Athens or Sparta? Greek Life and Lasting Ideas

Teacher		**Class**	Year 5
Subject	History	**Topic**	Ancient Greece
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United Kingdom

Pupils compare life in Athens and Sparta and explain city-states. They link democracy, Olympics and theatre to life today.

Curriculum links

- Ancient Greece – a study of Greek life and achievements and their influence on the western world [1]

Learning objectives

- Students will explain what a city-state was and name two examples.
- Students will compare daily life for children in Athens and Sparta.
- Students will explain three Greek achievements that still shape life today.

Success criteria

- I can name two city-states and say what a polis was.
- I can give one difference between Athens and Sparta childhood.
- I can give one Greek idea we still use and why it matters.

What students already know

Ask: Have you heard the words Athens, Sparta or Olympics? Show thumbs up if you have, then take two quick ideas of what pupils think Ancient Greece was.

Key words

polis	a tiny Greek town area with its own laws and leaders [4]
city-state	a small place that rules itself with its own laws and leaders [4]
democracy	a way of running a place where people vote to decide [10]
Olympics	a big sports contest held every four years to honour Zeus [15]
theatre	plays acted outside for crowds, sad or funny stories [15]
philosophy	thinking and talking about big ideas of life and right and wrong [10]

Materials

- Slides 1-2 title and objectives, Slide 5 vote, Slides 3-4, 6-8, 7, 11-12
- Video clip 1 (0:00-4:53) on Slide 6 and Video clip 2 (0:00-4:42) on Slide 8, tested
- Nothing extra for debate - open carpet space with two facing lines
- Sentence starters on board: I would prefer Athens because / One good thing about Sparta is
- Mini whiteboards and pens for checks

Before the lesson

- Test Slides 1-8, 11-12 and both video clips with sound and subtitles
- Set vote labels for Slide 5: Athens, Sparta, and set carpet in two facing lines
- Write sentence starters on board and prepare simple Athens and Sparta fact cards
- Clear carpet space so pupils can sit safely facing a partner

Lesson outline

0–8 min **Starter** 8 min · Whole class

To hook pupils with a choice and recall what Ancient Greece was.

YOU DO

1. Show Slides 1-2, share objectives and success in pupil words.
2. Use the hook choice: learning and debating or training and getting strong.
3. Show Slide 5 vote: Athens - schools, arts and voting, Sparta - sport, strength and army life.
4. Take a quick show of hands vote and ask two pupils to give a reason.

STUDENTS DO

1. Listen to objectives and look at Slide 5 choices.
2. Vote Athens or Sparta by a show of hands.
3. Give a neighbour one quick reason for the choice.

Say: Would you rather spend your days learning, drawing and debating, or running, training and getting super strong? You have to choose. Show me Athens or Sparta, and be ready to say why.

Ask: What do you already know about Athens, Sparta or the Olympics? (Listen for: Greek places, running races, gods, old temples.) · Why might living in Athens feel different from living in Sparta? (Listen for: different rules, learning compared with fighting and training.)

Check understanding: Hands vote and partner reasons; if vague, model one reason for each side and repeat vote with reasons.

Support: Let pupils vote by pointing to Athens or Sparta labels and echo a partner reason. **Stretch:** Ask pupils to predict one problem if their street made all its own laws.

Use: Slides 1-2, 5

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8–20 min **Teaching** 12 min · Whole class

To explain what a polis was and why Greece was not one country.

YOU DO

1. Explain there was never one country called Ancient Greece, it was divided into small city-states like Athens, Sparta, Corinth and Olympia [4].
2. Show Slide 6 and play Video clip 1, asking pupils to spot what a polis is.
3. Teach they were small, independent communities each with its own laws and leaders [4] and lived near the sea because mountains made land travel hard [4].
4. Sum up they spoke versions of the same language and worshipped the same gods, but daily life could be very different [10].

STUDENTS DO

1. Watch the clip to spot what a polis is and one idea we still use.
2. Repeat polis meaning with partner and name two city-states.
3. Show on mini whiteboards: one thing city-states shared and one way they were independent.

Say: A polis was a tiny Greek town and the land round it that made its own rules. Think of each city-state as a mini-country. Athens and Sparta shared language and gods, but they lived by different rules.

