

**Analyzing Motives: Pericles' Funeral Oration**

When you analyze motives, you examine the reasons why a person, group or government took a particular action. These reasons can be rooted in the needs, emotions, experiences or goals of the person or group. The passage below is from a funeral oration delivered by Pericles in honor of Athenian soldiers. As you read, keep in mind Pericles' goals for Athens—to strengthen Athenian democracy, to hold and strengthen the empire, and to glorify Athens.

*But before I praise the dead. I should like to point out by what principles of action we rose to power, and under what institutions and through what manner of life our empire became great...*

*Our form of government does not enter into rivalry with the institutions of others. We do not copy our neighbors, but are an example to them.*

*It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few...*

*And we have not forgotten to provide for our weary spirits many relaxations from toil... Because of the greatness of our city the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us; so that we enjoy the goods of other countries as freely as our own.*

*Then, again, our military training is in many respects superior to that of our adversaries... And in the matter of education, whereas they from early youth are always undergoing laborious exercises which are to make them brave, we live at ease, and yet are equally ready to face the perils which they face... We can be as brave as those who never allow themselves to rest; and thus too our city is equally admirable in peace and in war.*

From Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Benjamin Jowett

---

Answer the following questions.

1. The purpose of Pericles' speech was to honor those who had died early in the campaigns of the Peloponnesian War. What might have been his motives in speaking first of how Athens became a great empire?
2. Why do you think Pericles referred to the Spartans without once mentioning them by name?
3. What probably were Pericles' motives in comparing Athens v. Sparta?
4. How do you think Pericles' goals for Athens affected the content and tone of his funeral oration?