



## Athens vs. Sparta Argument-Based Project Documents & Arguments

The debatable issue for this project is:

**Which city-state, Athens or Sparta, presents us with the better model for organizing a society?**

### Directions

With your partner, read the document excerpts out loud once. Share what you think is the argument being made in the excerpt and ask each other (or the teacher) any questions that you have about vocabulary or the meaning of particular phrases or lines. Read the excerpt a second time. Then answer the argument-based questions.

The document excerpts are organized into five domains that organize a society: economy, education, government, military, and women & slaves. “Women & slaves” was a relevant category in ancient civilizations in the way that they are not in modern society: they were considered lesser beings by all ancient civilizations (though to varying degrees) in a way that modern society rejects. The way that ancient civilizations treated women, and kept slaves, are not the only important differences between their societies and ours, of course.

Note that the document excerpts within each domain are not necessarily balanced between Athens and Sparta.

## Economy

### Document A

Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Lycurgus,” c.100 CE

“For ample leisure was one of the blessings with which [Spartan leader] Lycurgus provided his countrymen, since they were absolutely forbidden to practice any mechanical craft, and moneymaking and business were unnecessary because wealth was disregarded and despised. The Helots [the name Spartans gave to their slaves] tilled the soil and produced the usual crops from them. . . . So slavish did they deem it to labor at a trade and in business.

“Lycurgus abolished all pride, envy, crime, and luxury, which flowed from these old and terrible evils of riches and poverty, by inducing all landowners to offer their estates for redistribution and prevailing upon all citizens to live on equal terms with equal incomes. They were to strive only to surpass one another in courage and virtue, there being henceforth no social inequalities among them except as praise or blame can create.

“Each man’s allotment of land was large enough to produce annually seven medimni of barley for himself and twelve for his wife, with oil and wine in proportion. He thought this would be sufficient because it was enough to maintain them in health, and they needed nothing more.”

1. What was the Spartan leadership’s attitude toward moneymaking and acquiring wealth?

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2. Identify two advantages that this attitude toward wealth had for the people of Sparta.

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### Document B

Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, c.410 BCE

“Yet our [city, Athens,] is no workaday city only. No other provides so many recreations for the spirit – contests and sacrifices all the year round and beauty in our public buildings to cheer the heart and delight the eye day by day.

“For we are lovers of beauty, yet with no extravagance and lovers of wisdom, yet without weakness. Wealth we employ rather as an opportunity for action than as a subject for boasting; and with us it is not a shame for a man to acknowledge poverty, but the greater shame is for him not to do his best to avoid it.

“[Athenian leader Pericles] realized the country was poor and unproductive, and that sea traders send no goods to those who can give them nothing in exchange. Therefore, he turned the attention of the citizens to manufactures. He made a law that no son was obliged to support his father unless he had been taught a trade. . . . and seeing that the soil of Attica was scarcely rich enough to maintain those who tilled it and was incapable of

feeding an idle and leisured multitude, he sought to dignify all trades and ordered the Council of Areopagus to inquire how every man made a living and to punish those who had no occupation.”

3. **What was the Athenian attitude toward money and wealth?**

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4. **What did Pericles do to improve the economy of Athens?**

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5. **Identify and explain 2 - 3 ways that the Athenian economy would have been good for Athenians.**

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**Document C**

**Xenophon, *On Lycurgus*, c. 375 BCE**

“Lycurgus [the Spartan leader] prohibited free citizens from having anything to do with business. . . . They should not desire wealth with a view to sensual gratification.”

6. **What argumentative claim might this short excerpt support for the Athenian side?**

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7. **What argumentative claim might this short excerpt support for the Spartan side?**

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## Education

### Document D

Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Lycurgus,” c.100 CE

“But as soon as they [Spartan children] were seven years old they were to be enrolled in certain companies and classes; where they all lived under the same order and discipline, doing their exercises and taking their play together. Of these, he who showed the most conduct and courage was made captain; they had their eyes always upon him, obeyed his orders, and underwent patiently whatsoever punishment he inflicted; so that the whole course of their education was one of continued exercise of a ready and perfect obedience. . . . Reading and writing they gave them just enough to serve their turn; their chief care was to make them good subjects, and reach them to endure pain and conquer in battle.”

