

# Ancient Greece



# The Geography of Greece

The present-day country of Greece is located on the Balkan Peninsula in southern Europe. A peninsula is a piece of land mostly surrounded by water and connected to a larger part of land. The Balkan Peninsula is surrounded by three seas – the Aegean Sea on the east, the Ionian Sea on the west, and the Mediterranean Sea on the south.

To the east of Greece, beyond the Aegean Sea, is a part of Asia called Asia Minor, or “Little Asia.” Today the country of Turkey fills Asia Minor.

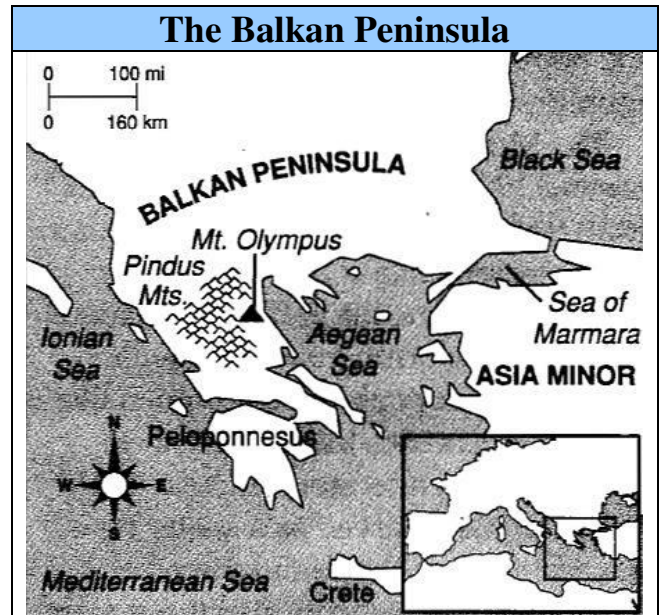
About 2,000 islands can be found in the seas all around Greece. One of the largest islands, Crete, lays southeast of Greece.

The southern part of Greece is called the Peloponnesus. The Ionian Sea and the Mediterranean Sea almost cut off the Peloponnesus from the rest of Greece. Only a small strip of land, or isthmus, keeps the Peloponnesus connected to the mainland of Greece.

The land of Greece is rocky and mountainous. In fact, nearly three-fourths of Greece is covered by mountains. Scattered

throughout this rugged land are valleys and small plains.

Long ago, the Balkan Peninsula and much of the land around it was home to the ancient Greeks. These early people farmed the rocky land and fished in the nearby seas.



## Review

### **CHECK UNDERSTANDING**

1. What is a peninsula?
2. What are the three seas that surround Greece?

### **THINK CRITICALLY**

3. How do you think the geography of Greece affected the people who lived there long ago?

### **SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW**

**Internet Search Activity:** Write a list of five things that you would like to know about Greece and its geography. From this list, create key words that could help you do a search on the Internet.

# Early People of Greece

In 1899 an archaeologist named Arthur Evans discovered the ruins of an ancient palace on the island of Crete. Evans decided to call the civilization on Crete the Minoan civilization in honor of a king named Minos from a Greek myth. Today we still refer to the people of ancient Crete as Minoans.

People probably first settled in Crete about 7000 B.C. For a long time they lived in small farming communities. As the population on Crete grew, the communities grew into towns and cities.

The Minoans built their first palace around 1900 B.C. at the city of Knossos. This palace was more than three stories tall and had hundreds of rooms. The Minoans painted the palace walls with colorful scenes of plants, animals, and people. Palaces much like the one at Knossos but smaller were built at other cities around Crete. Each Minoan palace served as a center for government for the community.

