

# Greek Religion, Philosophy, and Literature

SECTION

2

**BEFORE  
YOU  
READ**

## Reach Into Your Background

Think about the things that make the United States a good place to live. What do you like

about living here? How would you describe life in the United States to someone from another country? What would you say were the most important achievements of the United States?

## Questions to Explore

1. What were some accomplishments of the Golden Age?
2. How did Greek philosophers try to understand the world?

## Key Terms

tribute                      philosopher  
immortal                  tragedy

## Key People and Places

Pericles  
Parthenon  
Socrates

“Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighboring states. We are a pattern to other cities rather than imitators. Our constitution favors the many instead of the few. That is why it is called a democracy. If we look at the laws, we see they give equal justice to all . . . Poverty does not bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state. . . . In short, I say that as a city we are the school for all Greece.”

These are the words of the Athenian leader Pericles (PEHR ih kleez). He was reminding the citizens that Athens was special. Pericles' words had special meaning: They were spoken during the first year of a war with Sparta, another Greek city-state. Eventually, it was Sparta that ended Athens' Golden Age of accomplishment.

- Pericles led the Athenians in peace and war. The helmet he wears reminds us that he was a skilled general.





**Predict** Why do you think the years from 479 B.C. to 431 B.C. are called the Golden Age?

## The Golden Age of Athens

The years from 479 B.C. to 431 B.C. are called the Golden Age of Athens. During the Golden Age, Athens grew rich from trade and from silver mined by slaves in regions around the city. Tribute, or payments made to Athens by its allies, added to its wealth.

Athenians also made amazing achievements in the arts, philosophy, and literature. And democracy reached its high point. For about 30 years during the Golden Age, Pericles was the most powerful man in Athenian politics. This well-educated and intelligent man had the best interests of his city at heart. When he made speeches to the Athenians, he could move and persuade them.

Pericles was a member of an aristocratic family, but he supported democracy. Around 460 B.C., he became leader of a democratic group. He introduced reforms that strengthened democracy. The most important change was to have the city pay a salary to its officials. This meant that poor citizens could afford to hold public office.

## The Flourishing Arts

Today, Pericles is probably best known for making Athens a beautiful city. In 480 B.C., during one of the city's many wars, the Acropolis of Athens had been destroyed. Pericles decided to rebuild the Acropolis

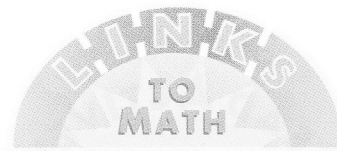
In Honor of Athena



and create new buildings to glorify the city. He hired the Greek world's finest architects and sculptors for the project.

**Magnificent Architecture** The builders of the new Acropolis brought Greek architecture to its highest point. Their most magnificent work was the Parthenon, a temple to the goddess Athena. The temple was made of fine marble. Rows of columns surrounded it on all four sides. Within the columns was a room that held the statue of Athena, made of wood, ivory, and gold. The statue rose 40 feet (12 m), as high as a four-story building.

**Lifelike Sculpture** The great statue of Athena disappeared long ago. However, much of the sculpture on the inside and outside of the temple still exists. Many of the scenes that decorate the Parthenon have three important characteristics. First, they are full of action. Second, the artist carefully arranged the figures to show balance and order. Third, the sculptures are lifelike and accurate. However, they are ideal, or perfect, views of humans and animals. These characteristics reflect the goal of Greek art. This goal was to present images of human perfection in a balanced and orderly way. Real people and animals would not look like these sculptures.



#### The Golden Rectangle

Greek architects based the design of their buildings on a figure called the Golden Rectangle. A Golden Rectangle is one with the long sides about one and two thirds times the length of the short sides. The Greeks thought Golden Rectangles made buildings more pleasing to look at. Modern architects have also used the Golden Rectangle.



It took the Athenians 15 years to build the Parthenon (left), considered the home on Earth of the goddess Athena. Its beauty still crowns the city of Athens. The graceful riders (far left, on facing page) are part of a sculptured procession. They were carved on the inner wall of the Parthenon.



## The Search for Knowledge

Greeks worshipped a family of gods and goddesses called the Twelve Olympians. Each ruled different areas of human life. The chart on the next page gives you more information about the Olympians.

