



## PURPOSE

Ancient Athens is remembered as the birthplace of democracy, a small city-state where freedom of thought and expression existed on a scale that had never been seen before and has seldom been equaled since. Yet in 399 B.C. Athens had to choose between the principles of democracy and free speech when three citizens brought charges against Socrates, a 70-year-old teacher and philosopher. Socrates' exercise of freedom of expression had so threatened Athenian democracy that his accusers demanded the death penalty as the only solution. Although this request seems harsh today, our own experience with democracy has revealed that free speech can sometimes disrupt a society to the point that citizens wonder whether it is worth the price.

The trial of Socrates helps students examine the complementary, and sometimes conflicting, ideals of democracy and free speech and formulate their own conclusions about the proper role of each in society. As your students participate in the activity they should experience the following:

### **Knowledge**

1. Understanding the importance of the city-state in the life of ancient Greece
2. Understanding the Athenian view of justice

### **Attitudes**

1. Appreciating the difficulty of balancing free expression with the survival of democratic institutions
2. Realizing that Athens was on trial along with Socrates

### **Skills**

1. Speaking clearly and forcefully before a group
2. Evaluating evidence to reach conclusions

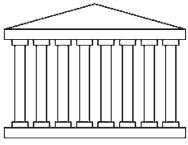
Samples are provided for evaluation purposes. Copying of the product or its parts for resale is prohibited. Additional restrictions may be set by the publisher.

S  
O  
C  
R  
A  
T  
E  
S



## OVERVIEW

The trial of Socrates focuses student attention on two important questions:



- *Can a democracy exist without freedom of thought and expression?*
- *Should free speech be permitted if it threatens the existence of democratic institutions?*

Those issues were deliberated in Socrates' day, and they continue to spark debate in contemporary society.

The activity re-creates the famous trial in 399 B.C. in which Socrates was accused by three fellow citizens—Anytus, Meletus, and Lycon—of worshipping false gods and corrupting the youth of Athens. Although the full text of the indictment does not exist today, much of its substance was recorded in the dialogues of Plato, who attended the trial.

By modern standards, the indictment seems vague. At no time is Socrates accused of violating a city statute. He participated in required religious observances and did not commit libel or slander, since Athenians had no such laws. Socrates' prosecution, rather, stemmed from his teaching and beliefs. The philosopher was tried for what he said rather than what he did.

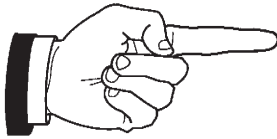
The activity is designed to closely follow the procedures of the actual trial. As in ancient Athens, there are no lawyers; the accusers and the accused give orations before a large jury, whose members have been chosen by lot. As in the historical trial, the jury will vote twice. The first vote is for conviction or acquittal. In the case of conviction, the next vote will be to determine punishment. In Socrates' day the jury could not propose a penalty of its own but had to choose between that proposed by the prosecution (in this case, death) and the penalty proposed by the defense.



## HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Several changes were made to adapt the historical trial to a modern classroom. They are as follows:

1. In ancient Athens juries were composed of 500 citizens. A majority of students in the class should serve as jurors in the trial re-creation.
2. In reality Socrates was the only person who spoke in his defense. In the interest of balance, two of his disciples, Plato and Chaerephon, will also address the jurors.
3. Socrates' wife, Xanthippe, was not present at the trial, since women and slaves were not allowed at court. Her role in this drama is to underscore the fact that democracy in Athens was for free males only.
4. Plato's dialogues suggest that in the actual trial Meletus did most of the talking. The classroom activity will afford equal time to fellow accusers Anytus and Lycon in order to increase student involvement and portray the full range of objections that were voiced against Socrates by his critics.



*Be certain that you go over the four points above briefly before the trial – and more thoroughly during debriefing.*



## SETUP DIRECTIONS



*If you wish to encourage students to dress for their parts, duplicate the GREEK CLOTHING handout and include it in the Student Guide you staple together prior to beginning the re-creation.*



