Education in Athens

**In ancient Athens, the purpose of education was to produce citizens**trained in the arts, and to prepare citizens for both peace and war.

Until age 6 or so, boys were taught at home by their mother or by a male slave. From age 6 to 14, boys went to a neighborhood primary school or to a private school. Books were very expensive and rare, so subjects were read out-loud, and the boys had to memorize everything. To help them learn, they used writing tablets and rulers.

In primary school, they had to learn two important things - the words of Homer, a famous Greek epic poet, and how to play the lyre. Their teacher, who was always a man, could choose what additional subjects he wanted to teach. He might choose to teach drama, public speaking, government, art, reading, writing, math, and how to play another ancient Greek instrument - the flute.

Following that, boys attended a higher school for four more years. When they turned 18, they entered military school for two additional years. At age 20, they graduated.

Girls were not educated at school, but many learned to read and write at home in the comfort of their courtyard. They learned how to run a home, and how to be good wives and mothers.

Education in Sparta

**In ancient Sparta, the purpose of education was to produce a well-drilled, well-disciplined marching army.** Spartans believed in a life of discipline, self-denial, and simplicity. They were very loyal to the state of Sparta. Every Spartan, male or female, was required to have a perfect body.

**Spartan Boys:**Spartan boys were sent to military school at age 6 or 7. They lived, trained and slept in the barracks of their brotherhood. They were taught survival skills and other skills necessary to be a great soldier. School courses were very hard and often painful.

Although students were taught to read and write, those skills were not very important to the ancient Spartans. Only warfare mattered. The boys were not fed well, and were told that it was fine to steal food as long as they did not get caught stealing. If they were caught, they were beaten. The boys marched without shoes to make them stronger. It was a brutal training period.

***Legend says*... A young Sparta boy once stole a live fox, planning to kill it and eat it. He noticed some Spartan soldiers approaching. In ancient Sparta, students were encouraged to steal, but the trick was that you could not get caught stealing. If you were caught, you were severely beaten. As the soldiers approached, the boy hid the fox beneath his shirt. While the soldiers quizzed him on why he was not in school, the boy let the fox chew into his stomach rather than confess he had stolen it. He did not allow his face or body to express his pain. That was the Spartan way. Lie, cheat, steal, and get away with it, or else (you would be in big trouble!)**

Somewhere between the age of 18-20, Spartan males had to pass a difficult test of fitness, military ability, and leadership skills.  Any Spartan male who did not pass these examinations became a ***perioikos***. (The perioikos, or the middle class, were allowed to own property, have business dealings, but had no political rights and were not citizens.)

If they passed, they became a full citizen and a Spartan soldier. Spartan citizens were not allowed to touch money. That was the job of the middle class. Spartan soldiers spent most of their lives with their fellow soldiers. They ate, slept, and continued to train in their brotherhood barracks. Even if they were married, they did not live with their wives and families. They lived in the barracks. Military service did not end until a Spartan male reached the age of 60. At age 60, a Spartan soldier could retire and live in their home with their family.

**Spartan Girls:**In Sparta, girls also went to school at age 6 or 7. They lived, slept and trained in their sisterhood's barracks. No one knows if their school was as cruel or as rugged as the boys school, but the girls were taught wrestling, gymnastics, and combat skills. They were also taught how to read and write, something most girls in other cities did not learn. Some historians believe the two schools were very similar, and that an attempt was made to train the girls as thoroughly as they trained the boys. In any case, the Spartans believed that strong young women would produce strong babies.

At age 18, if a Sparta girl passed her skills and fitness test, she would be assigned a husband and allowed to return home. If she failed, she would lose her rights as a citizen, and became a perioikos*,*a member of the middle class.

Weddings in Athens

In ancient Athens, wedding ceremonies started after dark. The veiled bride traveled from her home to the home of the groom while standing in a chariot. Her family followed the chariot on foot, carrying the gifts. Friends of the bride and groom lit the way, carrying torches and playing music to scare away evil spirits.

During the wedding ceremony, the bride would eat an apple, or another piece of fruit, to show that food and other basic needs would now come from her husband.

Gifts to the new couple might include baskets, furniture, jewelry, mirrors, perfume, and vases filled with greenery.

Weddings in Sparta

In ancient Sparta, the ceremony was very simple. After a tussle, to prove his superior strength, the groom would toss his bride over his shoulder and carried her off. Men and women were assigned to marry one another. There was no choosing (they had little to no interaction growing up anyway). There was definitely no time for dating!

Court System of Athens

Juries in Athens started around 500 BCE. There was no public prosecutor. Anybody could bring charges against another person or persons and start a trial, but there were rules. Here’s how it worked:

**TO OPEN OR BEGIN A TRIAL:**

**Tell the person.** You had to have witnesses. If you wanted to start a trial, you could go to someone’s house, bring along some witnesses, tell the person involved the charges you were bringing.

Then, you had to give them a date and a time to appear in court where they would then have a chance to defend themselves.

**Post a written notice.**You had to write down all the information – the person’s name, your name, the charges, and the date when and location where you are going to trial – and post it near the courthouse.

**FIRST TRIP TO COURT:**The judge would ask both sides questions. If the judge felt there was enough evidence to have a trial, a date would be set.

**JURY SELECTION:**Juries were paid, not much, but they were paid. To be on a jury, you had to be a citizen over age 30. Juries were selected from volunteers. Some juries had as many as 500 people on them, to make sure the jury could not be bribed. (Nobody could be sure of buying the silence of so many different people.) Jurors had to swear that they would be fair and would listen to both sides equally. Nobody was guilty until they were voted guilty by the jury.

