

Section 2

Religion, Philosophy, and the Arts

Prepare to Read

Objectives

In this section you will

1. Discover what characterized the Golden Age of Athens.
2. Learn about the religious beliefs of the ancient Greeks.
3. Find out about science, philosophy, and the arts in ancient Greece.

Taking Notes

As you read, look for important details about the religion, philosophy, and art of the ancient Greeks. Copy the outline below, and use it to record your findings.

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| <p>I. The Golden Age of Athens</p> <p>A. Period from 479 to 431 B.C.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. <p>B. Sources of wealth</p> <p>II. Ancient Greek religious beliefs</p> |
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Target Reading Skill

Use Word Parts When you see an unfamiliar word, break the word into parts to help you recognize and pronounce it. You may find roots, prefixes, or suffixes. A prefix goes before the root and changes the meaning of the word. In this section, you will come across the word *immortal*. Break it into a prefix and a root to learn its meaning.

Key Terms

- **tribute** (TRIB yoot) *n.* a regular payment made to a powerful state or nation by a weaker one

- **oracle** (AWR uh kul) *n.* in ancient Greece, a sacred site where a god or goddess was consulted; any priest or priestess who spoke for the gods
- **philosopher** (fih LAHS uh fur) *n.* someone who uses reason to understand the world; in Greece, the earliest philosophers used reason to explain natural events
- **tragedy** (TRAJ uh dee) *n.* a type of serious drama that usually ends in disaster for the main character

As leader of Athens, Pericles (PEHR uh kleez) gave a speech at a funeral of fallen soldiers. In his speech, he said of Athens,

“Our constitution favors the many instead of the few. That is why it is called a democracy. If we look at the laws, we see they give equal justice to all. . . . Poverty does not bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state. . . . In short, I say that as a city we are the school for all Greece.”

—The History of the Peloponnesian War
Thucydides

Pericles delivered his speech during the first year of a war with Sparta, another Greek city-state. Eventually, it was Sparta that ended Athens' golden age of accomplishment.



Pericles lived from about 495 to 429 B.C.

The Golden Age of Athens

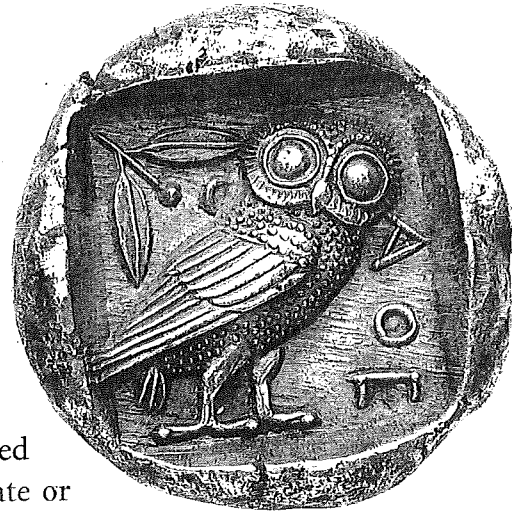
The Golden Age of Athens lasted from 479 to 431 B.C. During this period, philosophy and the arts flourished in Athens, and democracy reached its highest point. The democratic government of Athens would serve as a model for future civilizations.

The Wealth of Athens During the Golden Age, Athens grew rich from trade and from silver mined by slaves in regions around the city. Athens also collected **tribute**, or a regular payment made to a powerful state or nation by a weaker one. Both Athens' allies and the states it had conquered paid tribute, fearing Athens' great strength. The tribute paid to Athens added to its wealth.

Pericles and Democracy For about 30 years during Athens' Golden Age, Pericles (c. 495–429 B.C.) was the most powerful man in Athenian politics. Well-educated and intelligent, he always tried to act in the best interests of his city. When he made speeches to the Athenians, he could move and persuade them.

Pericles was a member of an aristocratic family, but he supported democracy. Around 460 B.C., he became the leader of a democratic group. He introduced reforms that strengthened democracy. One of Pericles' reforms required the city to pay a salary to its officials. This meant that poor citizens could afford to hold public office.

