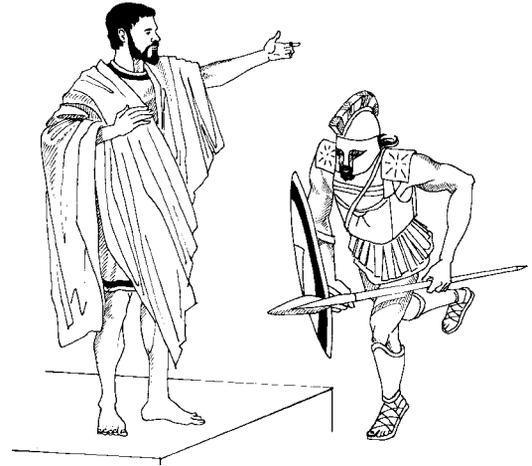


A Closer Look: Athens Versus Sparta

Democracy, Social Order, and Justice



Athens and Sparta were the two most famous city-states in ancient Greece, and they were separated by more than just rugged mountains and coastline. Boasting completely different societies, they carried on one of the greatest rivalries in history.

Athens was a prosperous, outgoing democracy that spread its influence and its policies as far as possible. The Athenians' direct democracy, in which even the humblest citizen could vote on important issues, was considered rowdy by many other Greeks. Yet it helped make Athens prosperous and powerful. Of course, not everyone enjoyed freedom in Athens. Women were largely expected to stay at home, and they had few rights. Some slaves lived comfortable lives, but many lived much worse than any slaves in the Deep South before the Civil War. Nevertheless, Athens was far ahead of its time in its system of justice and patronage of the arts. When we think of our rich Greek heritage, we think of Athens.

The Spartans were, first and last, warriors. Their entire society was geared toward raising and training soldiers, and their government was a tightly controlled oligarchy. All this made the Spartans conservative and inward-looking. Spartan infants had to be examined by city elders shortly after birth. If they were found to be physically defective, they were left on a mountainside to die. At the age of seven, Spartan boys were taken from their mothers and put through rigorous physical training. They had to exercise constantly and sleep outside in all types of weather. They were given only one cloak to wear and they were deliberately underfed. Boys were expected to make up for their lack of food by stealing. If they were caught, they were severely beaten. This hard conditioning, as well as constant military drills, made Spartans the most feared land warriors in Greece from about 600 B.C. to 371 B.C.



Ironically, Sparta—one of Greece’s most repressive city-states—allowed the greatest freedom for its women. Women could own land, and they were expected to get out and exercise so that they could bear healthy children. This small degree of freedom scandalized men from other Greek city-states. If it’s possible, though, the Spartans treated their slaves even more harshly than the Athenians. Called “Helots,” Spartan slaves were owned by the state and controlled by terror. Young Spartan boys were encouraged to stalk and kill helots—especially troublemakers—to hone their warrior skills.

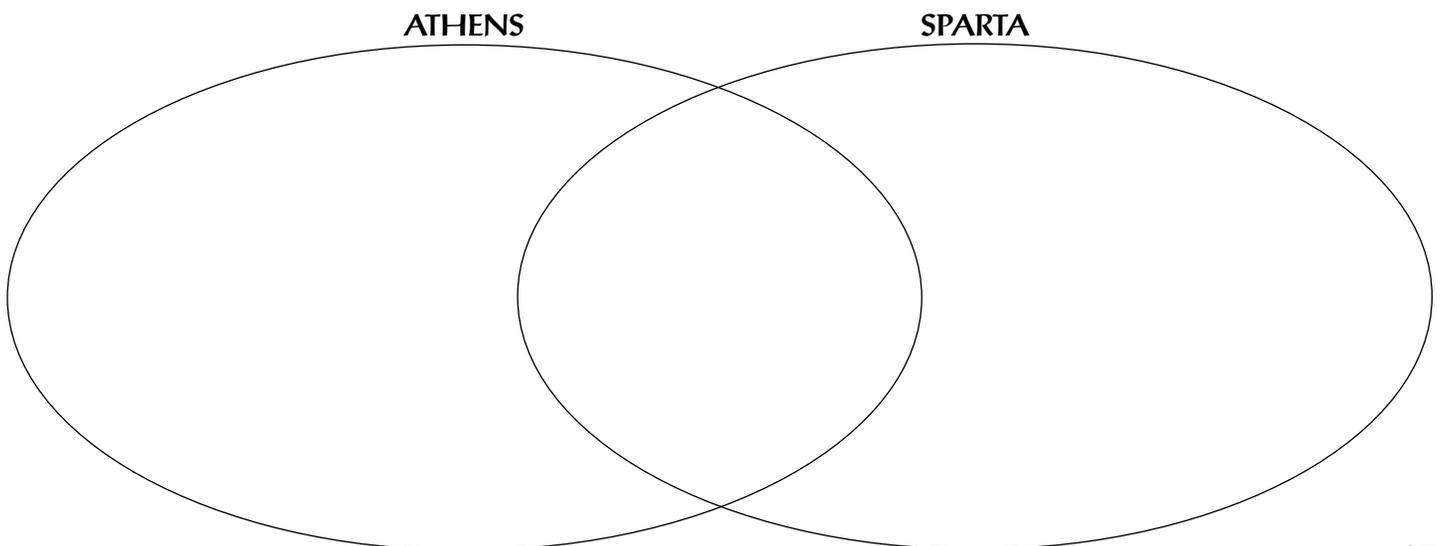
During the Persian War that lasted roughly from 500 to 479 B.C., Athens and Sparta cooperated with each other to help drive away the hated Persians. Once that threat was over though, the tensions between them rose until it exploded into the Peloponnesian War in 431 B.C. After decades of fighting, Athens finally lost the war in 404 B.C. Sparta stripped the Athenians of their power, but allowed the city to survive. In time, Athens revived itself though it never achieved its former glory. However, Sparta suffered a worse fate; when Sparta lost to Thebes in 371 B.C., the power and influence of this city-state were shattered for good.



