you find a drawing or diagram showing all the buildings that were once on the Acropolis (or make such a diagram on your own). Use the drawing or diagram to explain to the class the structures on the Acropolis in Athens and what they were for.