Minoan palaces were also the centers for managing the economy of Crete. An economy is the way people in a place use

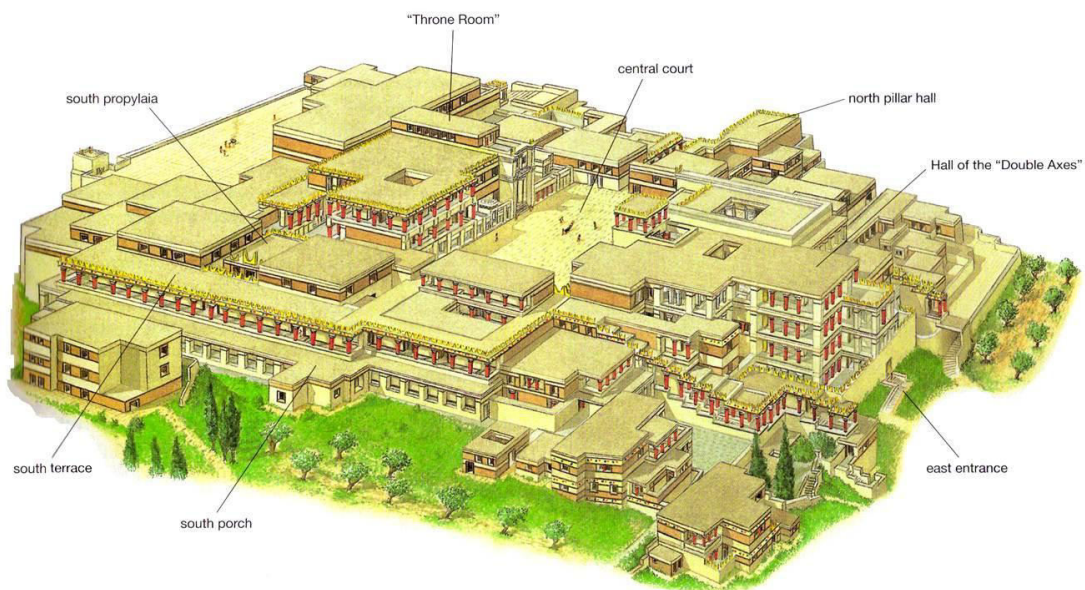
resources to meet their needs. Farmers brought natural resources such as olives and wool to the palaces. There the resources were stored and given out to people as needed. To keep track of the resources, the Minoans developed a system of writing.

The Minoans also traded their resources with people across the seas. They sailed to places as far away as Egypt in Africa and Syria in Southwest Asia. The Minoans traded pottery, wool, wine, and olive oil for tin, copper, and gold.

The Peloponnesus was one of many stopping places of Minoan trading ships. There the Minoans traded with the early people of the Greek mainland, now known as the Mycenaeans. The name Mycenaean comes from the ancient Greek city Mycenae.

The trade between the two groups of people made them aware of each other's culture. The Mycenaeans began to borrow many ideas from the Minoans including art, writing, and religious beliefs. The Mycenaeans adapted, or changed, what they borrowed to fit their own way of life.

## Minoan Palace

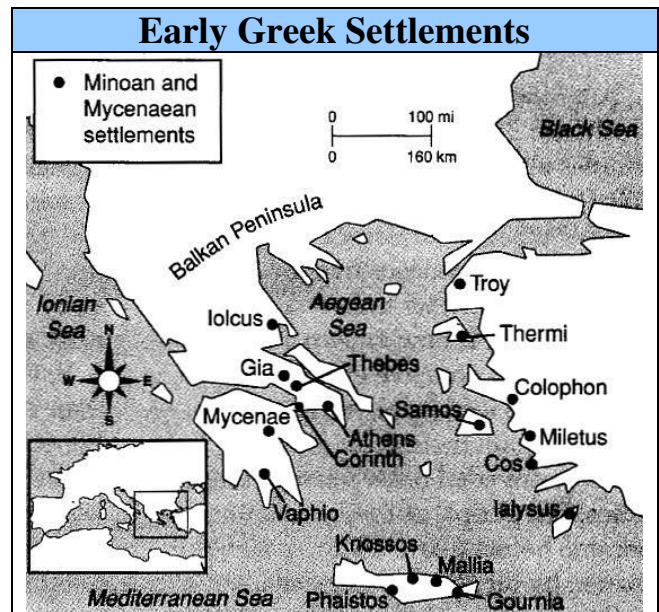


Like the Minoans the Mycenaeans built palaces. However, Mycenaean palaces were smaller and were surrounded by thick walls. The fact that the Mycenaeans needed to build walls suggests that they had to protect themselves from enemies.

About 1450 B.C. the Mycenaeans invaded Crete and took over the Minoan government. The Mycenaeans controlled Crete and the Peloponnesus for several hundred years. Then about 1100 B.C. the Mycenaean civilization weakened.

