

Student Handout 1 – Introduction to Athens and Athenian Democracy

Read the following introduction to the Greek city-state of Athens.

<p><i>Take notes on this side about who had POWER (who could make decisions, vote, participate in the court system, etc.)</i></p>	<p><i>Introduction to Athens and Athenian Democracy</i></p>	<p><i>On this side, take notes on who did NOT have power (who was excluded from the decision-making process in society)</i></p>
	<p><u>Why Athens was great</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athens was the largest city in Greece, and controlled a region called Attica. Between the many mountains were fertile valleys, with many farms. Athens became rich because Attica also had valuable sources of silver, lead and marble. Athens also had the biggest navy in Greece. • Athens was a beautiful and busy city. People came to the city from all over Greece, and from other countries, to study and to trade. The city's most famous building was the temple called the Parthenon. It stood on a rocky hill called the Acropolis. Inside the Parthenon stood a statue of the city's protector-goddess Athena. <p><u>People power</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the early 500s BC a new way of government was invented in Athens. It was "democracy" or "rule by the people". Not everyone had a vote though. Only a male citizen had a say in how the city was run. There were about 30,000 citizens. The ruling Council had 500 members, all men, and chosen for a year at a time. Women could not be citizens, nor could slaves or foreigners. • The citizens met to vote on new laws put forward by the Council. Usually around 5,000 citizens met, every 10 days or so on a hill called the Pnyx. In Athens, you can still see the stones of this historic meeting place. 	

<p><i>Take notes below on how citizens could be a part of making important decisions.</i></p>	<p><u>Guilty or not guilty?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Athens had law courts with trial by jury. Juries were larger than the ones we have today - 500 citizens normally, but sometimes more. There were no lawyers, so people spoke in their own defense. After listening to the evidence, jurors voted by placing metal discs into one of two jars - one for guilty, one for not guilty. Punishments included the death penalty. Speeches were timed by a water-clock.• Citizens also voted to get rid of politicians they did not like. They wrote the name of the person they hated on a piece of broken pottery, called an ostrakon. Any politician who got more than 600 votes was banished from the city of 10 years. <p><u>Slaves</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Of the 250,000 to 300,000 people in Athens (at its biggest around 400 BCE), between a quarter and a third of them were enslaved. Some slaves were captured in wars. Others were born slaves. Some people were forced into slavery when they could not afford to pay money they owed or as a penalty for criminal behavior.• A few slaves had special skills, such as nurses, teachers, or pottery painters. Most slaves did the hardest and most unpleasant jobs. A lucky slave might save enough money to buy his freedom.	<p><i>Take notes below on what life was like for slaves.</i></p>
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Source: "Ancient Greeks: Athens." Primary History. BBC. 24 February 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/ancient_greeks/athens/>.