Athens

Athenians thought of themselves as the shining star of the Greek city-states. They were famed for their literature, poetry, drama, theatre, schools, buildings, and government.

Before the [Greek dark ages](http://greece.mrdonn.org/darkages.html), Athens was a small village, home to a tribe of Ionian people. After the Greek dark ages, Athens grew rapidly until Athens was one of the two most powerful city-states in the ancient Greek world. (The other was Sparta.)

The Athenian was very different from the ancient Spartans.

* [The Spartans](http://greece.mrdonn.org/sparta.html) were famed for their military strength.

Athenians were famed for their commitment to the arts and sciences.

The Greeks believed that each city-state in ancient Greece had a [god or a goddess](http://greece.mrdonn.org/greekgods/index.html) in charge of it, their special patron. For Athens, the patron was [Athena, goddess of wisdom](http://greece.mrdonn.org/greekgods/athena.html). Perhaps because Athena was their patron, Athenians put a great deal of emphasis on education.

Girls learned at home from their mothers. They learned how to run a home, and how to be good wives and mothers.

Boys were educated quite differently. Until age 6 or 7, boys were taught at home by their mothers. From 7-14, boys attended a day school outside the home. There, they memorized Homeric poetry and learned to play the lyre. They learned drama, public speaking, reading, writing, math, and perhaps even how to play the flute. After middle school, they went to a four year high school and learned more about math, science, and government. At 18, they attended two years of military school. There was just cause for Athens to be proud of its system of education for its citizens.

Each city-state chose its own form of government. Most Greek city-states were ruled by kings. In Athens, citizens (the men) met each week to discuss problems. They worked on solutions. The men of Athens experimented with government. For about 100 years, Athens was a [direct democracy](http://greece.mrdonn.org/athensdemocracy.html)!

Sparta

Life was very different in ancient Sparta than it was in the rest of ancient Greek city-states. The Spartans were proud, fierce, capable warriors. No great works of art came out of Sparta. But the Spartans, both men and women, were tough, and the Greeks admired strength.

Sparta's government was an oligarchy. The people were ruled by a small group of warriors. The Spartans spoke Greek, wrote Greek, thought of themselves as Greeks, but they were different.

In most of the other Greek city-states, the goal of education was to create a strong citizen of that city-state. In Sparta, the goal of education was to create a strong warrior.

All of the ancient Greeks were warriors, but Sparta's warriors were legendary.

In Sparta, boys were taken away from their parents at age 7. They lived a harsh and often brutal life in the soldier’s barracks. Younger children were beaten by older children who started fights to help make the younger boys strong. Children were often were whipped in front of groups of other Spartans, including their parents, but they were not allowed to cry out in pain.

Girls went to school too, to learn how to fight. They lived at home during training. Their training was not as harsh and the boy's, but it was harsh enough. Sparta women were warriors.

Children, during their training process, were given very little food. They were encouraged to steal food, instead. If *caught* stealing, they were beaten. Spartan children learned to be cunning, to lie, to cheat, to steal, and how to get away with it!

As adults, Spartan men did not live with their families. They visited their families, but men lived in the soldiers' barracks.

As adults, Spartan women, unlike women in the rest of Greek world, had a great deal of freedom. Many ran businesses. Sparta women were free to move about and visit neighbours without permission from their husbands. How would they get permission? The men were often off fighting.

Corinth

As a coastal city-state, Corinth had a glorious history as a cultural and trade centre. Corinth was a monarchy. The people were ruled by a king. The king had many advisors. Together, Corinth's government solved many problems that face cities today.

For example, Corinth had a problem with unemployment. To solve this, they created a huge and successful public works program. This gave people work, like building new aqueducts, while solving other city problems, such as the need for an additional source of drinking water.

To solve the problem of foreign money pouring into their polis, the government of Corinth created its own coinage. They forced traders to exchange their coins for Corinth's coinage at the bank of Corinth, for a fee of course. Corinthians were very good with money.

Although Corinth's schools were not as fine, perhaps, as those of Athens, their boys were educated in the arts and the sciences. As a child, kids were taught at home. From age 7-14, boys attended a nearby day school, where they studied poetry, drama, public speaking, accounting, reading, writing, math, science, and the flute. Boys attended a higher school if their parents could afford it. All boys went to military school for at least two years.

Literature, culture, art, and businesses thrived in Corinth. Corinth was a highly respected city-state in the ancient Greek world.

Megara

Megara was a highly respected city-state in ancient Greece. As a coastal city-state, their history was similar to Corinth's, their neighbour. Any Megarian would have told you that their schools were as fine as those of Athens; although they would have had no doubt that any Athenian would disagree.

Boys were trained in the arts and the sciences. As a child, kids were taught at home by their mother or by a male slave. From age 7-14, boys attended a day school near their home where they memorized poetry and studied drama, public speaking, reading, writing, science, poetry, the flute, the lyre, and a great deal of mathematics. Boys then attended a higher school, and went on to military school for at least two years.

Like Athens, Megara offered its citizens a great deal of freedom. Like nearly all Greek city-states, Megara had beautiful temples, gorgeous statues, and open-air theatres. They were famous for their glorious textiles, which were the envy of other Greek city-states.

As a coastal town, Megara did a great deal of trading. They had their own coinage, an idea they copied from Corinth (who copied it from Argos.)

They were also explorers. Like all Greeks, they loved to establish new towns. The city-state of Megara founded the city of Byzantium, also called Constantinople, now called Istanbul, way back in 630 BCE.

Argos

The ancient city-state of Argos had a nearby harbour for trade and commerce. But Argos was located on a plain. The weather was hot and dry in the summer, and cold and wet in the winter. The soil was not especially fertile. The people of Argos had to fight to grow food. This they did, quite successfully.

They did many things successfully. Many scholars credit Argos with the invention of coinage in ancient Greece, an invention that made trade much easier.

Argos was actively involved in the arts. Their magnificent stone sculptures of athletes, rippling with stone muscles, were the envy of many a Greek city-state. Argos was famous for their wonderful musicians and poets. Drama reached new heights in their polis (city-state).

Like all Greek city-states, they had their own way of doing things. Their government was a monarchy - Argos was ruled by a king.

When [Athens](http://greece.mrdonn.org/athens.html) and [Sparta](http://greece.mrdonn.org/sparta.html) asked Argos to send supplies and troops to help fight the Persians, after the battle of [Thermopylae](http://greece.mrdonn.org/persianwars.html) in 480 BCE, the king of Argos refused. The other Greek city-states held Argos in disgrace for that decision for many years thereafter.