1. About a week before the trial, duplicate the following materials, following the number in parentheses:
  - PRE-TRIAL SURVEY (one for each student)
  - UNIT TEST (one for each student)
  - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ESSAY, BRIEF SUMMARY OF MAJOR ROLES, ROLE RESPONSIBILITIES, and COURT PROCEDURES (one for each student) *Staple together to make an introductory Student Guide before the re-creation begins.*
  - Individual role handouts (one per role)
  - JURORS handout (one per juror)
  - EPILOGUE (one for each student)
2. Role selection is very important to the outcome of this activity. Pick your most highly motivated students to be **Socrates**, **Plato**, **Chaerephon**, **Anytus**, **Meletus**, and **Lycon**. Either select a strong student to be the **Archon** or play the role yourself. This individual functions as head of the court tribunal. *He or she must be able to keep the activity functioning smoothly.*
3. In keeping with the Athenian custom of choosing jurors by lot, have a drawing for the following role assignments:
  - **Juror** This majority of students in the class will be expected to question witnesses following each oration, render a verdict, and keep reaction journals throughout the trial.
  - **Guard** (one student charged with keeping order during the proceedings)
  - **Xanthippe** (one female student) Xanthippe's role in the activity will be to attempt to speak on her husband's behalf in court. She will be denied participation on the grounds that she is a woman. As a result, she will spend the remainder of the activity on the sidelines, writing letters to relatives about what is occurring at court.
  - **Cristobulus** (one student)
  - **Apollodorus** (one student)
  - **Adeimantus** (one student)

Cristobulus, Apollodorus, and Adeimantus are followers of Socrates. Since the philosopher kept no written records of his work, his thoughts have been passed down through the writing of such students. Cristobulus, Apollodorus, and Adeimantus will play such a role by *carefully* recording the court proceedings on each day of the trial.
4. Encourage all students to supplement the information you give them by doing more research on their own. You may wish to award grades based on the following factors: preparation, role-playing, and testing.



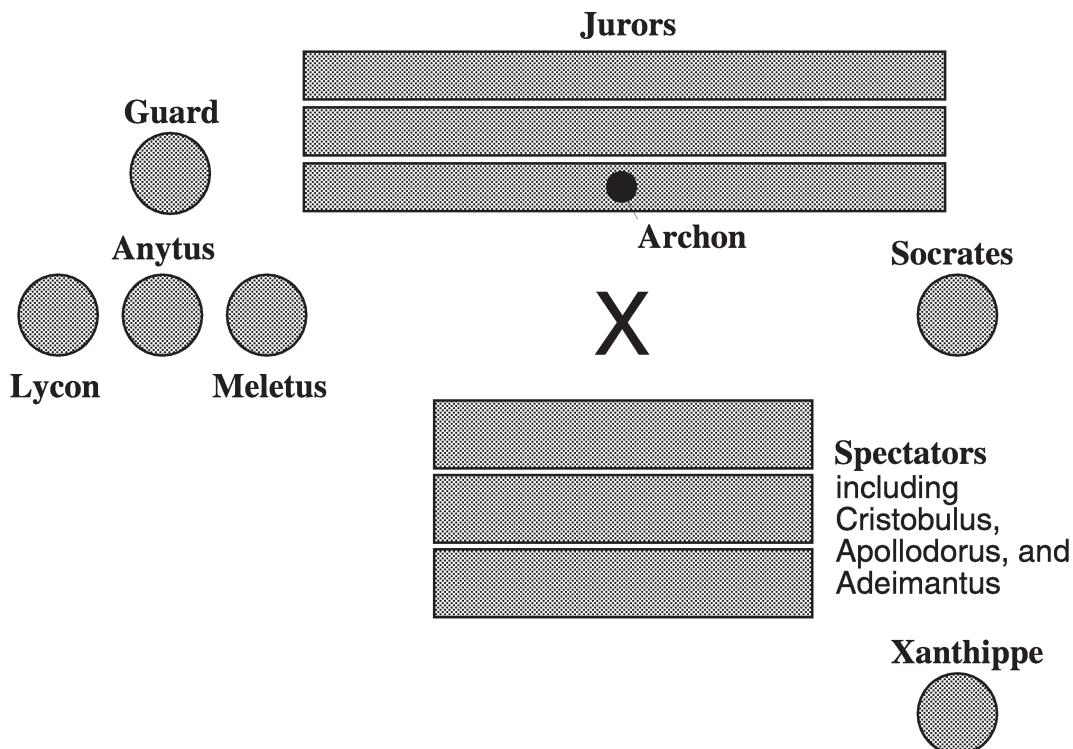
## TEACHING SUGGESTIONS - 1

### Three days before trial: Introduction

1. Briefly explain to students why they are going to study this trial. Then pass out Student Guides which you have made by stapling together several handouts.
2. Have students read the BRIEF SUMMARY OF MAJOR ROLES.
3. Explain how you have assigned roles to a few students as well as the historical justification for drawing the remaining roles by lot.
4. Complete the role selection and give students copies of their individual role responsibilities.
5. Have everyone read the HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ESSAY, then go over the Discussion Questions with the class.