About four centuries later a poet named Homer wrote two epics about the lost Mycenaean culture. His epics were based on stories that had been told and retold about Mycenaeans.

Homer's first epic, the Iliad, tells of a war between the Mycenaeans and a people from Asia Minor. The Odyssey continues the story by telling the adventures of the hero Odysseus as he travels home from this war. Many people still read those poems to learn more about the ancient Greeks.



## Review

### ***CHECK UNDERSTANDING***

1. How did the Minoans get their name?
2. What are two differences between the Minoans and the Mycenaeans?

### ***THINK CRITICALLY***

3. Why do you think the Mycenaeans borrowed and then adapted much of the Minoan culture?

### ***SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW***

**Art Activity:** With one or two classmates, find a picture of a Minoan wall painting in a book about the ancient Greeks. Using the picture as a guide, draw your own Minoan wall painting on a large sheet of posterboard. Color the drawing in with bright paint, crayons, or markers.

# Sparta

After the Mycenaean civilization weakened, the people went back to a simpler way of life. Then about 800 B.C. settlements and villages began to grow up again in Greece. In the southern Peloponnesus five small villages joined together to form a city-state. This city-state is now known as Sparta.

Sparta did not have enough natural resources to feed its growing population. To gain more farmland, the Spartans invaded other nearby communities. The people of these communities became helots, or slaves owned by the Spartan city-state.

Sparta had many more slaves than citizens. Fear of the slaves fighting for their freedom led the Spartans to adopt a war-like way of life.

At the age of seven, Spartan boys were sent to camps where they learned to be good soldiers. At these camps they were taught leadership skills and loyalty to the group. Most importantly, they learned never to give up during a battle. Most boys had to serve in the Spartan army until they were 60.

The lives of Spartan girls took a different path. When Spartan girls turned seven, they studied gymnastics and running. Like Spartan boys, the girls were training for

their role in life. Spartan girls were taught at an early age that their main job was to raise strong children.

Spartan women had more rights than women in other Greek city-states. For example, they were allowed to own property. However, Spartan women were not allowed to take part in the government.

Sparta had two kings who served as generals. These kings were part of a 30-member council. The council helped decide Sparta's laws. The members of Sparta's council were elected by an assembly, or a group of people. All male Spartan citizens over the age of 30 could be part of the assembly.

The Spartan government had strict control over its citizens' lives. Spartan laws told people how to cut their hair, when they could be married, and whether to have children.



## Review

### ***CHECK UNDERSTANDING***

1. What training were Spartan boys given? What training were Spartan girls given?

### ***THINK CRITICALLY***

2. Why do you think Spartan boys were taught to never give up in battle?

### ***SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW***

**Table Activity:** Make a table that shows the difference between the lives of Spartan men and Spartan women. You can use information from other resources to complete your table.

# Athens

Athens, the present-day capital of Greece, is located northeast of the Peloponnesus. About 2,500 years ago, Athens was a powerful city-state named for Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. Because Athens was near the sea, it became a rich trading city.

In Athens, people believed that the citizens should help make all the government decisions. This did not include women and slaves, who could not take part in the government.

Forty times a year, male citizens gathered in a large outdoor theater. There they discussed issues and problems in their city and voted on them. This kind of government is called a democracy, or rule by the people. Each male citizen had one vote. They usually voted by a show of hands, but sometimes votes were written down and counted. The decision that received the most votes was put into effect. This is called majority rule.

Like most Greek city-states, Athens built a fort on top of a high hill for protection. This hill was called the acropolis. Later, temples were built on the acropolis. The most famous temple in Athens was the Parthenon, which was built to honor Athena. The ruins of this temple still stand in modern Athens.

Outside the acropolis was the market, or agora. In the agora there were workshops for craftspeople, as well as temples, theaters, and other public buildings.

Most Athenian houses were small and built close together along narrow streets. The

rooms of the houses included bedrooms, dining rooms, and storage rooms. All these opened onto a courtyard.



Wealthy Athenian women were expected to stay at home and take care of the house. They appeared in public only for religious gatherings and special occasions, such as weddings and festivals. Women who lived in the country probably helped with the farming. Poorer women living in town may have kept shops alone or with their husbands.