1. Summarize the educational system of Sparta.

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2. What is there to admire or praise about the educational system of Sparta?

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3. What are the downsides of the educational system of Sparta?

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### Document E

Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*, 1990

“The ability to read and to write was important to all Athenian people – reading and writing was needed in order to be a citizen, and to carry out their duty. The Athenian citizen needed a basic knowledge of reading and writing in order to be a member of the government.

“Education was made available by the government. Only boy citizens were sent to school. There they would learn about poetry, literature, math, and science. It was also about preparing citizens to be in the government.”

4. What were the purposes of education in Athens?

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5. What did Athenian boys learn in school, and what advantages do you think this curriculum had?

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**Document F**

**Gustav Gilbert, *The Constitutional Antiquities of Sparta and Athens*, 1893**

“The military school in Sparta was designed not to teach reading, but teach fitness, obedience, and courage. From the age of seven, boys were taught survival skills, how to fight, how to steal what they needed without getting caught, and, under certain circumstances, to murder Helots [slaves].

“The entire education these boys had was to make them strong soldiers that were prepared for war. Girls were also sent to school in Sparta, and were taught wrestling, gymnastics, and were taught how to fight in battle.”

6. What did Spartan boys learn in their education system?

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7. What argument might the Spartan side develop from this document excerpt?

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8. How might the Athenian side critique or counter the argument above (#2), by reasoning that this evidence demonstrates that Spartan education system was very flawed and not a good model?

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## Government

### Document G

Information gathered from several textbooks on Ancient Greece

#### ATHENIAN GOVERNMENT:

**3 Kings: (archons) leaders during war, but did not declare it ,elected by assembly and any citizen could become a king, only had power for one year.**

**Council of Five Hundred: citizens over 30 years of age; chosen by lottery, proposed laws to the Assembly, served for only 1year**

**Assembly: all male citizens over 20 years of age; enjoyed full and final power. (declared war, made laws, determined who citizens were, made up of all males over 20, about 30,000, vote based on majority)**

#### SPARTAN GOVERNMENT:

**Five Leaders: (called Ephors)unlimited power meaning they had the power over the other three parts of government shown below , declared war, only had power for one year, elected by the assembly and any citizen could become one of the five leaders only once.**

**Council of Old People: 28 people over 60 years of age; came up with ideas for laws but the Assembly voted to decide if the laws should be allowed, served for life.**

**Kings: two kings elected by the Assembly; served for life, and leaders during war, could not declare war**

**Assembly: all citizens over 30 years of age; elected government members and did not make laws but voted whether they should be allowed.**

1. Based on the information in this document, which government was more democratic? Why?

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2. Aside from their relative democratic status, does this document have information that suggests that one government is better structured than the other? What argumentative claim might this document support (other than one government is more democratic than the other)?

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**Document H**

**Pericles' Funeral Oration, in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 431 BCE**

“It is true that our [the Athenian] government is called a democracy, because its administration is in the hands, not of the few, but of the many, yet while as regards the law all men are on an equality for the settlement of their private disputes, as regards the value set on them it is as each man is in any way distinguished that he is preferred to the public honors, not because he belongs to a particular class, but because of personal merits; nor again, on the ground of poverty is a man barred from public service.

“For we alone regard the man who does not take part in public affairs not as one who minds his business, but as good for nothing; and we Athenians decide public questions for ourselves or at least endeavor to arrive at a sound understanding of them, in the belief that it is not debate that is a hindrance to action, but rather not to be instructed by debate before the time comes for action.”

