

Primary Resource Comparison: Athens vs. Sparta

Objective: Students will use the primary resources provided by the instructor to explain the differences between the societies of Athens and Sparta.

Directions: In a structured five-paragraph essay, answer the question below using quotes from the provided primary resources to support your conclusions.

Essay Question:

- Explain the most important *differences* between Athens and Sparta in their forms of government, economic structure and their cultural values.

PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENTS- Athens and Sparta

Document 1- Excerpt from “The Persian Wars, Book VI, ’56-60. On the Kings of Sparta” by Herodotus.

The kings alone give decision on the following cases.....and it is ordained that they shall sit in council with the elders, who are in number twenty-eight, and if they do not come, those of the elders who are most closely related to them shall have the privileges of the kings and give two votes besides their own, making them three in all. These rights have been assigned to the kings for their lifetime by the Spartan state.... When the king is dead and another is appointed king, this king who is newly coming in sets free any man of the Spartans who was a debtor to the king or the state...

From: Fred Fling, ed., A Source Book of Greek History, (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1907), pp. 63-66.

Document 2- Excerpt from “The Spartan Constitution” by Aristotle.

Some, indeed, say that the best constitution is a combination of all existing forms, and they praise the Lacedaemonian because it is made up of oligarchy, monarchy, and democracy, the king forming the monarchy, and the council of elders the oligarchy while the democratic element is represented by the Ephors; for the Ephors are selected from the people. Others, however, declare the Ephoralty to be a tyranny, and find the element of democracy in the common meals and in the habits of daily life. At Lacedaemon, for instance, the Ephors determine suits about contracts, which they distribute among themselves, while the elders are judges of homicide, and other causes are decided by other magistrates.

From: Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, trans. Benjamin Jowett (London: Colonial Press, 1900), pp. 30-49.

Document 3- Excerpt from “Funeral Oration” by Pericles.

It is true that our government is called a democracy, because its administration is in the hands, not of the few, but of the many, yet while as regards the law all men are on an equality for the settlement of their private disputes, as regards the value set on them it is as each man is in any way distinguished that he is preferred to the public honors, not because he belongs to a particular class, but because of personal merits; nor again, on the ground of poverty is a man barred from public service....

....For we alone regard the man who takes no part in public affairs, not as one who minds his own business, but as good for nothing; and we Athenians decide public questions for ourselves or at least endeavor to arrive at a sound understanding of them, in the belief that it is not debate that is a hindrance to action, but rather not to be instructed by debate before the time comes for action.

From: Thucydides (c.460/455-c.399 BCE): Peloponnesian War, Book 2.34-46.

Document 4- Excerpt from “The Persian Wars” by Herodotus.

So it is with the Spartans; fighting singly, they are as good as any, but fighting together they are the best soldiers in the world. They are free- yes- but not entirely free; for they have a master, and that master is law, which they fear much more than your subjects fear you. Whatever this master commands they do; and his command never varies; it is never to retreat in battle, however great the odds, but always to stand firm, and to conquer or die.

From: Fred Fling, ed., *A Source Book of Greek History*, (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1907), pp. 63-66.

Document 5- Excerpt from “The Old Oligarch on the Athenian constitution” by unknown author.

Again, some people are surprised at the fact that in all fields they give more power to the masses, the poor and the common people than they do the respectable elements of society, but it will become clear that they preserve the democracy by doing precisely this. When the poor, the ordinary people and the lower classes flourish and increase in numbers, then the power of the democracy will be increased.

From Fred Fling, ed., *A Source Book of Greek History*, (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1907), pp. 155-159.

Document 6- Excerpt from “On Lycurgus and Spartans” by Xenophon.

Lycurgus prohibited free citizens from having anything to do with business....they should not desire wealth with a view to sensual gratification.

From Adams, Paul. “On Lycurgus and the Spartans” *Xenophon*. 01 September, 2008. <<http://www.csun.edu/~hcfl1004/sparta-a.html>>.

Document 7- Excerpt from “The Old Oligarch” by an unknown author.

In Sparta my slave is afraid of you. If your slave is afraid of me there will be a danger even of his giving his own money to avoid personal risks. This is then why we placed even slaves on a footing of equality with free men; and we placed aliens on a footing of equality with citizens because the state has the need of aliens, owing to the number of skilled trades and because of the fleet. For this reason then we were right to place even the aliens on a footing of equality.

From Fred Fling, ed., *A Source Book of Greek History*, (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1907), pp. 155-159.