Public, or free, education did not exist in Athens. Poorer Athenian children learned farming and craft-making from their parents. Girls from wealthy Athenian families were taught at home as well, but they learned reading, writing, and mathematics. These subjects would help them later as they ran their households.

Usually the only Athenian children taught by teachers were boys from wealthy families. Their parents paid a private tutor to teach them reading, writing, mathematics, and music. When they grew into young men, their fathers and uncles taught them about Athenian democracy. The art of public speaking was also an important part of a young man's education.

## Acropolis



## Review

### *CHECK UNDERSTANDING*

1. What kind of government did Athens have?
2. How does majority rule work?

### *THINK CRITICALLY*

3. How were the city-states of Athens and Sparta the same? How were they different?

### *SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW*

**Speech Activity:** Speech-making was an important part of most Athenians' lives. Imagine that you are a citizen of Athens. Write a speech about a new law you think would be good for the city. Present your speech to the class. Then hold a vote to decide whether to adopt the new law.

# Greek Culture

The Greeks are remembered for their ideas in history, the arts, science, and language. Many of these ideas still influence our culture today.

For hundreds of years the Greeks relied on their memories to pass on important information. Once they developed a writing system, they were able to record information in a more permanent way. Some experts believe the Greeks developed their writing system to keep track of daily records. Others believe the Greeks wanted to be able to write down the epics that meant so much to them.

The alphabet the Greeks used was based on the Phoenician alphabet. Unlike the Phoenician alphabet, however, the Greek alphabet had 24 letters. Each letter stood for a separate spoken sound.

Many present-day languages use words based on the ancient Greek language. English, for example, owes words such as hero, history, school, paper, and poet to the Greeks.

Greek literature and art have also

influenced present-day culture. The Greeks gave us many myths. The Greeks used myths to explain things in the natural world they did not understand such as lightning, thunder, and death. Greek myths also followed the deeds of Greek gods, goddesses, and heroes.

**Theater Mask**



**Amphitheater**





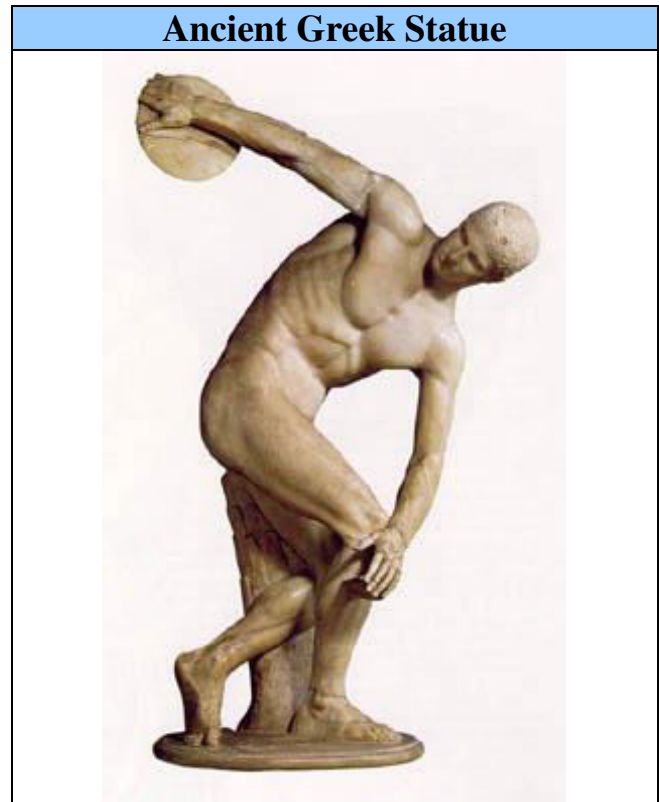
In later years Greek writers such as Sophocles and Euripides wrote plays based on these myths. The Greeks wrote both tragedies and comedies. Tragedies are serious plays that almost always have sad endings. Plays that end happily and make the audience laugh are comedies.

Greek plays were performed during the day in outdoor theaters called amphitheaters. Male actors played all the parts in the plays, even characters who were women. The actors wore masks and spoke with strong, loud voices so they could be heard by the entire audience.

