Greek literature
THE GREEKS

Beliefs and Philosophy
WHAT DID THE GREEKS BELIEVE?

- Sought to know basic truths about human nature.
- Believed in the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of life.
- Wanted to understand themselves and the people around them.
- Intense love of intellectualism and rational thought.
The Heroic Age

1500-1200 B.C.E.
GREEK CIVILIZATION

• Began in Crete

• **Minoan** (2000 B.C.):
  • Developed sixty miles south of mainland Greece
  • A peaceful people
  • Named for King Minos of Crete- sacrificed twelve young men and women each year to feed a half-man, half-bull monster called the **Minotaur** (Theseus myth)
Minoan civilization directly influenced the rise of the **Mycenaean** (1500 and 1200 B.C.) on the Greek mainland:

- Enterprising and aggressive
- **King Agamémnon** led an expedition against the city of Troy in Asia Minor.
- Homer immortalizes heroes of this “Trojan War” four centuries later in *The Iliad*. The Greeks of this time called the Mycenaean era **The Heroic Age**.
THE DARK AGE

Mysterious Decline
• Mysterious decline of Mycenaean culture less than fifty years after the Trojan War
• 1100 B.C.- Dorians invade the Greek peninsula:
  • Burned Mycenaean palace centers
  • “Dark Age” lasts several centuries
  • Writing falls out of use
  • No record of cultural development
THE EPIC AGE

The Iliad and The Odyssey
• Earliest surviving works of Greek poetry are epics: *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (c. 750 B.C.)
• Greeks develop a script for their language based on a system borrowed from the Phaiákiáns:
  • We know this as the alphabet.
  • Named for its two initial letters, *alpha* and *beta*
  • Theories: its purpose was to aid commercial dealings and/or to record Homer’s epics for posterity.
The Rise of the City States

700-500 B.C.E.
Between 700 and 500 B.C.E.:

- Greek life was more organized and institutional.
- Fragmented settlements banded together to form communities.
- Polis (politics)- city-state; ruled by a king
- Despite city-states, Greeks did not think of themselves as a single nation.
- Hellenes- belief that all Greeks were direct descendants of Helen, the son of Deukalion, who according to Greek myth, was the sole survivor of a great flood and thus the ancestor of all Greeks; this belief created common cultural bonds.
Cultural identity:

- Set Greeks apart from “barbarian” neighbors
- Unity resulted in social and religious institutions:
  - Olympics: brought city-states together; fostered Greek identity; held every four years at Mt. Olympus in honor of Zeus
  - Religious shrines: universal centers of worship; Oracle at Delphi (god Apollo)
GREEK GODS AND GODDESSSES

Ageless and Immortal
• First glimpse of Greek religion is in Homer’s epics.
• Ancient Greeks saw gods as being “human”, i.e. being able to interact with humans.
• Gods possessed the worst traits of humans: jealously, irrational anger, and pettiness.
- Greeks believed that everyone had his or her own destiny or fate (*moira*); gods do not control human beings.
- A god can help or hinder a human being, depending on the human’s relationship with the god, their character and talents, and the trouble and effort the person took with offerings.
- Two differences that distinguish gods from humans:
  - Gods and goddesses are ageless and immortal.
  - Gods and goddesses are immensely more powerful than humans.
THE LYRIC AGE

7th-5th century B.C.E.
• C. 7th-5th centuries B.C.E.:
  • Lyric poetry:
    • derived from the word *lyre*—a stringed instrument used to accompany poets: [Listen to a Greek Lyre](#)
    • Speaker is not always the poet but a *persona*—a character whose voice and concerns do not necessarily reflect those of the poet.
    • The poet used relatively few lines to express the personal emotions of a single speaker.
    • intimate themes
    • Only small fraction of this poetry has survived.
• **Pindar**—wrote odes that celebrated victors in major athletic contests.

• **Sappho**—composed some of the finest and honest love poems ever written.

• The power of lyric poetry lies in its immediacy and its ability to quickly and fully describe a strong emotion. This is done through the *first-person speaker*, the “I” telling the poem, and through the use of *sensory imagery*—images that appeal to the senses and trigger memories and emotional responses.
• Start of 5th century B.C.:  
  • Bitter rivalry that formed out of conflicts  
  • Most powerful city-states in Greece  
  • Sparta- militaristic and conservative; boys and girls underwent years of rigorous physical training and frail infants were exposed, or left on mountaintops to die (legend).  
  • Athens- played a leading role in the Persian Wars.
THE GOLDEN AGE OF ATHENS

Pericles and Democracy
• Athens:
  • Main beneficiary of the Persian Wars
  • Victories: Marathon, Salamis—Athens as wartime leader of all city-states and chief naval power of Greece
  • Established a democratic government (free adult males; women and slaves could not vote); influenced both the Roman Republic and democracy in the United States.
• Late 460s B.C.—Athenian “Golden Age”