### READ ACTIVELY

**Predict** What kind of gods do you think the Greeks worshipped?

**Greek Religion** Wherever the Greeks lived, they built temples to the gods. Since the gods had human forms, they also had many human characteristics. The main difference between gods and humans was that the gods were perfect in form and had awesome power. Also, the gods were **immortal**, which meant they lived forever.

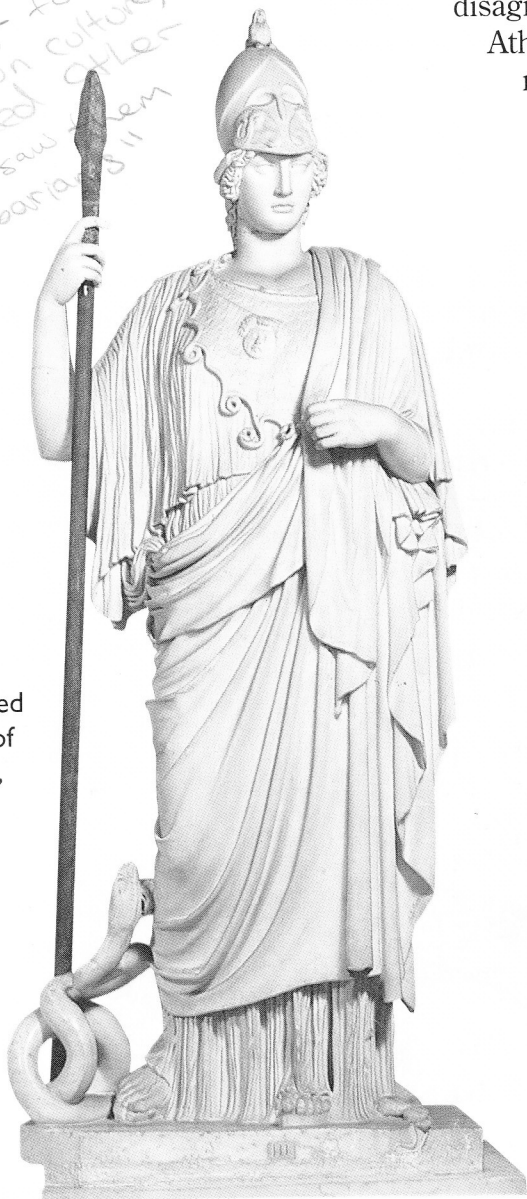
In addition to the 12 great gods led by Zeus, the Greeks worshipped many lesser ones. They also honored mythical heroes like Achilles (uh KIL eez), who had done great deeds during the Trojan War. The story of Achilles is told in the *Iliad*. - Greek gods had human faces

**Greek Science and Philosophy** Most Greeks believed that their gods were the source of all natural events. But a few thinkers disagreed. About 150 years before the Golden Age of Athens, some people thought about ways besides myths to understand the world. - love of wisdom

These people came to be called **philosophers**. They believed that people could use the power of mind and reason to understand natural events. One of the first philosophers, Thales (THAY leez), believed that water was the basic material of the world. Everything was made from it. Over the years, other philosophers had other ideas about the universe. They did not do experiments. But they were careful observers and good thinkers. Democritus (dih MAHK ruh tus), who lived in the 400s B.C., thought that everything was made of tiny particles he called atoms. More than 2,000 years later, science showed he was right.

During the Golden Age and later, several important philosophers taught in Athens. One was a man called Socrates (SOCK ruh teeZ). People in the marketplace of Athens could not help but notice this sturdy, round-faced man. He was there at all hours of the day, eagerly discussing wisdom and goodness.