The Greeks enjoyed looking at beautiful buildings and sculptures as much as watching a good play. They built their buildings in a simple, balanced style. A typical Greek temple was rectangular in shape and surrounded by tall columns. Greek statues were also both beautiful and simple. Greek artists studied the human body closely so their statues would be lifelike.

People see remains of the ancient Greek culture in their everyday lives. Some ancient Greek myths, plays, and buildings still survive today. Many modern poems and books are based on Greek myths. Throughout the

centuries many museums, libraries, government buildings, and houses have been built following ancient Greek styles.



**Review**

***CHECK UNDERSTANDING***

1. How many letters were in the alphabet used by the ancient Greeks?
2. What is the difference between a tragedy and a comedy?

***THINK CRITICALLY***

3. Why do you think the Greeks continue to have a great influence on our culture today?

***SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW***

**Myth-Writing Activity:** Reread about Greek myths. Based on your reading, write your own Greek myth. Remember to include gods, goddesses, or heroes in your myth. Your myth should explain some natural event, such as tornadoes or snow.

# The Olympic Games

The first Olympic Games were held in Greece more than 2,700 years ago to honor Zeus, the ruler of Greek gods. The games took place at Olympia, a plain in the northwestern Peloponnesus. As many as 40,000 people attended the first Olympic Games. These games lasted one day and had just one event – a footrace.

As time went by, the Olympic Games grew to be five days long. Athletes competed in many events such as footraces, chariot races, boxing, and wrestling. One of the most important events was the pentathlon. In the pentathlon, athletes took part in five separate contests including throwing, jumping, running, and wrestling.

Olympic games were open only to men. Women athletes were not allowed to compete in any of the events. They could not even watch the games.

Every four years for more than a thousand years, athletes from many different Greek cities competed in the Olympic Games. During the time of the Olympics, the Greek city-states made sure that people could travel safely to and from the games – even if there was a war going on along the way! It can truly

be said that the Olympic Games helped encourage peace among the people of Greece.

The first modern Olympic Games were held in 1896 in Athens, Greece. This time, athletes from all over the world gathered in Greece to revive the ancient tradition. Four years later during the Olympic Games in Paris, France, women were allowed to compete for the first time.

The modern Olympic Games have been held every four years at different cities around the world. The games have gone on despite wars and political problems. The message of peace among peoples is still the most important part of the Olympic Games.

## Olympic Winners Were Crowned With an Olive Wreath



## Review

### ***CHECK UNDERSTANDING***

1. Why were the Olympic Games first held?

### ***THINK CRITICALLY***

2. Do you think the Olympic Games caused or ended problems between the Greek city-states? Explain your answer.

### ***SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW***

**Role-Playing Activity:** In a small group, write and act out a scene related to the ancient Olympic Games.

# The Greek Philosophers

Between 500 B.C. and 300 B.C. many great teachers and thinkers lived in the city-state of Athens. These people were called philosophers, after the Greek words meaning “lovers of wisdom.” The philosophers believed that all ideas should be based on truth and reason. The teachings of these people would influence other people for thousands of years to come.

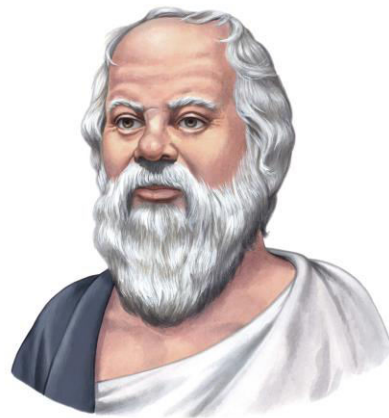
One of the most famous Greek philosophers was a man named Socrates. Socrates believed it was important to question every idea. He began his questioning by asking people for their definition of a feeling such as happiness, or a quality such as courage. The answers people gave would lead to more questions. In this way Socrates taught people to think for themselves instead of simply accepting the easiest answers. When Socrates was 70 years old, the government of Greece ordered him to be put to death. They believed he was teaching dangerous ideas to the young people of Greece.

Many of Socrates’ ideas were written down by his student Plato. Plato also wrote down his own ideas. One of the books written by Plato, called *The Republic*, was a description of what he considered the perfect

government. Plato is also known for beginning the Academy, a school that lasted for over 900 years.