### Day 1: Background and preparation

1. Give the PRE-TRIAL SURVEY.
2. Arrange students in cooperative learning groups to discuss their responses.
3. Allow time for individual role preparation.
4. Decide how you will physically arrange the room for the trial. If available, risers effectively elevate the jurors. Here is a possible arrangement:





## TEACHING SUGGESTIONS - 2

5. When addressing the jurors, speakers should stand in the area of the **X** found on the classroom illustration on the bottom of the previous page. In the actual trial, Socrates and his accusers sat on stools, while spectators leaned against columns in the open court or sat on stone benches. You may wish to simulate these conditions in the classroom.

### Days 2-3: The trial

1. The actual number of periods devoted to the trial will vary according to the length of speeches, amount of questioning, extent of research, level of student interest, and your judgment.
2. Make sure all participants are positioned in their proper places. (*Note:* For added interest, Socrates' followers—Plato, Chaerephon, Cristobulus, Apollodorus, and Adeimantus—should follow Socrates in a group as he enters and exits the classroom. Students should be encouraged to wear costumes. Socrates should go barefoot and wear a tattered tunic or robe, while other students should wear sandals and tunics or robes that are in somewhat better condition. An example of how to use a sheet to make Greek clothing is found on the GREEK CLOTHING handout, which you may have chosen to include in the Student Guide you created before beginning the re-creation.
3. Before beginning the trial, ask if there are any questions. Remind jurors that they may question a witness upon completion of his oration.
4. Instruct the Archon to open the court by asking Meletus to read the indictments. See COURT PROCEDURES, pages 21-23.
5. When the trial has concluded, immediately ask jury members the reason for their verdict. Then ask witnesses how they would have voted had they been on the jury.



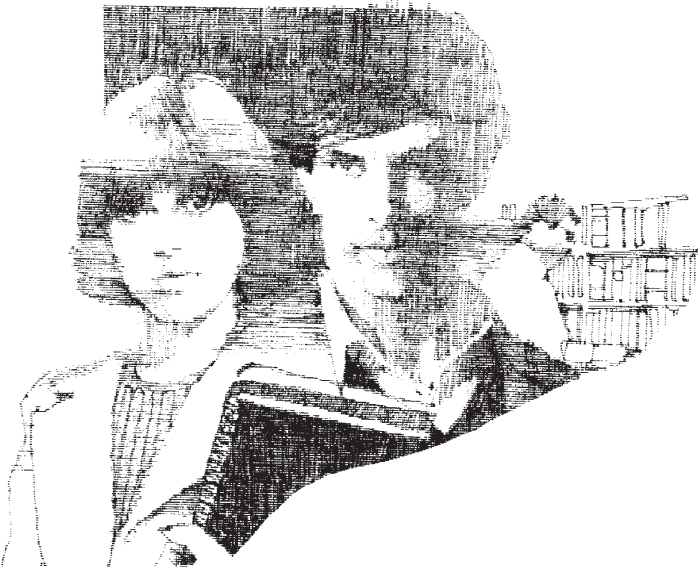




## TEACHING SUGGESTIONS - 3

### Day 4: Debriefing and testing

1. The following questions should serve as a discussion guide following the conclusion of the trial:



#### **Debriefing Questions**

- Could Athenian democracy have survived Socrates' questioning? Why or why not?
- Did Socrates corrupt the young people of Athens or lead them to wisdom? Why?
- Would Socrates be a good teacher for you? Why or why not?
- How would you rate Socrates? a great man? a pest? a subversive? a fool? Give reasons for your answer.
- Did Socrates have a right to give up worldly possessions when that action caused hardship for his family? Why or why not?
- Why did Socrates antagonize the jury when he knew his life was at stake?
- Is it possible to have democracy without freedom of expression?

