

Ancient Citizens in Ancient Civilizations



By Jennifer Coe

Introduction

Every single day, you are affected by the decisions and actions of the government under which you live. Here in the United States, which is considered a **democracy**, we have been given the right to vote (women only since in 1920), which means we have an opportunity to express our opinions on who we would like to lead our country both locally and nationally.

Your parents have probably gone to vote during your lifetime. Maybe you went with them to see how it was done. You, also, will be able to vote in just a short number of years, so it is important to understand what a democracy is and what other government types there have been (and actually still are) throughout history.

In this study, we will be looking at several historical governments as well as learning about our own. We will learn about the Christian principles upon which much of our government is based, and we will be learning about what makes each style of governance interesting and unique.

To Parents: The structure of these lessons is meant to be interactive and ACTIVE. Therefore, there will be at least one book referred to in each lesson (which you can obtain through your local library, or I will also list a place where you can read it for free) as well as activities. Please take advantage of these portions of the lesson in order to make this a more fulfilling experience for the student.

SchoolhouseTeachers.com note: Parents should closely monitor children's use of YouTube and Wikipedia if you navigate away from the videos and articles cited in these lessons. We also recommend viewing the videos on a full screen setting in order to minimize your students' exposure to potentially offensive ads and inappropriate comments beside or beneath the video.

Unit 1: Ancient Greece



The ancient Greeks have been given credit for huge achievements in government and political thinking. They are considered to have been the seat of philosophical thought as well as the creators of famous ancient art as well. Greece was a dynamic place to live in ancient times because leadership and leadership styles were changing and forming with every single new generation. As you will see, throughout their history, they changed political structures back and forth several times.

Ancient Greece itself was divided into **city-states**, which were basically cities and their surrounding areas. The two major cities you may be most familiar with are also the biggest ones and are named **Sparta** and **Athens**. Each city-state had its own government. That is like each state in the United States having its own president, vice president, money, and laws! (How about that for confusing?)

Imagine: What if you took a trip to New Jersey, and you couldn't spend any of your money because it was New York money? What if in Massachusetts the law said you could chew gum in

public, but in Pennsylvania you could be arrested for chewing gum on the street. Needless to say, this situation made things complicated for the ancient Greek people.

Some of the city-states were **monarchies**. This is when one person (a king or queen—also known as a monarch) rules over the people by him or herself. Although initially people voted for the king they wanted, the position of king was later passed down to their own children as they preferred to keep the authority “in the family,” so to speak.

Kings in Greece had a group of people around him to advise him on important matters, and they often influenced what laws were passed and which ones were ignored. These advisors were called **aristocrats**. These positions were often given to the rich and successful; therefore, pretty much cutting the king and his advisers off from the regular types of people like you and me.

Eventually in Greek history, the aristocrats got tired of having to wait around for a king to pass the laws they approved of, and they took over completely.

When the rich and influential take over the government, that is called an **oligarchy**. The Greek oligarchs often ignored the needs of the poor and working-class people. This happened for so long, and then the citizens of different city-states got tired of being ignored by the ruling class, and they took over the government by force! Click [here](#) for more information and a video about oligarchies.



The working class also became tired of not being listened to. Powerful men (sometimes high-ranking soldiers) with ambition would step in to try and take over the government. An example of this is [Cypselus](#). Unfortunately, this ended up being a bad situation for the citizens as well as many of these men became **tyrants (tyranny)**.

Tyrannies are brutal governments to live under. They are characterized by the leader operating as if no law applies to him. Click [here](#) for more information about what a tyranny is or [here](#) to see a long list of Greek tyrants. Dionysus was a tyrant who lived around 406 BC. He was at war most of his rule. Learn more about this fellow [here](#).

Eventually, around 460 BC, the Greek people turned to [democracy](#). This is when the citizens of the city-states ruled over themselves. We will talk about democracies later as well.

For further reading:

- Pearson, Anne. *D.K. Eyewitness Books: Ancient Greece*. London: DK Publishing. 2004.
- Apel, Melanie Ann. *Politics and Government in Ancient Greece*. New York: Powerkids Press. 2004.

Challenge Assignments:

1. Find one Greek ruler of each style in Greek history (monarchy, tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy) and write two paragraphs about each, describing his rise to power, reign, and the end of his rule.
2. Research how to make a salt-dough map and create one based on the geography of ancient Greece. Label the major bodies of water and the largest city-states.

Craft: Watch [“How to make a gold-leaf crown.”](#)

Vocabulary: city-states, monarchy, monarch, oligarchy, oligarch, tyranny, tyrant, aristocrat