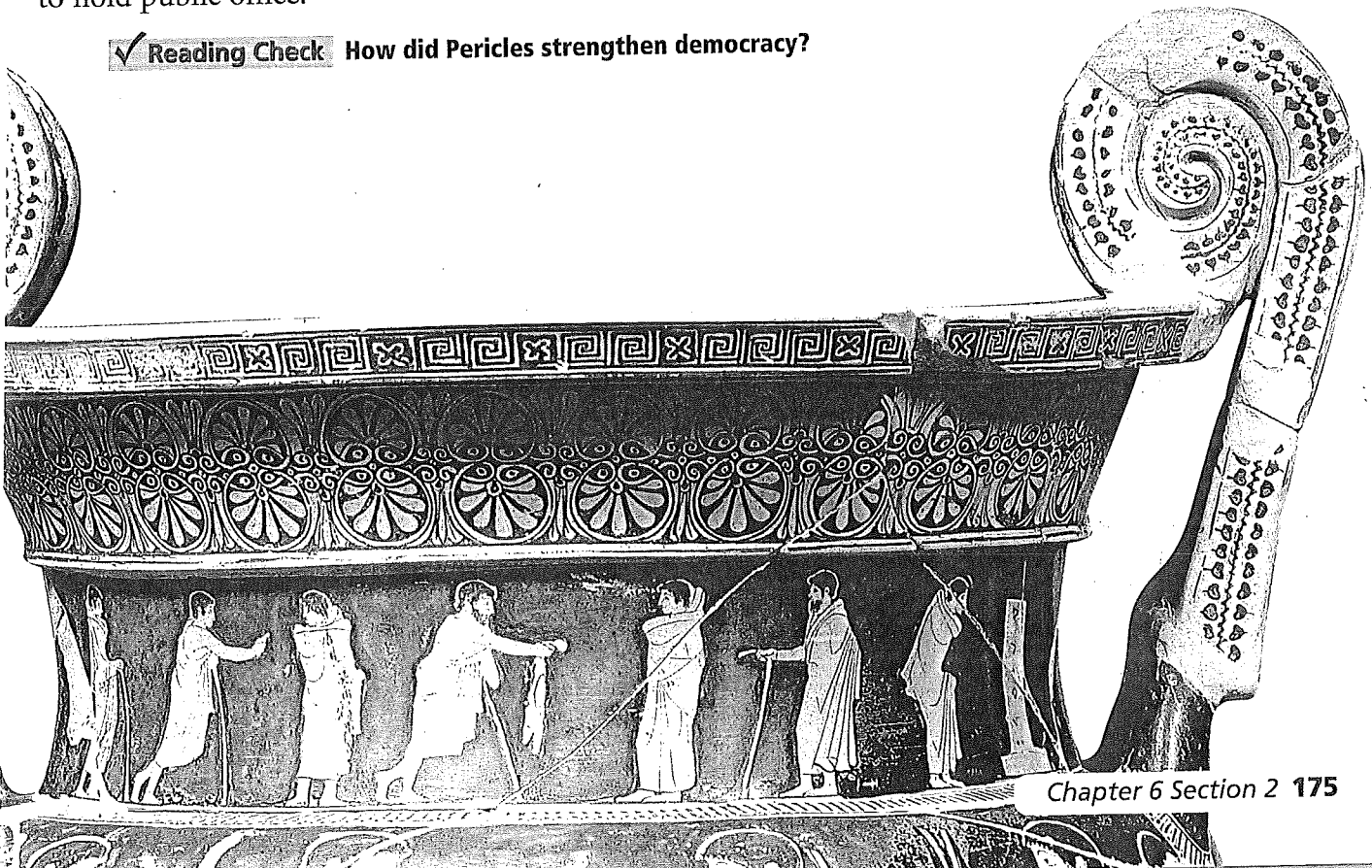
✓ **Reading Check** How did Pericles strengthen democracy?



An ancient Athenian silver coin bearing an owl, a symbol of the city

Scenes of Ancient Greece

The arts flourished during Athens' Golden Age. This Greek vase was created about 470 B.C. **Conclude** How did Athens become wealthy during the Golden Age?



Religious Beliefs in Ancient Greece

Greeks worshiped a family of gods and goddesses called the Twelve Olympians. Each ruled different areas of human life and the natural world. The chart below titled A Family of Gods describes some of the Twelve Olympians and the areas over which they ruled.

The Greeks took great care in honoring their gods. They expressed their gratitude to them and asked them for blessings. They also tried to avoid angering the gods.



Prefixes and Roots

If *im-* means "not," what does *immortal* mean?

Gods and Goddesses Wherever the Greeks lived, they built temples to the gods. Since the gods had human forms, they also had many human characteristics. The gods were different from humans, however, in that they were perfect in their human forms, they had great power, and they were immortal.