**3. Who was ultimately in control of the government in Athens?**

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**4. How did the Athenians view civic participation, discussion, and debate?**

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**5. Why do your answers to the above two questions mean that Athens had a government worth modeling and emulating?**

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**Document I**

**Aristotle, *The Poetics*, c.335 BCE**

“Some, indeed, say that the best constitution is a combination of all existing forms, and they praise the Lacedaemonian [Spartan] because it is made up of oligarchy, monarchy, and democracy, the king forming the monarchy, and the council of elders represents the oligarchy, while the democratic element is represented by the Ephors; for the Ephors are selected from the people. Others, however, declare the Ephoralty to be a tyranny, and find the element of democracy in the common meals and in the habits of daily life. At Lacedaemon, for instance,



the Ephors determine suits about contracts, which they distribute among themselves, while the elders are judges of homicide, and other causes are decided by other magistrates.”

6. In what way does Aristotle suggest or imply that Sparta’s blended government is an advantage?

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7. How might the Athens side of the debate respond to this argument?

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**Document J**

**Fred Fling, *A Source Book of Greek History*, 1907**

“Some people are surprised at the fact that in all fields [the Athenians] give more power to the masses, the poor and the common people than they do the respectable elements of society, but it will become clear that they preserve the democracy by doing precisely this. When the poor, the ordinary people and the lower classes flourish and increase in numbers, then the power of the democracy will be increased.”

8. In what way was the Athenian government strikingly democratic, even egalitarian?

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9. Is a government that is this democratic good or bad? Explain why.

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**Document K**

**Pericles' Funeral Oration, in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 431 BCE**

“We [the Athenians] do not copy the laws and ways of other states. Actually, we are the patterns to others. Our administration places power in the hands of the many instead of the few: this is why it is called a democracy. If we go to court, our laws provide equal justice to all. Class considerations are not allowed to interfere with merit. Nor does poverty bar the way – if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition.”

**10. According to Pericles, why was Athens' government a “pattern to others”?**

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**11. How did the Athenian government treat people of different economic classes, according to Pericles?**

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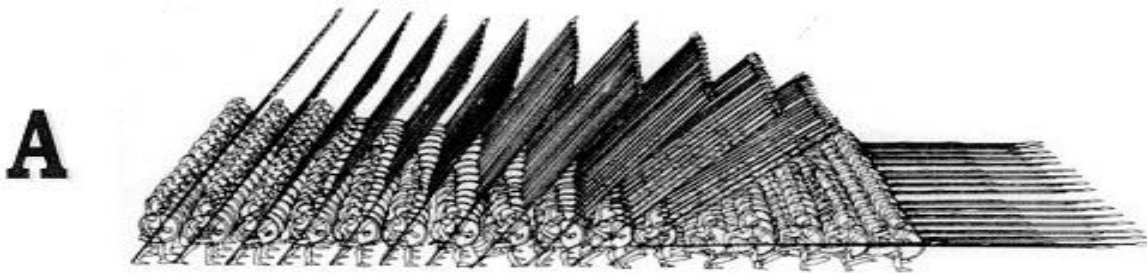
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## Military

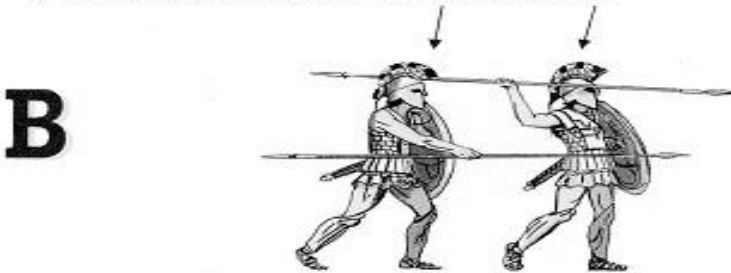
### Document L

#### Information gathered from a textbook on Ancient Greece

**DOCUMENTS 2- Ancient Athenian and Spartan Military:** A: shows an Ancient Greek military fighting style called the phalanx, both Athens and Sparta used this fighting style. B: shows a hoplite, which is the name for Greek soldiers, both Athens and Sparta had this type of soldier. C: describes the military training of Sparta and Athens.



