Name: _____

Date: _____

ANCIENT GREECE
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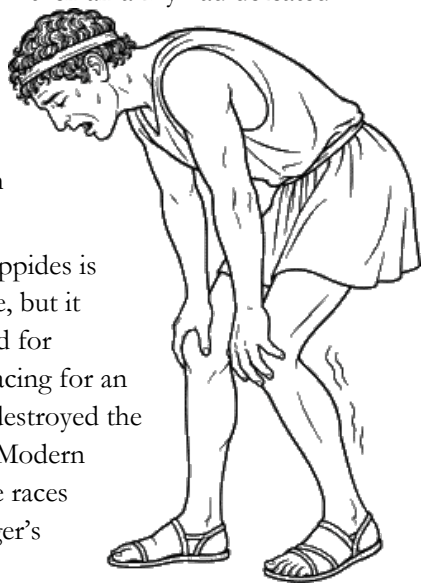
The Greco-Persian Wars

A messenger named (fye-DIP-ih-deez) ran from Marathon to Athens with astonishing news: despite being outnumbered, the Athenian army had defeated Persia, the world's most powerful empire. After delivering the news, he collapsed and died from exhaustion.



The story of Pheidippides is almost certainly not true, but it would be told and retold for centuries. Instead of bracing for an attack that might have destroyed the polis, Athens was safe. Modern marathons are 26.2-mile races inspired by the messenger's legendary run.

The Persian Threat

The ancient Greeks shared a common language and pantheon of gods, but until the fifth century before the Common Era, the poli were often at war with one another. They came together to compete in the Olympics, but what truly united the city-states was fear of a common enemy, the great Persian Empire that lay east of the Greek peninsula.

Persia conquered the Greek poli of Ionia on the west coast of Asia Minor, a region now part of Turkey. When the Ionians rebelled in 499 BCE, Athens sent twenty warships to help them fight the Persians. Persia crushed the Ionians, but King Darius then turned his attention to Athens.

The Battle of Marathon

In 490 BCE, Persian ships carried about 20,000 warriors to Marathon, a coastal plain twenty-six miles from Athens. The Persians planned to use Marathon as a base to attack, but the Athenian army sealed off the routes from Marathon to Athens. After several days, Athens launched a daring attack, charging across the plain under a barrage of Persian arrows. The defeated Persians fled to their ships, but instead of sailing home, they sailed toward Athens.

When the Persian fleet reached Athens, they found the same army waiting for them. The soldiers had marched twenty-six miles after fighting at Marathon, carrying their heavy shields and armor. The frustrated Persians turned their ships around and sailed home.

The Persians Return

Ten years after the Persian retreat at Marathon, Darius's son Xerxes returned with an enormous army and fleet. The Persians marched into Athens, but most Athenians had already escaped by sea. Xerxes captured the nearly deserted city and burned it. In 480 BCE, the smaller Greek fleet lured the Persians into the narrow waters near Salamis, where their ships became crowded and difficult to maneuver. From a mountaintop, Xerxes watched as the Greeks rammed and sank many of his vessels. Defeated, Xerxes returned to Asia, but Persia remained powerful and continued to control Ionia.

The Delian League

In 478 BCE, several poli met on the island of Delos to form a league. Each member contributed ships or money to prepare for Persia's return. The Delian League drove Persian forces out of Ionia. As the league grew stronger, the Greek poli no longer lived in fear of another Persian invasion.

The Classical Age

The victorious Greeks developed a sense of confidence that led to an era we now call the Classical Age of Greece. During this period, artists, poets, sculptors, and architects developed a unique Greek culture. Sparta and Athens were the two most powerful poli of the Classical Age. Sparta was a disciplined military poli that discouraged traveling and visitors, while Athens was a port city whose merchant ships traveled throughout the Mediterranean Sea. In time, the rivalry between Sparta and Athens would lead to the disastrous Peloponnesian War.

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Fill in the Blanks

The Greek poli, though sharing a l__n__ua__e and g__ds, were often at w__r with one another until fear of P__r__ia united them. Persia conquered I__n__a, and when the Ionians r__b__l__ed in 499 BCE, A__h__ns sent w__r__hi__s to help. In *r__v__n__e, King Darius sent a large i__v__s__on force to M__r__th__n in 490 BCE. The o__t__u__b__r__d Athenian army defeated the P__r__ia__s, then marched t__e__ty-s__x miles back *h__me to block the Persian f__e__t from attacking. A m__s__e__g__r named Pheidippides is said to have run to A__h__ns with news of the *v__c__o__y, then died from e__h__u__ti__n—the legendary origin of the modern m__r__t__on. Ten years later, D__r__us's son X__rx__s invaded. His army burned a d__s__r__ed Athens, but lost much of his fleet at the Battle of S__l__m__s in 480 BCE. The poli formed the D__l__an L__a__ue, contributing ships and money to drive P__rs__a from I__n__a. This victory brought c__n__i__e__ce that led to the C__a__s__c__l Age of Greece, though r__v__l__y between the powerful poli of S__ar__a and A__he__s would eventually lead to the disastrous P__l__p__n__e__i__n War.

Answer in Complete Sentence

1. What was the cause of the conflict between Athens and Persia?

*2. Why do you think the Persian ships docked at Marathon instead of Athens?

3. What was the purpose of the Delian League?

*4. Why has the legend of Pheidippides remained popular for over two thousand years? What does the text says about the truth of the legend?

*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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