Worked example: For example: Athens makes one law that citizens vote on big decisions. Sparta makes a different law that boys train hard as soldiers. Same language and gods, different laws and leaders [4][10].

Ask: What was a city-state or polis? (A small, independent community with its own laws and leaders [4].) · Why did Greeks live in separate city-states near the sea? (Mountains made it hard to travel across the land, so towns stayed apart [4].) · What did city-states share even though rules were different? (Versions of the same language and the same gods [10].)

Check understanding: Mini whiteboards showing shared and independent; reteach with map sketch if many write Greece was one country.

Support: Give a pre-drawn coastline with Athens and Sparta labelled so pupils only add one law each. **Stretch:** Ask pupils to justify one benefit and one problem of having no single ruler.

Use: Slide 6, Video clip 1 (0:00–4:53)

20–40 min **Main activity** 20 min · Pairs

To compare daily life in Athens and Sparta through structured debate.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 8 and play Video clip 2, asking pupils to watch homes, markets, schools and children.
2. Seat class in two facing lines: side A Athens, side B Sparta, as Student A and Student B pairs.
3. Read fact cards: Athens known for democracy, philosophy and the arts, Sparta well-known for military training and discipline [10]; in Athens boys went to school and girls learned household skills at home [10].
4. Lead turn-taking: Student A gives one good point about Athens, Student B replies with one good point about Sparta, using Sparta ruled by two kings [10] and Spartan boys training young and girls staying strong and competing in sport [10].

STUDENTS DO

1. Watch the daily-life clip and note one Athens and one Sparta difference.
2. In facing pairs, take turns giving one good point for Athens then Sparta.
3. State a final choice with one reason linked to learning, rules or training.

Say: Student A, start with I would prefer Athens because and link to learning or voting. Student B, reply with One good thing about Sparta is and link to strength or training. We take turns, we listen, we do not shout out.

Worked example: Student A: I would prefer Athens because boys went to school and people talked about ideas and art [10]. Student B: One good thing about Sparta is boys trained young as soldiers and girls stayed strong and joined in sport [10]. Teacher: Well compared, now swap and add: city-states even paused wars to compete, but Athens and Sparta were rivals in the Peloponnesian War [10].

Ask: What was school and home life like in Athens? (Boys went to school, girls learned household skills at home [10].) · How was growing up in Sparta different? (Ruled by two kings [10]; boys trained young as soldiers, girls kept strong and could compete in sport [10].)

Check understanding: Each pair states final choice and reason; if reasons are thin, point to sentence starters and model one more turn.

Support: Provide sentence starters on the board, such as I would prefer Athens because and One good thing about Sparta is. **Stretch:** Challenge students to suggest one idea Athens could copy from Sparta and one idea Sparta could copy from Athens.

Use: Slide 8, Video clip 2 (0:00–4:42)

40–52 min **Teaching** 12 min · Pairs

To show how Greek democracy, Olympics and theatre still shape the western world.

YOU DO

1. Show Slides 3-4 chain: Greeks try ideas in city-states, Romans copy art and ideas, ideas spread, we still vote, play and perform today.
2. Teach democracy: Athens developed rule by the people [10], they voted by placing objects like pebbles in jars [10], but only adult men born in Athens could vote [10].
3. Teach Olympics and theatre: first recorded Games at Olympia to honour Zeus [10], began in 776 BC [15] every four years [15]; they built outdoor amphitheatres for tragedies and comedies [15], and our words tragedy and comedy come from Ancient Greek [14].
4. Model a then-and-now link for philosophy, where Socrates, Plato and Aristotle asked big questions to help people understand the world [10].

STUDENTS DO

1. Match each card: democracy, Olympics, theatre to its then picture.
2. With a partner say the now version and one sentence why it still matters.
3. Link the chain in order: Greek idea, Romans copy, we still use it.

Say: Greeks tried new ideas and the Romans copied them, so they spread to us. Then pebbles in jars, now votes in a box. Then races for Zeus, now Olympics. Then plays outside, now theatre and films.

Worked example: Democracy then and now: Then - in Athens adult men born there voted with pebbles in jars [10]. Now - we vote in secret to choose fairly. Why it still matters: ordinary people get a say in decisions.