• **Pericles:**
  • Great general and **statesman**
  • Guided the fortunes of Athens for over three decades
  • Skillful politician who walked the line between extremists views in the democratic assembly
  • **Patron of literature, philosophy, and the arts**
  • Organized campaign to build the **Parthenon** (dedicated to Athena)
THE RISE OF GREEK DRAMA

Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides
• 5th century B.C.:
  - Authors of *tragedy*: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides
  - Plays posed profound questions about the limits of knowledge, individual free will, moral responsibility, and human suffering.
  - Sophocles was the most admired playwright; general and friend to Pericles.
  - Aristophanes: author of *comedies*; used farce and *satire* to deal with serious issues as education and war.
The Historians
Herodotus and Thucydides
• **Herodotus** (c. 485-c. 425 B.C.):
  - considered, in the West, to be the first historian
  - wrote a chronicle of the Persian War
  - reported on many foreign lands and customs of people he met during his travels
  - filled his narrative with colorful character sketches and interesting digressions
  - thought of his role as that of a moral teacher
• Thucydides (c. 460-401 B.C.):
  • He analyzed the Athenian rise to power and the conflict with Sparta in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*.
  • His work stressed rigorous research and objective reporting.
  • He thought of his role as that of a moral teacher.
Greek philosophers

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle
• Philosopher: a Greek word meaning “lover of wisdom.”

• **Socrates** (469-399 B.C.):
  - “Wisdom begins in wonder.”
  - Method of questioning through dialogue
  - Left no writings of his own
  - Eccentric—pretending to be ignorant, he wandered the streets of Athens, a shabby and unkempt figure who questioned people about concepts such as virtue, truth, and wisdom.
• Socrates cont. . . .
  • Never preached or offered his own solutions
  • Demonstrated that no argument was infallible
  • His technique of questioning is know as the Socratic Method.
  • Pointed criticism at official authorities earned him a reputation as a public nuisance.
  • Persecuted for his teaching methods and his belief that an “unexamined life is not worth living”
  • 399 B.C.: tried and executed on false charges of corrupting the minds of his young students
• **Plato (c. 429-c. 347 B.C.):**
  
  • Socrates’ pupil
  
  • Preserved Socrates’ method of questioning in a series of *dialogues* in which the “character” Socrates poses and answers philosophical questions for/with two or more other characters.
  
  • Used dialogues as a vehicle to present a comprehensive philosophical system known as *Platonism*.
  
  • *Platonic system: ideas are the only reality, and people should rely on reason, not on their senses, to comprehend the world.*
Plato cont. . . .

- His writings examined concepts such as freedom of conscience, the nature of reality, the existence of the soul, ideal government, and how to lead a virtuous and happy life.
- 387 B.C.: founded a school called the Academy—a center of philosophical learning.
- At the age of sixty, during a sea voyage, his ships was raided by pirates, and he was sold as a slave to a former student, who helped him return to Athens. He never left Athens again.
• **Aristotle** (384-322 B.C.):
  • Plato’s greatest pupil
  • Studied in Athens and later became tutor to a young Alexander the Great
  • Wrote numerous treatises on logic, ethics, political theory, rhetoric, and biology
  • *Poetics*—one of Aristotle’s most influential works—sets forth the principles of Greek tragic drama.
• Aristotle cont. . . .
  • His **systematic inquiry** into numerous branches of knowledge impacted the development of Western philosophy.
  • Modern students of philosophy and literature must acquaint themselves with the work of Plato and Aristotle (influenced literary theory).
• Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric:
  • **Rhetoric**: the art of persuasion
    • Ethos- credibility (ethics)
    • Logos- logic of the argument (even if it isn’t factual)
    • Pathos- appeal to emotion
THE DECLINE OF ATHENS

Athens vs. Sparta
• Envy and resentment toward Athenian expansions led to clashes and then full-scale war between Athens and Sparta:
  • **The Peloponnesian War** (431-404 B.C.):
    • Involved other city-states on each side
    • Sparta was victorious
    • Athens spiraled into decline from which it never recovered.
• Macedon (middle of 4\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.):
  • Ruled first by Philip and then by his son, Alexander the Great
  • Emerged as the most powerful state in the Greek-speaking world
  • Alexander conquered lands from Egypt to India.
• By the time of Alexander’s death in 323 B.C.:
  • Greek language and culture had spread through the Mediterranean, North Africa, and western Asia.
  • Continuation of Greek culture by Alexander, and later by the Romans who would conquer the Macedonians in 197 B.C., is called the Hellenistic Age.
• Hellenistic Age:
  • Emulated the Hellenic Age, the age of the Greeks
  • The Romans would be greatly responsible for the preservation and spread of Greek knowledge in the West.
Are you done reading the PowerPoint?

The Next Step:
Click on the class document in Google Classroom called “Greek Literature Powerpoint Questions” and add YOUR three questions. Do not repeat questions that other students have asked.