Name: _____

Date: _____

The Cradle of Western Civilization

Every time you watch the Olympic Games, vote in an election, or hear the story of Hercules, you're encountering a world of explorers, athletes, storytellers, brilliant thinkers, and larger-than-life heroes. Ancient Greece was never the largest empire or the richest civilization. Yet its shadow spans centuries, and its ideas still shape the world we live in.

More than 2,500 years ago, on the shores of the Mediterranean, Greek thinkers began to challenge the old myths. They looked to the laws of nature, dared to question the rule of kings, and sparked a firestorm of curiosity that has inspired human achievement for over two millennia.

Mountains and the Sea

Greece occupies a rocky peninsula and hundreds of islands in southeastern Europe. A peninsula is a piece of land almost surrounded by water. Because the mountainous land and poor soil could not grow enough food for a growing population, the Greeks turned to the sea to survive. They soon discovered the Mediterranean offered far more than fish; it became a highway to new trading partners and fresh ideas. As Greek sailors traveled, they learned from other cultures—even adapting their alphabet from the seafaring Phoenicians of the eastern Mediterranean.

The Poleis

Today, Greece is a modern nation with a common identity. Ancient Greece was very different. Mountains, valleys, and the sea fragmented its people into hundreds of independent city-states called poleis. Bound by a common language and a family of gods, yet far enough apart to govern themselves, these isolated communities became laboratories for new ways of thinking.

Thinkers Who Changed the World

The ancient Greeks produced some of history's greatest thinkers. Herodotus and Thucydides transformed the study of history. Euclid organized the principles of geometry. Socrates and Plato asked questions about truth, justice, and the best way to live. Ancient Greek ideas often provide the framework for how we think about government, justice, science, and the search for truth.

Stories That Never Died

The stories of Greek mythology have mostly outlived the religion that inspired them. They continue to influence books, movies, plays, and works of art today. The Greeks also developed comedy and tragedy, two styles of storytelling that continue to entertain audiences around the world.

A cradle is a small bed for an infant. Ancient Greece is called the Cradle of Western Civilization because many of the ideas that shaped Europe and the Americas were first nurtured there. When the Romans adopted Greek culture, they carried these ideas forward, allowing them to grow and shape our modern world.

The Eastern and Western Worlds

Today, people often divide the world into the West and the East. These ideas have changed over time, but they trace many of their roots to ancient Greece. The Greeks thought of Europe as lying to the west and Asia to the east. Over the centuries, the nations of Europe—and later North and South America—came to be known as the Western world because they inherited many ideas from ancient Greece and Rome.

Australia and New Zealand are also considered part of the Western world, even though they lie east of Asia. Their governments, laws, languages, and many traditions developed from European civilization. In history, "the West" describes a shared cultural heritage, not simply a location on a map. Ancient Greece is called the Cradle of Western Civilization because many of those ideas first took shape there.

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Fill in the Blanks

Ancient Greece was never the l__r__e__t or r__c__e__t civilization, but its i__e__s still shape the world today. Greek t__i__ke__s challenged myths, studied the laws of n__t__re, and inspired curiosity. Greece is located on a rocky p__n__n__u__a in southeastern E__ro__e. Greece's poor soil made f__r__i__g difficult, so many Greeks turned to the M__d__t__r__a__e__n Sea. They became sailors who t__a__ed with other cultures and l__a__n__d new ideas. The Greeks adapted an alphabet from the P__o__n__c__a__s. Mountains and seas d__v__d__d Greece into i__d__p__n__e__t city-states called p__l__is. Greek thinkers such as H__r__d__t__s, Thucydides, E__c__id, Socrates, and P__a__o shaped h__s__o__y, geometry, j__s__i__e, science, and p__i__o__o__hy. Greek m__t__o__o__y, comedy, and *t__a__e__i__s still influence books, movies, plays, and art. Because the *R__mns later adopted and spread Greek culture, Greece became known as the C__a__le of W__s__e__n Civilization.

Answer in Complete Sentence

1. According to the text, why were the Greek motivated to become sailors?

_____

_____

_____

*2. Modern Greece has borders, but what made a poleis or a village Greek? [Hint: look carefully in the section titled The Poelis.]

_____

_____

_____

3. Why is Greece known as the Cradle of Western Civilization?

_____

_____

_____

4. Why are Australia and New Zealand also considered part of the Western world despite being closer to Asia than Europe of North and South America?

_____

_____

_____

*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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