Mythology tells us that the Greeks worshiped twelve great gods led by Zeus, the king of the gods. Zeus ruled both the gods and men from atop Mt. Olympus, Greece's highest mountain. In addition to the twelve great gods, the Greeks worshiped many lesser ones. They also honored mythical heroes like Achilles (uh KIL eez), who fought bravely during the Trojan War. The story of Achilles is told in the *Iliad*.



A Family of Gods

Chart Skills

The Greeks considered the five gods in the table at the right to be the most powerful of the Twelve Olympians. Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, and Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, are shown in the above relief. **Identify** Who was considered to be the leader of all gods and goddesses? **Analyze** Why do you think this chart is titled "A Family of Gods"?

God or Goddess	Description
Zeus (zoos)	King of the gods and goddesses. Ruler of the sky and storms. Protector of the law.
Hera (HIHR uh)	Wife and queen to Zeus. Goddess of marriage and women.
Apollo (uh PAHL oh)	Son of Zeus. Handsome young god of poetry and music. The most widely worshiped of the Greek gods.
Athena (uh THEE nuh)	Zeus' wise daughter. Goddess of crafts. War goddess who defended her cities.
Poseidon (poh SY dun)	Zeus' brother. God of the sea, of water, and of earthquakes. Lord of horses.

Although the Greeks worshiped all their gods, each city-state honored just one of the twelve gods, in part by building a temple to that god. To honor Zeus, the city-states came together every four years for an Olympian festival and games. The modern Olympic Games are based on this tradition.

The Oracles In ancient cultures, people often looked to their gods for signs, or advice. They wanted the gods to show them how to live or how to behave. The Greeks visited oracles, sacred sites where a god or goddess was consulted. At these shrines, Greeks would ask the gods for advice or for predictions about the future. Sometimes the advice came through dreams. Often the answers came in the form of a riddle, delivered by a priest or a priestess believed to be able to hear the voices of the gods. Oracles of various gods were located throughout Greece. Heads of state often sought advice on governing from the oracle of the god Apollo at Delphi, an ancient town in central Greece. Because such advice was taken very seriously, the oracles had a great effect on Greek history.

✓ **Reading Check** How did the Greeks honor their gods?

Greek Science and Philosophy

Most Greeks believed that their gods were the source of all natural events. But about 150 years before the Golden Age of Athens, some people thought about other ways besides myths to understand the world.

The Search for Knowledge You learned earlier about philosophy, which is a system of beliefs or values. Philosophers believed that people could use the powers of the mind and reason to understand natural events. One of the first philosophers, Thales (THAY leez), believed that water was the basic material of the world. He thought that everything was made from it. Democritus (dih MAHK ruh tus), who lived in the 400s B.C., thought that everything was made of tiny particles he called atoms. More than 2,000 years later, scientists still use his ideas about atoms.

Beginning in the 600s B.C., writers and traveling teachers called Sophists (SAHF ists) gained popularity in Greece. Sophists were skilled speakers who cleverly debated topics in public. Although they were popular in Athens, some philosophers thought Sophists were more interested in winning debates than in seeking the truth.



Delphi

At the top is the Tholos Temple at the Sanctuary of Athena Pronaia, once the gateway to Delphi. In the vase painting above, Aegeus, a legendary Athenian king, consults a priestess at Apollo's oracle in Delphi.

Conclude Why did the ancient Greeks visit oracles?

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle During the Golden Age and later, several important philosophers taught in Athens. The ideas of three men, Socrates (SAHK ruh teeZ), Plato (PLAY toh), and Aristotle (AR is taht ul), had a lasting effect on modern learning and thinking.

Using the marketplace as his classroom, Socrates eagerly discussed wisdom and goodness with the people of Athens. He asked questions that challenged people's beliefs. His questions often frightened and angered many Athenians.

In 399 B.C., Socrates was brought to trial. The authorities accused him of dishonoring the gods and misleading young people. He was sentenced to death by forced suicide, a common sentence in Athens at the time. Socrates drank a cup of hemlock, a poison, and died.