**COURT TRIAL:**

* PROSECUTION: The prosecution presented its side first, including all witnesses. Witnesses were not cross-examined.
* DEFENSE: Once the prosecution had their say, the defense had a chance to have theirs.
* JURORS VOTED. Jurors did not discuss the case (deliberate.) They voted. Majority ruled. If less than 100 jurors voted guilty, the prosecutor (the person bringing charges) had to pay all jury fees and court costs.
* PUNISHMENT: If a person was found guilty, there was one more step to take. Both could suggest a punishment. Those were the only two punishment choices that jurors could choose. The jury voted on which punishment to accept.

**Example:** When Socrates was tried, the prosecution’s suggested punishment was death. Socrates suggested punishment was free meals for life. The court gave him another chance to choose a punishment. Socrates suggested his punishment be a cash fine of one piece of silver. Socrates did not leave the jury a lot of choice. Out of the two choices facing the jury – punishment by death or punishment by payment of one piece of silver, the jury voted overwhelming for death. If Socrates had suggested something more severe, the jury probably would have voted for it.

Sparta’s Military

The military was extremely important to Sparta. Everything they did revolved around the military. However, this wasn’t always the case.

Early in Sparta’s history they were like many of the other city-states. They made pottery, had great artists, and worked in many different jobs. This changed due to the need for grain.

Sparta was relatively small city-state located in an area of rocky, hilly ground. As the city grew, the Spartans needed more farm land. The solution to that problem was to attack and take over their neighboring city Messene, which had great farm land. Started by trivial matters, the long war ended with Sparta taking over Messene and making all the Messenians slaves (called Helots). The Helots outnumbered the Spartans 10 to 1. To keep the Helots in check, and keep control of the fertile land of Messene, the Spartans changed their society into an extreme military nation.

From the graduation of school to the age of 60, Spartan men lived in the barracks. They trained and drilled every day. All Spartan males had to serve in the military, those that didn’t pass military school were not considered citizens and had to become craftsmen for the city.

Sparta was the only city-state that had a full time army

Government in Athens

Athens did not have a king, it was ruled by the people as a democracy. The people of Athens believed that no one group of people should make the laws and so citizens could choose the government officials, and vote for or against new laws. The people of Athens chose their ruler.

They held a large meeting on the slopes of a hill in Athens where any citizen could speak, and tell the government what it should be doing. This was called the Assembly, and there had to be at least 6,000 citizens at every Assembly.

Athenian democracy was not like modern democracy. Only citizens over 18 could vote. Women, slaves and foreigners could not become citizens. So democracy in Athens meant rule by the men of Athens.

Government in Sparta

Sparta had an oligarchy. Sparta’s government was slightly confusing, but was created to lead a military. They had two kings, a council of retired military officers called the Gerousia and an assembly.

Athens Extra

When most people today think about ancient Greece, what they actually think and know about is Athens. The knowledge and culture of Athens has greatly affected the world we live in. Also, because many writers, playwrights, and pottery makers came from Athens, we have many records to tell us about them.

Athens was famous for their arts and science. Many of the Greek plays came from Athens. Also, many of the math and science that we have from the Greeks came out of the city of Athens. Athens encouraged art and learning (much like Sparta encouraged military strength). Because of this, many famous Athenians are still known for their accomplishments today. Many of their math formulas are still used, and their plays set the structure that today’s plays, tv shows, and movies are based.

Sparta Extra

Sparta was greatly revered in its time, and still is today. Here are a few facts on Sparta that will help you understand its unique culture.

As adults, Spartan women, unlike women in the rest of Greek world, had a great deal of freedom.  Many ran businesses. Sparta women were free to move about and visit neighbors without permission from their husbands. How would they get permission? The men were often off fighting.

 Spartans believed in a life of discipline, self-denial, and simplicity. They were very loyal to the state of Sparta. Every Spartan, male or female, was required to have a perfect body.  When babies were born in ancient Sparta, Spartan soldiers would come by the house and check the baby. If the baby did not appear healthy and strong, the infant was taken away, and left to die on a hillside, or taken away to be trained as a slave (a ***helot***). Babies who passed this examination were assigned membership in a brotherhood or sisterhood, usually the same one to which their father or mother belonged.

Athens’ Philosophy

Ancient Greek philosophy is dominated by three very famous men: [Socrates](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/philosophy/socrates.htm), [Plato](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/philosophy/plato.htm), and [Aristotle](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/philosophy/aristotle.htm). All three of these lived in Athens for most of their lives, and they knew each other. [Socrates](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/philosophy/socrates.htm) came first, and [Plato](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/philosophy/plato.htm) was his student, around 400[BC](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/bc.htm). Socrates was killed in 399 [BC](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/bc.htm), and Plato began his work by writing down what Socrates had taught, and then continued by writing down his own ideas and opening a school. [Aristotle](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/philosophy/aristotle.htm), who was younger, came to study at Plato's school, and ended up starting his own school as well.

In the years after Plato and Aristotle died, in the 200s [BC](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/bc.htm), three famous kinds of philosophy started up in the schools that [Plato](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/philosophy/plato.htm) and [Aristotle](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/philosophy/aristotle.htm) had started. These are the [Stoics](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/philosophy/stoics.htm) (happiness comes from moderation), the [Skeptics](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/philosophy/skeptics.htm) (do we really know anything), and the [Epicureans](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/philosophy/epicureans.htm) (happiness come from limiting wants). Each of these continued to be important ways of thinking about the world all the way through the [Roman Empire](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/romans/index.htm), until people converted to [Christianity](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/religion/christians/constantine.htm) in the 300s [AD](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/ad.htm), and even after that.