Name: _____

Date: _____

ANCIENT GREECE
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Democracy in Athens

In the fifth century BCE, male citizens of Athens assembled about forty times a year on a hillside near the Acropolis to run the polis. By a show of hands, they voted on laws, war, and taxes. No elected representatives cast those votes. Citizens cast them directly.

The Boule

The Council of 500, called the boule, was chosen randomly from among qualified citizens. It prepared the Assembly's agenda and managed the daily affairs of the polis. At the end of their term, council members faced an audit of their work and spending.

The Power of the People

This radical new government was called democracy, or the power of the people. The Greek word *demos* meant people, and *kratos* meant power. Most modern democracies are representative democracies called republics: people elect representatives to make laws and make decisions for them. Athens had a direct democracy. Citizens gathered in the Assembly to make many of the polis's major decisions.

Athens and the Sea

People have lived in the Athens area for more than 7,000 years. Unlike Sparta, Athens was closely connected to the sea. Its nearby harbor welcomed ships from throughout the Mediterranean. Athenian sailors and merchants encountered cultures and ideas. Trade made Athens wealthier and connected it to the wider world.

The Aristocrats

For generations, a small group of wealthy families controlled Athens. Known as the aristoi—meaning "the best"—these landowners held most political power and most of the land. When a crop failed and farmers fell into debt, aristocratic creditors could seize their land and even sell them into slavery.

Draco

As disorder spread and debt threatened to tear the polis apart, the ruling class appointed a lawmaker named Draco in 621 BCE to codify the laws and restore order. Rather than easing the tension, Draco's code established death as the mandatory penalty for many offenses. Plutarch later wrote that Draco imposed the death penalty for stealing a cabbage. The severity of these penalties failed to calm the populace, and the term draconian remains a permanent description for merciless laws.

Solon

An aristocrat named Solon restored order. Solon repealed most of Draco's laws, canceled debts, and freed Athenians held for debt. He also allowed male citizens to vote for officials, hold aristocratic leaders accountable for their actions, and appeal a government official's decision to a jury of their fellow citizens. In the years following Solon's death, further change expanded the Assembly's power until it met regularly and decided all of the laws of the polis.

The Phalanx

The Athenian army fought in a phalanx, a military formation of soldiers with overlapping shields that moved together as a unit. This formation was more powerful than any single aristocratic warrior. Its soldiers fought on foot, allowing many citizens who were not aristocrats to serve in the army. As these men became important to Athens's defense, they demanded a greater voice in how the polis was governed.

The Limits of Athenian Democracy

Only adult men born to Athenian parents could participate in the Assembly. Women could own property but did not have the right to vote. They had time to work on public affairs because slaves did most of the physical work in the polis. Some historians estimate that nearly half of the people living in Athens were slaves. Consequently, the members of the Assembly accounted for only a small fraction of the total population of the polis.

Athenian democracy was limited: women, slaves, and foreign residents had no vote. But its example inspired the framers of the American Constitution more than two thousand years later.

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Name: _____

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Fill in the Blanks

In the f__f__h century BCE, male c__t__z__ns of Athens gathered in the A__s__m__ly about f__r__y times a year to voted on l__ws, war, and t__x__s. The boule, a "C__u__c__l of 500 chosen r__n__o__ly, prepared the Assembly's a__e__da and managed d__i__y affairs. This was democracy, or power of the p__o__le. Earliuer in Athens history, wq__a__t__y *aristoi* controlled the p__l__s. When f__r__e__s fell into debt, c__e__i__o__s could seize their land and even sell the debtors into s__a__e__y. In 621 BCE, D__a__o wrote harsh laws that made d__a__h the penalty for many offenses. S__l__n repealed most of Draco's laws, c__n__el__d debts, and f__e__d Athenians held for debt. Further change e__p__n__ed the A__s__m__ly's power. The Athenians fought in a p__a__a__x, and its c__t__z__n-soldiers demanded a greater v__i__e in government. As a result the, Assembly developed, but only adult m__n born to Athenian p__r__n__s were allowed to p__r__i__ip__te. Women could own p__o__e__ty but could not v__te, and s__a__es did most p__y__ic__l work in the polis. Athens later i__s__i__ed writers of the American C__n__t__t__t__on.

Answer in Complete Sentence

1. Who were the aristocrats of ancient Athens?

_____

_____

_____

*2. Make up a draconian punishment for something that may happen today.

_____

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_____

*3. Why do you think the members of the boule chosen by lot instead of in an election? Do you think this is a good idea?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Explain why Athenian democracy was limited.

_____

_____

_____

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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