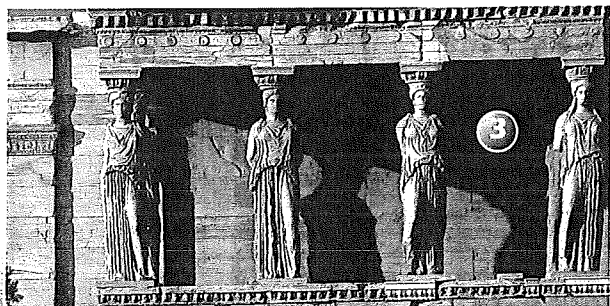
Much of what is known about Socrates comes from the writings of Plato, one of his students. Socrates' death caused Plato to mistrust democracy. In *The Republic*, Plato wrote that society should be made up of three groups: workers, soldiers, and philosopher-rulers. Plato founded a school in Athens called the Academy, where he taught a student named Aristotle. Aristotle believed that reason should guide the pursuit of knowledge. He later founded his own school, the Lyceum.

The Acropolis

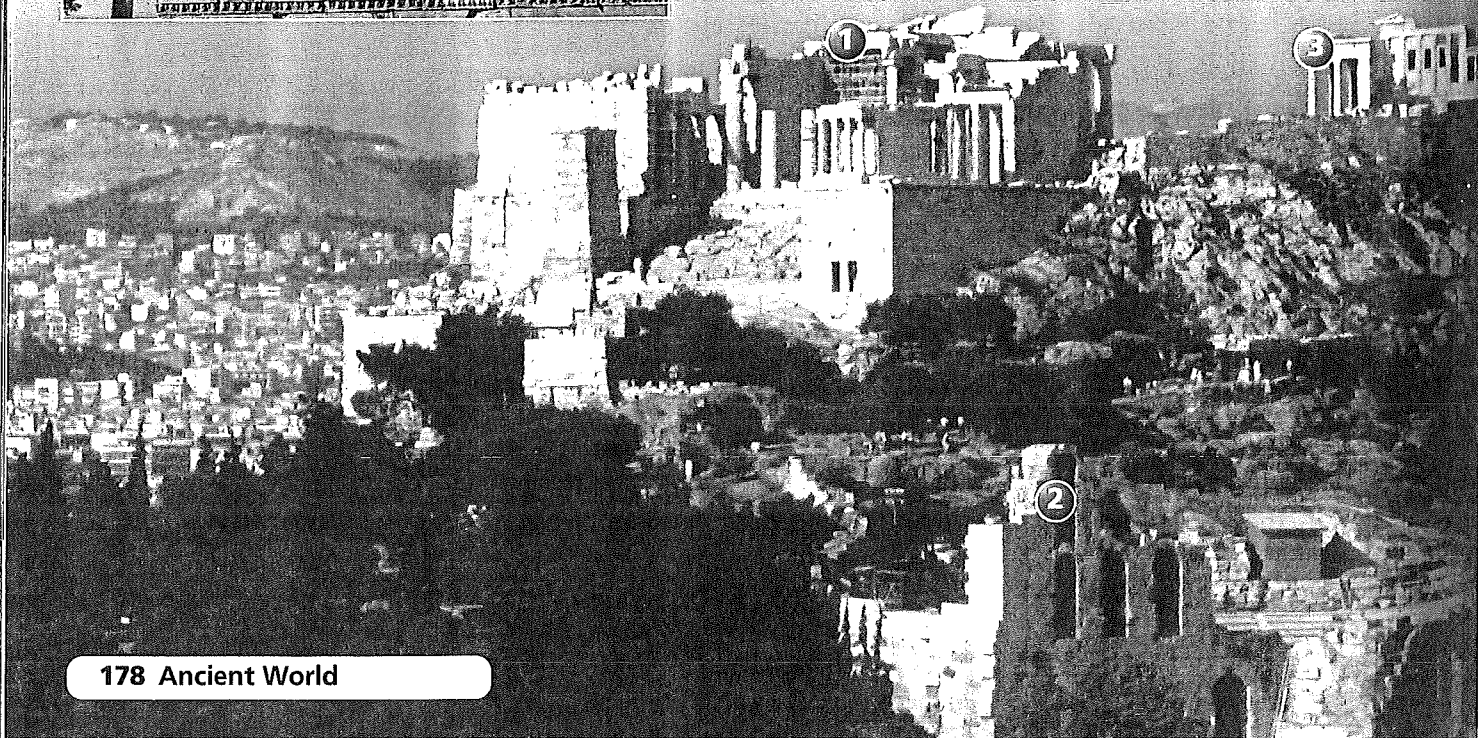
Once the religious center of Athens, the Acropolis now serves as a monument to Greek architecture.