The philosopher named Aristotle studied under Plato at the Academy for almost 20 years. Unlike Plato, who loved mathematics, Aristotle was fascinated by science. Aristotle believed it was important to learn by watching. He spent many hours studying things in nature such as plants and animals. Aristotle recorded his ideas in many books that are still read by people today.

Socrates



## Review

### ***CHECK UNDERSTANDING***

1. Name three important ancient Greek philosophers.

### ***THINK CRITICALLY***

2. Do you think Socrates was a good teacher? Explain.

### ***SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW***

**Question-Writing Activity:** Socrates taught by asking his students questions. Write down a question that you feel will make people think. Then form a small group to discuss the questions group members have written.

# Alexander the Great

For many years, villages dotted the mountainous land of Macedonia, north of the Greek city-states. Then, about 359 B.C. a ruler named Philip II brought the villages together to form a strong kingdom. With all of Macedonia under his control, Philip II looked south for more land. Soon he began to conquer, or take over, the many independent Greek city-states on the Balkan Peninsula. At the Battle of Chaeronea, Philip won control of the last of these city-states.

For the first time, the Greek city-states on the Balkan Peninsula became united under one ruler. Philip did not take over the Greek city-states to destroy them. In fact, he wanted to help preserve them. Philip thought very highly of the Greek people and their ideas. Because of this, he took on many of their customs.

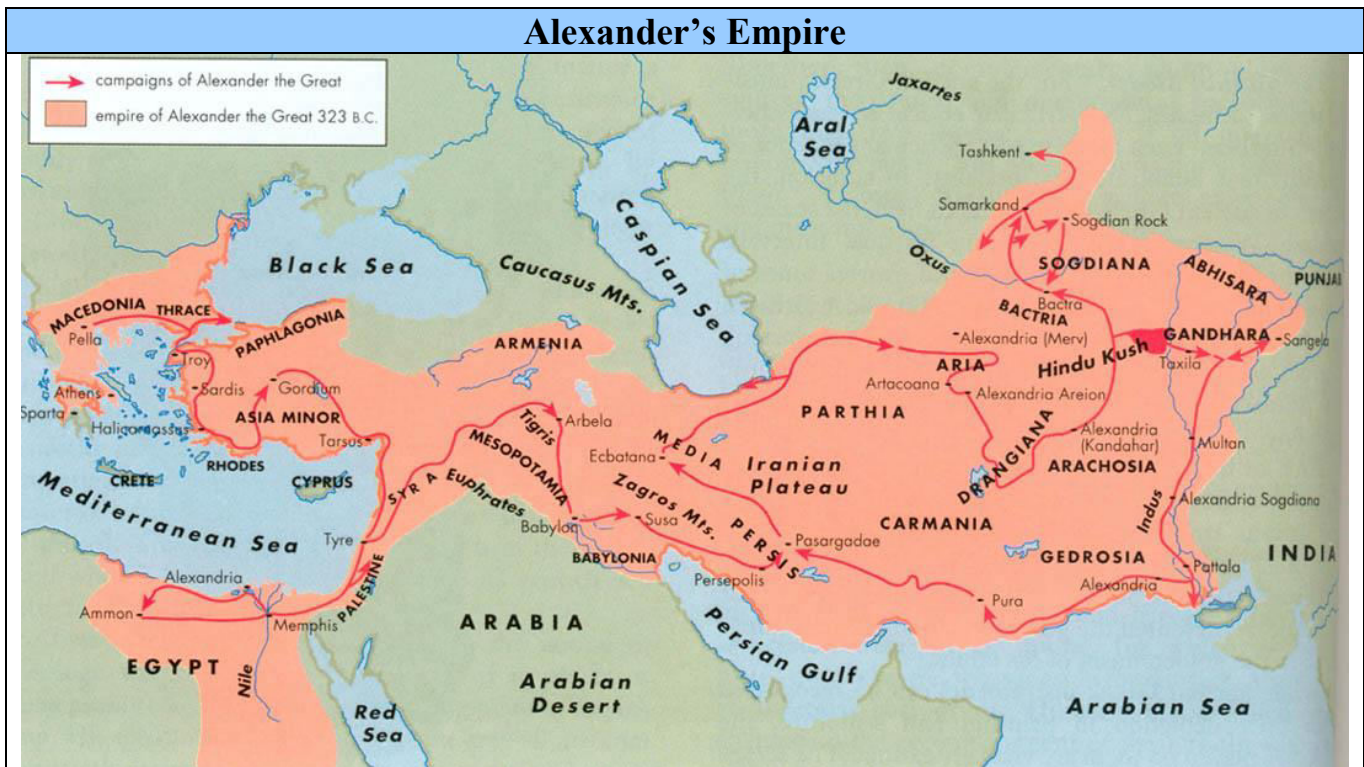
After gaining control of the Balkan Peninsula, Philip soon turned his attention to Asia. He wanted to free the Greek city-states in