Who's the Winner?

Fill in the Venn diagram below using this information.

	ATHENS	SPARTA
Language:	Greek	Greek
Estimated free population (adult males only):	45,000	25,000
Estimated population of slaves:	75,000	250,000
Form of government:	democracy	oligarchy
Main form of money:	silver coins called <i>drachmas</i>	heavy iron bars called <i>obols</i>
Chief god:	Zeus	Zeus
Important religious site:	the Parthenon—dedicated to Athena, the goddess of wisdom	shrines to the minor gods Fear, Laughter, and Death
Major exports:	silver, olives, olive oil, wine, pottery	the Spartans discouraged all trade with foreigners
Major imports:	slaves, timber, corn, iron, tin	
Best-known literary works:	Homer's <i>Iliad</i> and <i>Odyssey</i>	Homer's <i>Iliad</i> and <i>Odyssey</i>
Age when men become full citizens:	18	30
Typical childhood activities (boys):	going to school, exercising, learning military drills, playing with friends	exercising, learning military drills, stealing food to survive, hunting and killing rebellious slaves, policing slaves to keep them in line
Typical childhood activities (girls):	learning household duties	exercising, athletic competitions, learning household duties
Military strong point:	Greece's most powerful navy	Greece's most powerful army



▣ ATHENS AND SPARTA: BRAINS v. BRAWN ▣

ATHENS

Athens, a port on the Aegean Sea, was a major trade center. It traded goods such as olive oil and grapes for much-needed wheat. Athens developed a strong navy. Large fleets of fighting ships called triremes defended Athens. A city wall almost 7 feet (2 m) thick and 23 feet (7 m) tall protected the city-state.

Athens developed the world's first democracy. Every male citizen over the age of 18 took part in the government. Women, slaves, and men born outside the city were all excluded from this process.

Education for boys was important. From age 7 to 12 boys learned reading, writing, math, history, and music. At age 18, they served two years of military service. Girls were not allowed to go to school. They learned household chores from their mothers and often married at the age of 15.

As the cultural center of ancient Greece, Athens attracted the best artists and scholars. Athenians developed new ideas about architecture, art, literature, philosophy, politics, and science.

SPARTA

Sparta was located in an inland valley 150 miles (241 km) from Athens. High mountains formed a natural wall protecting the city-state. Spartans disapproved of trade and contact with outsiders. Male citizens received a plot of land to farm, but they also had to be soldiers. Sparta had the strongest army in the ancient world.

