

Life in Ancient Greece

The ancient Greeks lived over 3000 years ago. Their legacy inspires people to this day and, indeed, many of their ideas and inventions still influence how we live in modern times.

Society

There was not one united country called 'ancient Greece'. Instead, Greece was divided up into individual '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 common enemy.



Instead of referring to themselves as Greeks, people would use the name of their city state, for example Athenians, Spartans and Corinthians.



Homes

Most ancient Greek homes were designed and built around a central courtyard. The houses were constructed from stone, clay or wood. The floors were made of tiles, which helped to keep them cool in the hotter months. If a house did have windows, these were small and high up and did not have glass in them. Instead, curtains or wooden shutters were used.

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



tablet and stylus

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.



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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 running a household, such as cooking and making clothes.

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. This was because women were not treated as equals to men and had fewer freedoms.

Because of fighting between city states, a truce was announced just before each Olympics. This meant that people could travel to the Games safely.



Events included boxing, wrestling, running, jumping, throwing and chariot racing. The most gruelling 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.

Questions

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

☐ Sparta

☐ Greece

☐ Athens

☐ Corinth

2. What was the relationship between city states in ancient Greece like?

3. Name **one** material that was used to construct ancient Greek houses.

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

lyre

tablet

palaestra

stylus

wooden frame filled with beeswax
used for writing on

stringed musical instrument

wooden or metal rod used for
writing with

training ground for physical education

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

6. **Because of fighting between city states, a truce was announced just before each Olympics.**

What do you think is meant by a 'truce'?

7. Find and copy **one** word that means the same as 'tough'.

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

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9. What **three** features of a non-chronological report can you identify? How do these features help to make the text easier to read and understand?