Asia that had long been ruled by the Persian Empire. Before he could do this, though, he was killed. His 20-year-old son, Alexander, became the new king.

Alexander continued his father's plans. In 334 B.C. the young leader led his army of 35,000 soldiers into Asia. After many battles Alexander ended the Persians' control of the Greek city-states in Asia. But the city-states were not freed. Instead, they became part of Alexander's empire.

With these victories, Alexander prepared to claim all the world known to him. To Alexander, the world included eastern Europe, northern Africa, and western Asia.

Alexander and his army marched through Asia, capturing Syria, Egypt, and other lands. All along the way Alexander built new cities. He named many of these Alexandria. One city – Alexandria, Egypt-became known far and wide as a center of learning.



Like his father, Alexander admired Greek culture. Everywhere he went Alexander introduced the Greek way of life. Across the empire people learned to understand the Greek religion. At the same time Alexander borrowed customs from those he conquered. He did this to make them feel like they were a part of his empire. However, no other culture influenced the empire as much as Greek culture did.

Alexander and his soldiers continued their march east. First Mesopotamia fell. Then the entire Persian Empire became theirs. Alexander planned next to move into India. However, his dream of taking over this land never came to be.

By this time, Alexander and his army had been fighting for more than seven years. They had traveled thousands of miles. Alexander wanted to continue, but his soldiers refused. They were tired of fighting. They insisted on turning back. Alexander finally agreed. He and his army headed west toward home. On the way back, Alexander became ill and died.

Not long after his death, Alexander's empire broke up into small kingdoms. Even so, Alexander had a lasting effect on the world. He had introduced Greek culture to a large number of people. Knowledge of Greek thought led to

many new ideas. People in the lands once ruled by Alexander began to make new discoveries about mathematics, the planets, and medicine.

### Alexander the Great



Because Greek ideas played such a strong part during this period of time, it has become known as the Hellenistic, or “Greek-like” Age. The word Hellenistic comes from the name Hellen. Hellen was a hero believed to have been the ancestor of all Greek people.

## Review

### *CHECK UNDERSTANDING*

1. Who was Alexander? Why is he remembered?

### *THINK CRITICALLY*

2. Why do you think Alexander became known as Alexander the Great?

### *SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW*

**Speaking Activity:** Alexander was a strong leader for his times. Yet many of his ideas would not work well for leaders today. What qualities and skills do you think a leader of today needs? Prepare a speech that tells the qualities and skills you think a modern leader should have.

# Test

## ***CHECK UNDERSTANDING***

Directions: Match the word or words in Column B with the correct definition in Column A.

### COLUMN A

- \_\_\_ 1. the way people in a place use resources to meet their needs
- \_\_\_ 2. to change
- \_\_\_ 3. a small strip of land connecting two larger pieces of land
- \_\_\_ 4. a piece of land mostly surrounded by water and connected to a larger part of land
- \_\_\_ 5. rule by the people
- \_\_\_ 6. when the decision that receives the most votes is put into effect
- \_\_\_ 7. “lovers of wisdom”
- \_\_\_ 8. outdoor theater

### COLUMN B

- A. philosophers
- B. democracy
- C. majority rule
- D. amphitheater
- E. adapt
- F. economy
- G. peninsula
- H. isthmus

## ***THINK CRITICALLY***

Directions: Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

9. How is the present-day government of the United States like the government of Athens? How is it different? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Why do you think Alexander the Great conquered so many lands? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## ***SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW***

**Poster:** Make a poster showing some of the achievements of the Greeks. Divide your poster into four sections, and label the sections Art, Language, Building, and History. Under each section, draw and color a scene that shows an achievement that fits the section topic.