**Note:** As a follow-up activity, students may be interested in researching cases when our government limited freedom of expression out of concern for a "greater good." The following cases would apply:

- the Sedition Act
- *Schenk v. United States*
- *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*

2. Distribute EPILOGUE and discuss.
3. Conclude the activity by giving the UNIT TEST. The key to the answers is as follows: 1. c, 2. c, 3. a, 4. b, 5. d, 6. d, 7. d, 8. b, 9. d, 10. d.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aymar, Brandt and Edward Sagarin. *A Pictorial History of the World's Great Trials*. New York: Bonanza Books. 1985.

Bowra, C.M. *The Greek Experience*, The New American Library, 1957.

\*Connolly, Peter. *Greece and Rome at War*. McDonald Phoebus Ltd., 1981.

Durant, Will. *The Life of Greece*. Simon and Schuster, 1939.

\*McKown, Robin. *Seven Famous Trials in History*. Vanguard Press, 1963.

Miller, Helen Hill. *Greece Through the Ages*. Funk and Wagnals, 1972.

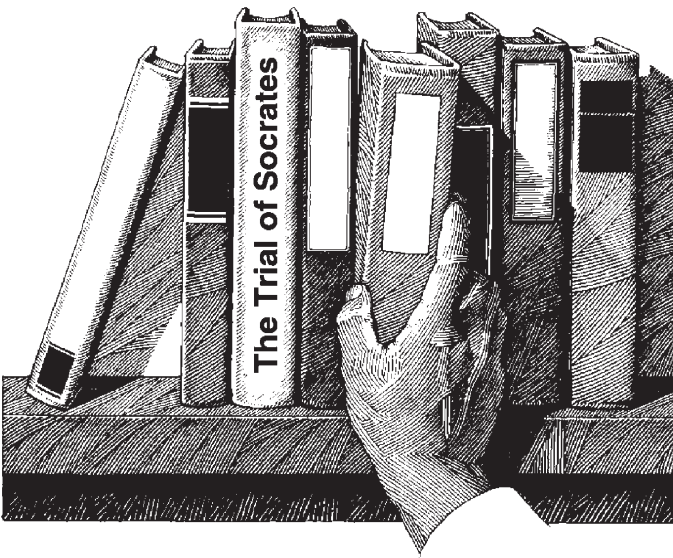
Plato. *The Works of Plato*. Simon and Schuster, 1928.

\*Powell, Anton. *The Greek World*. Warwick Press, 1987.

\*Rutland, Jonathan. *See Inside An Ancient Greek Town*. Warwick Press, 1986.

Stone, I. F. *The Trial of Socrates*. Doubleday, 1989.

\*suitable for student use.



Work with your friendly school librarian to find books on Socrates and his historical period. Possibly you will want to set up a **Reserve Shelf: SOCRATES**.

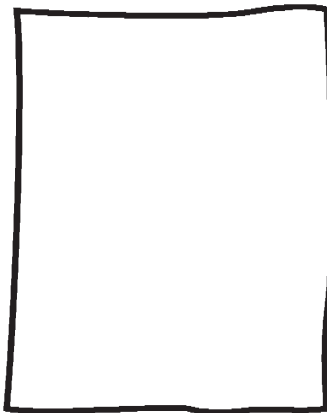




## GREEK CLOTHING

Lay the sheet lengthwise.

1



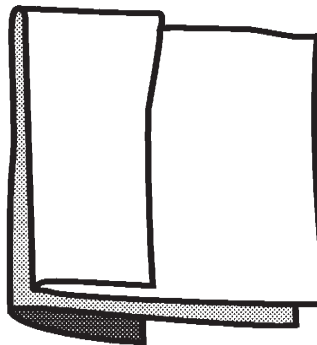
Fold over the top for desired shoulder-to-leg length.

2



Fold in half.

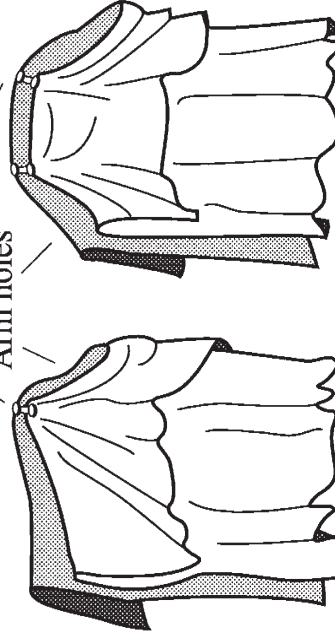
3



Clasps

Arm holes

4



Fasten in the two places at the top.

# GREEK CLOTHING

MADE FROM A SHEET