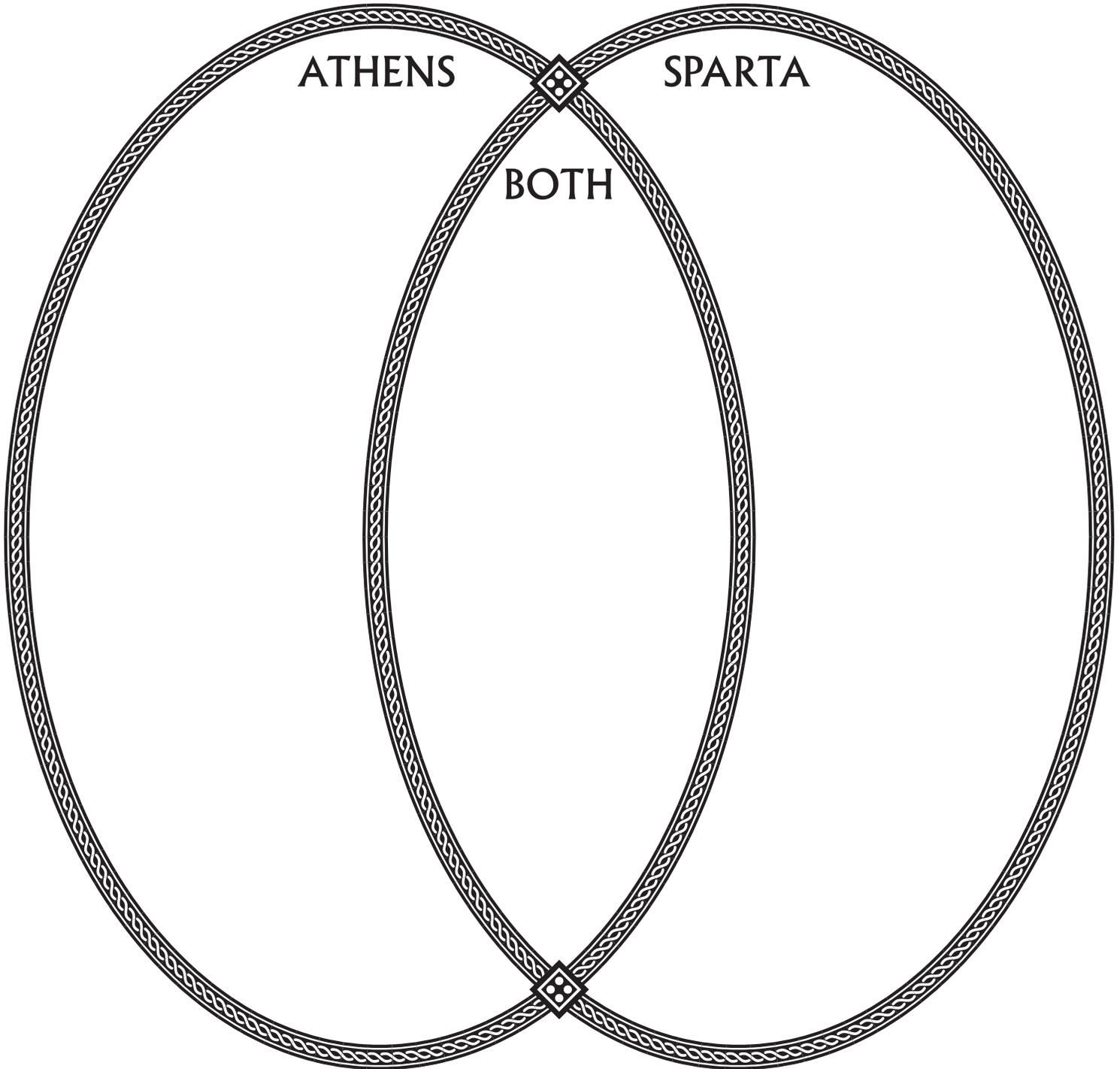
Sparta was the only city-state that did not develop a democratic government. Two kings, who were also army commanders, led it. Only men born in Sparta could be citizens. Women were not citizens, but they could own land.

Only Spartan boys were educated. At age 7, boys were sent to military school. They learned reading and writing, but the emphasis was on physical and military training. Boys had to be in the army until at least age 30. As in Athens, girls learned household chores from their mothers and often married at the age of 15.

Sparta was not famous for beautiful buildings or works of art because Spartans did not believe in luxuries. Sparta is remembered for its army, considered the best in the ancient world.

Name: _____

▣ ATHENS AND SPARTA: BRAINS v. BRAWN ▣



I think _____

could have ruled all of ancient Greece because _____

_____.



Who's the Winner? (cont.)

Use the information in your diagram and on the map to help you answer these questions.



- 1 What important things did Athens and Sparta share?

- 2 Did Athens or Sparta have more contact with foreigners? Explain. _____

- 3 In which city-state did adult males probably have more freedom? Explain. _____

- 4 In which city-state did young girls have more freedom? Explain. _____

- 5 Which group of young people in the two city-states was the best educated? Explain. _____

- 6 Which group of young people in the two city-states received more training to fight and kill? Explain. _____

- 7 Why was such training important to that city-state? _____

- 8 Which city-state do you think had more of a problem with slave revolts? Explain. _____

- 9 Which city-state do you think put a greater emphasis on wisdom? Explain. _____

- 10 In which city-state was money more attractive and easier to use? Explain. _____

- 11 Which city-state do you think had more shipbuilders? Explain. _____