Document 8- Excerpt from “Parallel Lives: Lycurgus” by Plutarch.

For ample leisure was one of the blessings with which Lycurgus provided his countrymen, since they were absolutely forbidden to practice any mechanical craft, and moneymaking and business were unnecessary because wealth was disregarded and despised? The Helots tilled the soil and produced the usual crops from them....So slavish did they deem it to labor at a trade and in business....

Lycurgus abolished all pride, envy, crime, and luxury, which flowed from these old and terrible evils of riches and poverty, by inducing all landowners to offer their estates for redistribution and prevailing upon all citizens to live on equal terms with equal incomes. They were to strive only to surpass one another in courage and virtue, there being henceforth no social inequalities among them except as praise or blame can create.

Each man’s allotment of land was large enough to produce annually seven medimni of barley for himself and twelve for his wife, with oil and wine in proportion. He thought this would be sufficient because it was enough to maintain them in health. and they needed nothing more.

From Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Lycurgus.” based on the translation by Audrey Stewart and George Long.

Document 9- Excerpt from “The History of the Persian Wars” by Thucydides.

Wealth to us is not mere material for vainglory but an opportunity for achievement; and poverty we think it no disgrace to acknowledge but a real degradation to make no effort to overcome.

He realized the country was poor and unproductive, and that sea traders send no goods to those who can give them nothing in exchange. Therefore, he turned the attention of the citizens to manufactures. He made a law that no son was obliged to support his father unless he had been taught a trade.....and seeing that the soil of Attica was scarcely rich enough to maintain those who tilled it and was incapable of feeding an idle and leisured multitude, he sought to dignify all trades and ordered the Council of Areopagus to inquire how every man made a living and to punish those who had no occupation.

From Thucydides (c.460/455-c.399 BCE): Peloponnesian War. In *The Greek Commonwealth: Politics and Economics in the Fifth Century Athens*, translated by Alfred Zimmern. 4th edition (Oxford: 1924), pp.202-209.

Document 10- Excerpt from “Funeral Oration” by Pericles.

And our city is so great that all the products of the earth flow in upon us, and ours is the happy lot to gather in the good fruits of own soil with no more home felt security of enjoyment than we do those of other lands.....

From: Thucydides (c.460/455-c.399 BCE): Peloponnesian War, Book 2.34-46.

Document 11- Excerpt from “On Lycurgus and Spartans” by Xenophon.

...considering that the PRODUCTION OF CHILDREN WAS THE NOBELEST DUTY OF THE FREE, he enacted...that the female should practice bodily exercise no less than the male sex...”

From Adams, Paul. “On Lycurgus and the Spartans” *Xenophon*. 01 September, 2008.
<<http://www.csun.edu/~hcfl1004/sparta-a.html>>.

Document 12- Excerpt from “The Lycurgan Reforms” by Plutarch.

...but as soon as they were seven years old they were to be enrolled in certain companies and classes; where they all lived under the same order and discipline, doing their exercises and taking their play together. Of these, he who showed the most conduct and courage was made captain; they had their eyes always upon him, obeyed his orders, and underwent patiently whatsoever punishment he inflicted; so that the whole course of their education was one of continued exercise of a ready and perfect obedience...Reading and writing they gave them just enough to serve their turn; their chief care was to make them good subjects, and reach them to endure pain and conquer in battle.

From Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Lycurgus.” based on the translation by Audrey Stewart and George Long.

Document 13- Excerpt from “Funeral Oration” by Pericles.

For we are lovers of beauty yet with no extravagance and lovers of wisdom yet without weakness. Wealth we employ rather as an opportunity for action than as a subject for boasting; and with us it is not a shame for a man to acknowledge poverty, but the greater shame is for him not to do his best to avoid it.

From: Thucydides (c.460/455-c.399 BCE): Peloponnesian War, Book 2.34-46.

Document 14- Excerpt from “Household Management and the Role of the Athenian Wife” by Xenophon.

To the woman, since he had made her body less capable of such endurance, I take it that God has assigned the indoor tasks. And knowing that he had created in the woman and had imposed on her the nourishment of the infants, he meted out to her a large portion of affection for new born babes than to the man...

Your duty will be to remain indoors and send out those servants whose work is outside, and superintend those who are to work indoors, and to receive the incomings....

From: Fred Fling, ed., A Source Book of Greek History, (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1907), pp. **The Oeconomicus.**