- ❶ The Propylaea, the entrance to the Acropolis, was completed in 432 B.C.
- ❷ The Odeion (theater) of Herodes Atticus was built in A.D. 161.
- ❸ The Erechtheion, named after a legendary king of Athens, was completed in 406 B.C. The inset photo shows the temple's south porch.
- ❹ Completed in 438 B.C., the Parthenon was a temple to Athena, the patron goddess of Athens.

Predict Why do you think the Athenians built the Acropolis?



✓ **Reading Check** Which three important philosophers taught in Athens?



Visual and Dramatic Arts

The Greeks used visual arts, such as architecture and sculpture, to glorify and honor their gods. The Greeks are also known as the first playwrights, because they wrote the first plays.

The Parthenon The Acropolis, the religious center of Athens, had been destroyed in 480 B.C., during one of the city's many wars. Pericles decided to rebuild the Acropolis and create new buildings to glorify the city.

The builders of the new Acropolis brought Greek architecture to its highest point. Their most magnificent work was the Parthenon, a temple to the goddess Athena. The temple was made of fine marble. Rows of columns surrounded it on all four sides. Within the columns was a room that held a 40-foot (12-meter) statue of Athena, made of ivory and gold.

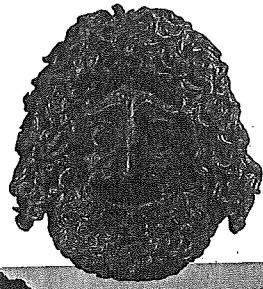
The great statue of Athena disappeared long ago. However, many of the sculpted scenes that decorate the inside and outside of the temple still exist. These scenes have three important characteristics. First, they are full of action. Second, the figures are carefully arranged to show balance and order. Third, the sculptures are lifelike and accurate. However, they are ideal, or perfect, views of humans and animals. The goal of Greek art was to present images of perfection in a balanced and orderly way.

Links to

Math

The Golden Rectangle
Greek architects based the design of the Parthenon (below) and other buildings on a figure called the Golden Rectangle. A Golden Rectangle is one in which the long sides are about one and two thirds times the length of the short sides. The Greeks thought Golden Rectangles made buildings more pleasing to look at. Modern architects have also used the Golden Rectangle.





Greek actors performed in outdoor theaters, such as the one shown above at Epidauros. By using different masks, such as the one shown at the top, actors could play a variety of roles.

Dramas Athenians were the first people to write dramas, or stories written to be performed by actors. Among the city's greatest achievements were the plays written and produced in the 400s B.C., during the Golden Age. These plays soon became popular all over the Greek world.

Some of the most famous Greek dramas were tragedies. A **tragedy** is a type of serious drama that usually ends in disaster for the main character. Between scenes in the play, a chorus chanted or sang poems. In most plays, the writer used the chorus to give background information, to comment on the events, or to praise the gods. Euripides (yoo RIP uh deez), Aeschylus (ES kih lus), and Sophocles were important authors of tragedies.

Performances of tragedies were part of contests held during religious festivals. The city chose wealthy citizens to fund these dramatic contests.

Comedies Comic writers also competed at the dramatic festivals. During the 400s B.C. in Athens, these writers wrote comedies that made fun of well-known citizens and politicians and also made jokes about the customs of the day. Because of the freedom in Athens, people accepted the humor and jokes. Aristophanes (a rih STAHF uh neez) is probably the best-known Greek comic playwright.

✓ **Reading Check** What was the role of the chorus in Greek drama?



Section 2 Assessment

Key Terms

Review the key terms at the beginning of this section. Use each term in a sentence that explains its meaning.



Target Reading Skill

Find *perfection* on page 179. Apply your knowledge of the prefix *im-*. What are imperfections?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

1. (a) **Define** What was the Golden Age of Athens?

(b) **Draw Conclusions** Why do you think Pericles called Athens "the school for all Greece"?

2. (a) **Explain** How did the Greeks attempt to understand the world?

(b) **Analyze** One of the teachings of Socrates was "know thyself." What did Socrates mean when he said this?

3. (a) **Identify** What were the goals of Greek art?

(b) **Infer** What does Greek art, both visual and literary, tell us about the Greeks and their culture?

Writing Activity

Write a brief essay describing the achievements of Athenians during the Golden Age.

Writing Tip Your opinion should be the main idea of your paragraph. When writing to persuade, support your main idea with specific evidence arranged in a logical order.