Name: _____

Date: _____

ANCIENT GREECE
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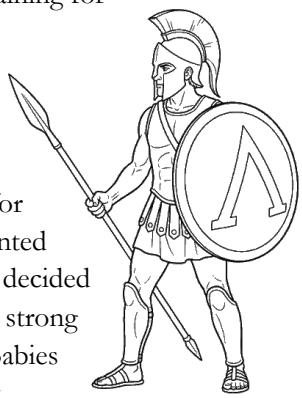
Sparta: Always Prepared for War

Plutarch reported that as Spartan soldiers prepared for battle, their mothers would point to their shields and say, "With this, or upon this." A soldier was expected to return victorious with his shield or be carried home dead upon it. Returning without his shield would brand him a coward and disgrace his family. The soldier was not surprised. He had been living apart from his family and training for battle since he was seven.



Training for War

Sparta was an ancient Greek polis surrounded by enemies, so Spartan citizens began preparing for war at birth. Spartan fathers presented their newborns to the elders, who decided whether the child was healthy and strong enough to be of value to Sparta. Babies who passed were returned to their families. Sickly or malformed infants were taken to a chasm at the foot of Mount Taygetus and left to die.

At age seven, boys left their homes to begin training as warriors. They lived in communal quarters, where they faced rigorous training and discipline. Spartan trainers deliberately underfed them. A boy caught stealing food was beaten, not for stealing, but for getting caught.

Spartan men lived with their military units until they were thirty. They were expected to marry and spend some time with their wives, but their primary responsibility was to Sparta. At thirty, men gained full political rights and could live at home, though they remained soldiers and could be called to fight until they were sixty.

Spartan Women

Both men and women in Sparta competed in athletic contests to remain physically fit. Spartan girls trained because Spartans believed that strong women would bear strong children. With men constantly training for war, Spartan women managed households, farms, and estates. By the fourth century BCE, women owned more than a third of Spartan land.

A common story described a Spartan mother who killed her son for running away from his military duties. Whether the story was true or not, Spartan women were remembered for being stoic. A stoic person can endure pain or hardship without showing feelings or complaining.

The Dorians

Sparta is located on the Peloponnesus, a large peninsula in southern Greece. The polis was founded sometime during the Greek Dark Age by the Dorians, a Greek-speaking people from the rugged Pindus Mountains to the north. Spartan warriors later expanded their territory across the Peloponnesus by capturing neighboring lands.

The Helots

The Spartans called the people they captured helots. They forced the helots to farm land they once owned and to surrender half of every harvest to their Spartan masters. A Spartan police force spied on the helots and killed anyone suspected of being a threat. Every year, Sparta declared war on the helots, allowing Spartan warriors to kill them as part of their training.

A Closed Society

Spartan laws discouraged anything that would distract citizens from their disciplined military life. Spartan officials frequently expelled visitors from other cities, and few Spartans were allowed to travel. Spartan leaders were not interested in different ways of life and did not want to bring new ideas to their polis. Today, we use spartan as an adjective to describe someone who leads a rigorously disciplined life with few comforts or luxuries.

Rivalry with Athens

Sparta vied for control of Greece with Athens. Sparta commanded the strongest army, while Athens developed the strongest navy. In 431 BCE, their rivalry erupted into the twenty-seven-year Peloponnesian War. Sparta defeated Athens, but its supremacy did not last. By the time Rome conquered Greece in 146 BCE, Sparta had long since ceased to be a great power.

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Fill in the Blanks

Sparta was a Greek polis built around d__s__i__li__e and war. From b__r__h, citizens were judged by their ability to serve the p__l__s. Boys left home at seven for m__l__t__ry training. They lived with their units until age t__i__ty and remained soldiers until s__x__y. Spartan women trained physically, managed estates, o__n__d land, and were remembered for s__o__c devotion to the polis. Sparta was founded by D__r__a__s on the P__l__p__n__e__us and expanded by c__p__u__i__g neighboring peoples. The conquered h__l__ts were required to s__r__e__d__r half their h__r__es__s, and lived under *s__rv__ill__nce and the threat of *v__o__e__ce. Spartan leaders restricted t__a__el and expelled outsiders to prevent *f__r__i__n ideas from *w__a__e__i__g their military society. Sparta competed with A__h__ns for control of Greece; Sparta had the strongest a_____, while Athens commanded the strongest n_____. Sparta defeated Athens in the P__l__p__n__e__i__n War, but its supremacy faded. By the R__m__n conquest in 146 BCE, Sparta was no longer a great power.

Answer in Complete Sentence

1. Why were Spartan boys punished for stealing?

_____

_____

_____

*2. Describe a situation where a person might be stoic. Your response must include a definition of the term.

_____

_____

_____

_____

*3. Why does the text imply the Spartans believed it was necessary to terrorize the helots?

_____

_____

_____

_____

*4. Why did Sparta discourage visitors and travel?

_____

_____

_____

*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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