**Greek Hoplite:** a soldier that used spears as their main weapon, were citizens.  
(Both Athens and Sparta had this type of soldier)



**Athens military training:** in Athens boys were sent to school to learn reading, writing, math, and other things from the age of 6 to 17. When boys turned 18 in Athens they were required to go to military school and learn how to fight in battle. In Athens military training was only 2 years long, once boys turned 20 they graduated military school.

**C**

**Spartan military training:** Spartan boys were taken from their families at the age of 6 or 7, and were sent to live in a military school until they were 30 years old. When Spartan men got married they could not live with their wives until they reached 30. Even if they were married they had to live in military schools until they were 30. Their whole lives were about military training, even after 30 the Spartan boys were required to serve the military until they were 60.

1. What similarities were there between the militaries in Athens and Sparta?

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2. What were the differences between the militaries of Athens and Sparta, and why would those differences seem to have favored Sparta’s military?

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**Document M**

**Herodotus, *Histories*, c.430 BCE**

“The same goes for the Spartans. One-against-one, they are as good as anyone in the world. But when they fight in a body, they are the best of all. For though they are free men, they are not entirely free. They accept Law as their master. And they respect this master more than Persian subjects respect [Persian leaders]. Whatever he commands, they do. And his command never changes: It forbids them to flee in battle, whatever the number of their foes. He requires them to stand firm – to conquer or die.”

3. Why according to Herodotus were the Spartans the best fighters in the ancient world?

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4. Is there any way that the Spartans’ advantage in war-fighting might make their city-state a lesser model for modern societies to copy?

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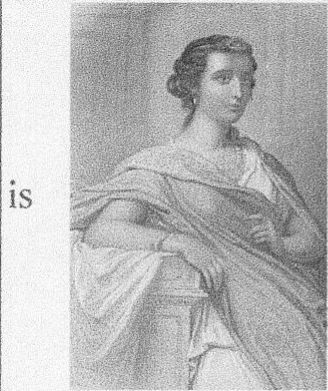
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## Women & Slaves

### Document N

Information gathered from a textbook on Ancient Greece



Ancient philosopher and teacher, Aspasia, was known for her freedom, as well as her relationship with Pericles a king of Athens. Because of her strong ideas and her relationship to the king she was able to become important to Athenian government. Aspasia's story different than all other women of Athens. Women of Athens could own things such as clothes, jewelry, but they could not buy it on their own. Also Athenian women could not own a home, or land. The men of the family controlled her life. Athenian women had no voting rights, and were not allowed to leave their homes (unless they were with their husband, or father.)

1. Identify the three most important limitations on the rights of women in Athens?

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2. Is there a way that this account of Aspasia might be used by the Athens side of the debate, to support their position?

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**Document O**

Information gathered from a textbook on Ancient Greece



To the right is a picture of Helen of Sparta, who was a Queen of Ancient Sparta. The lives that Spartan women had were different from those of the women in Athens. This is because the men were always out either training for war, or fighting a war. Spartan women had greater freedom than Athenian women had. Different from Athens, Spartan women could own land just like the men could. In fact, they owned more than 1/3 of land in Sparta. Spartan women were expected to protect

the city from attacks when the men were not home, for this reason they were also trained to fight in battle. The one bad thing for Spartan women was that at 18 they needed to pass a military strength test, if they did they would be set up to get married. If the women failed the test then they would not be allowed to get married and would lose their rights as a citizen.

3. Identify the two most important ways that Spartan women had more rights than Athenian women had?

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4. Why are these rights important to people living in a society?

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5. In what way were the rights of women in Sparta limited and not equal to those of men?

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**Document P**

Information gathered from a textbook on Ancient Greece

Population	Athens (5 <sup>th</sup> Century BCE)	Sparta (5 <sup>th</sup> Century BCE)
Citizens	165,000	32,000
Metics (Resident foreigners with the rights of citizens)	30,000	0
Perioci (Residents with none of the rights of citizens)	0	120,000
Slaves (called Helots in Sparta)	105,000	224,000

6. How does the data in this graph suggest that Sparta was a society that mistreated some of its residents much more so than Athens did?

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7. How might the Sparta side of the debate use this same graph to respond to the above argument?

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