Socrates wanted people to consider the true meaning of qualities such as justice and courage. To do this, he asked

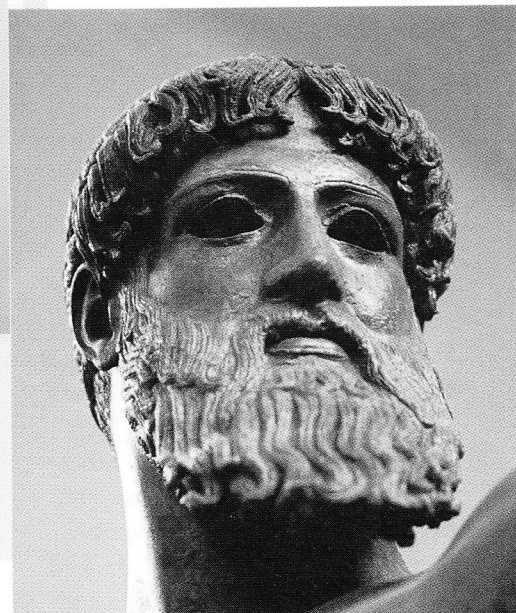


► The ancient Greeks worshipped many gods. One of them was Athena, the goddess of wisdom.

## A Family of Gods

God or Goddess	Description
Zeus (zoos)	King of the gods and goddesses. Ruler of the sky and storms. Lord of the thunderbolt. Protector of the law.
Hera (HIR uh)	Wife and queen to Zeus. Goddess of marriage and women.
Apollo (uh PAHL oh)	Son of Zeus. Handsome young god of poetry, music, and medicine.
Athena (uh THEE nuh)	Zeus' wise daughter. Goddess of crafts. War goddess who defended her cities, including Athens.
Poseidon (poh SY duhn)	Zeus' brother. Ruler of the sea and cause of earthquakes. Lord of horses.

▼ This bronze statue of the god Poseidon was made about 460 B.C.



**Chart Study** The Greeks considered these five gods to be the most powerful of the Twelve Olympians.

**Critical Thinking** Which of these gods were concerned with the way people lived? Which were related to natural events?



questions that made others think about their beliefs. Sometimes they became angry, because Socrates often showed them that they didn't know what they were talking about. "Know thyself," was his most important lesson.

Socrates' questions frightened many Athenians. This man challenged all the values of Athens. In 399 B.C., Socrates was brought to trial. The authorities accused him of dishonoring the gods and misleading young people. He was condemned to death. Friends visited Socrates in prison and urged him to flee. He replied that escape would be unacceptable behavior. He calmly drank poison and died.

## Greek Drama

What do today's plays, movies, and television shows have in common with Athens? The answer is surprising. The Athenians were the first people to write dramas. Among the city's greatest achievements were the plays written and produced there in the 400s B.C., during the Golden Age. These plays soon became popular all over the Greek world.

**Tragedy** Some of the most famous Greek plays were tragedies. A tragedy is a serious story that usually ends in disaster for the main character. Often, tragedies told of fictional humans who were destroyed when forced to make impossible choices. A Greek tragedy consisted of



**Connect** How would you feel toward Socrates if he questioned your values?

several scenes that featured the characters of the story. Between the scenes, a chorus chanted or sang poems. In most plays, the author used the chorus to give background information, comment on the events, or praise the gods.

Performances of tragedies were part of contests held during religious festivals. At the main festival at Athens in the spring, three playwrights entered four plays apiece in the contest. The city chose wealthy citizens to pay the bills for these dramatic contests.

**Comedy** Comic writers also competed at the dramatic festivals. During the 400s B.C. in Athens, these poets wrote comedies that made fun of well-known citizens and politicians and also made jokes about the customs of the day. Because of the freedom in Athens, people accepted the humor and jokes.

► **Theater at Epidaurus** This is the most famous of ancient Greek theaters. The seating area, which held 14,000 people, is built into a hillside. The round space, or orchestra, was where the action took place and the chorus danced and sang. The theater is still used for plays today. It is so well constructed that everyone can easily hear the words of the play.



## SECTION 2 REVIEW

**1. Define** (a) tribute, (b) immortal, (c) philosopher, (d) tragedy.

**2. Identify** (a) Pericles, (b) Parthenon, (c) Socrates.

**3.** What part did religion play in Athenian achievements during the Golden Age?

**4.** According to Greek philosophers, how could people understand natural events?

### Critical Thinking

#### 5. Drawing Conclusions

Why do you think Pericles called Athens “the school of all Greece”?

#### Activity

**6. Writing to Learn** Write a brief essay describing the achievements that Athenians made during the Golden Age.