Ask: How did Athenians vote and who could vote? (By placing pebbles in jars [10]; only adult men born in Athens, not women, children or enslaved people [10].) · Why were the first Olympics held and when? (To honour Zeus [10], first Games in 776 BC at Olympia [15], every four years [15].) · What is our proof theatre came from Greece? (They built outdoor places for tragedies and comedies [15]; our words tragedy and comedy come from their language [14].)

Check understanding: Partners show then-and-now pairs on whiteboards; reteach any mixed-up gift with Slide 4 cards before moving on.

Support: Give pre-matched then-and-now pairs so pupils only add the why-it-matters sentence with a word bank.
Stretch: Ask pupils to argue if a vote is fair when many affected people cannot vote, using because.

Use: Slides 3-4, 7

52–60 min **Plenary** 8 min · Whole class

To check objectives and secure one lasting Greek idea each.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 11 mystery: tall stone building with columns on a hill; reveal the Parthenon, a temple for Athena [7] finished in 432 BC [10].
2. Show Slide 12 true or false: Ancient Greece was one big country; correct to many city-states each with own laws [4].
3. Check second statement: in Athens only adult men born there could vote [10]; discuss if fair.
4. Take exit answers and restate big idea: Greek life became ideas the western world still uses.

STUDENTS DO

1. Guess the mystery building then say what it was for.
2. Vote true or false with thumbs and correct the false sentence.
3. Answer exit ticket on whiteboards: polis, Athens-Sparta difference, one gift today.

Say: Look at this hill temple with columns. This is the Parthenon for Athena. It shows Greek art we still copy. Now prove what you know: was Greece one country, and who could vote?

Worked example: False: Ancient Greece was not one big country with one ruler. It was many city-states, each with own laws [4]. True: In Athens only adult men born in Athens could vote [10].

Ask: Was Ancient Greece one big country? (No, it was many city-states each with own laws and leaders [4].) · What is the Parthenon? (A temple dedicated to Athena [7], completed in 432 BC [10].)

Check understanding: Thumbs true/false plus whiteboard exit lines; if polis confused, repeat tiny town with own rules and name Athens and Sparta.

Support: Allow pupils to answer by pointing to true/false cards and copying a model correction sentence.
Stretch: Ask pupils to add why the Parthenon or Olympics still matters today in one because sentence.

Use: Slides 11-12

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Thinking Ancient Greece was one country with one king.	Pupils draw one border or say the king of Greece ruled all.	Restate there was never one country, but small city-states like Athens and Sparta each with own laws and leaders [4].
Thinking everyone in Athens could vote.	Pupils say women, children or enslaved people voted too.	Remind only adult men born in Athens could vote, not women, children or enslaved people [10], shown by pebbles in jars [10].
Thinking Olympics were only modern sport with no Greek meaning.	Pupils describe medals only, with no god or coming together.	Rebuild link: first Games at Olympia to honour Zeus [10] in 776 BC [15], and city-states even paused wars to compete [10].

Support

- Provide sentence starters on the board for Athens and Sparta reasons.
- Offer pre-drawn coastline and pre-matched then-and-now cards with picture word bank.
- Let pupils rehearse in pairs for 30 seconds before speaking and allow pass.

Stretch

- Challenge pupils to justify one benefit and problem of no single ruler.
- Ask pupils to swap one good idea between Athens and Sparta and explain why.
- Ask pupils to argue if a decision is fair when many affected cannot vote.

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For the LSE or teaching assistant

Stay with facing pairs in main debate to prompt starters, check whiteboards in teaching parts, and scribe the why-it-matters sentence where needed.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer
What was a polis? Name two city-states.	A small community with its own laws and leaders [4]; e.g. Athens and Sparta.
Give one difference between growing up in Athens and Sparta.	Athens boys went to school [10]; Sparta boys trained young as soldiers and girls trained strong [10].
Name one Greek gift we still use and why it matters.	Democracy / Olympics / theatre; e.g. voting gives people a say; Games bring rivals together to honour Zeus [10][15].

Homework

Tell someone at home one Greek idea we still use and one sentence why it matters.

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