

Section

1

The Culture of Ancient Greece

Guide to Reading



History Social Science Standards

WH.6.4 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Ancient Greece.

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

You have read that under Pericles, Athens became a center of beauty and culture. During this Golden Age, Greek thinkers, writers, and artists contributed many new ideas to the world.

Focusing on the Main Ideas

- The Greeks believed that gods and goddesses controlled nature and shaped their lives. (page 377)
- Greek poetry and fables taught Greek values. (page 379)
- Greek drama still shapes entertainment today. (page 382)
- Greek art and architecture expressed Greek ideas of beauty and harmony. (page 384)

Meeting People

Homer (HOH • muhr)

Aesop (EE • SAHP)

Sophocles (SAH • fuh • KLEEZ)

Euripides (yu • RIH • puh • DEEZ)

Locating Places

Mount Olympus (uh • LIHM • puhs)

Delphi (DEHL • FY)

Content Vocabulary

myth (MIHTH)

oracle (AWR • uh • kuhl)

epic (EH • pihk)

fable (FAY • buhl)

drama (DRAH • muh)

tragedy (TRA • juh • dee)

comedy (KAH • muh • dee)

Academic Vocabulary

grant

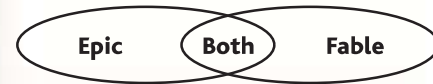
generation (JEH • nuh • RAY • shuhn)

tradition (truh • DIH • shuhn)

conflict (KAHN • FLIHKT)

Reading Strategy

Compare and Contrast Create a Venn diagram showing similarities and differences between epics and fables.



Interactive Graphic Organizer

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Where & When?



700 B.C.

c. 700s B.C.
Homer writes the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*

600 B.C.

c. 550 B.C.
Aesop writes a series of fables

500 B.C.

c. 500s B.C.
Greek architects begin using marble columns



▲ This painting shows a Greek man at the oracle at Delphi receiving a prophecy. *Why were these prophecies often confusing?*

But Greek gods and goddesses were not thought to be all-powerful. According to Greek myths, even though gods had special powers, they looked like human beings and acted like them. They married, had children, quarreled, played tricks on each other, and fought wars.

Because Greeks sought their gods' favor, they followed many rituals. A ritual is a set of actions carried out in a fixed way. As part of their rituals, the Greeks prayed to their gods and also gave them gifts. In return, they hoped that the gods would **grant** good fortune to them. Many Greek festivals honored the gods and goddesses. Festivals dedicated to Zeus were held at Olympia.

The Greeks also believed in an afterlife. When people died, the Greeks believed their spirits went to a gloomy world beneath the earth ruled by a god named Hades.

What Was a Greek Oracle? The Greeks believed that each person had a fate or destiny. They believed that certain events were going to happen no matter what they did. They also believed in prophecy. A prophecy is a prediction about the future. The Greeks believed that the gods gave prophecies to people to warn them about the future in time to change it.

To find out about the future, many Greeks visited an **oracle** (AWR•uh•kuhl). This was a sacred shrine where a priest or priestess spoke for a god or goddess. The most famous was the oracle at the Temple of Apollo at **Delphi** (DEHL•fy). The oracle chamber was deep inside the temple. The room had an opening in the floor where volcanic smoke hissed from a crack in the earth.

A priestess sat on a tripod—a three-legged stool—in the oracle chamber and listened to questions. The priests translated her answers. State leaders or their messengers traveled to Delphi to ask advice from the oracle of Apollo.

The priestess in the oracle often gave answers in riddles. When one king, named Croesus (KREE•suhs), sent messengers to the oracle at Delphi, they asked if the king should go to war with the Persians. The oracle replied that if Croesus attacked the Persians, he would destroy a mighty empire. Overjoyed to hear these words, Croesus declared war on the Persians. The Persian army crushed his army. The mighty empire King Croesus had destroyed was his own!

Reading Check Explain Why did the Greeks have rituals and festivals for their gods and goddesses?



WH6.4.4 Explain the significance of Greek mythology to the everyday life of people in the region and how Greek literature continues to permeate our literature and language today, drawing from Greek mythology and epics, such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and from *Aesop's Fables*.

Greek Poetry and Fables

Main Idea Greek poetry and fables taught Greek values.

Reading Connection Do you have favorite stories? Are the characters in the stories brave and clever? Read about the characters of the best-loved stories in early Greece.

Greek poems and stories are some of the oldest in Europe. For hundreds of years, Europeans and Americans have used these early works as models for their own poems and stories. Shakespeare, for example, borrowed many Greek plots and settings.

The earliest Greek stories were **epics** (EH•pihks). These long poems told about

heroic deeds. The first great epics of early Greece were the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The poet **Homer** (HOH•muhr) wrote these epics during the 700s B.C. He based them on stories of a war between Greece and the city of Troy, which once existed in the region that is today northwestern Turkey.

In the *Iliad*, a prince of Troy kidnaps the wife of the king of Sparta. The kidnapping outrages the Greeks. The king of Mycenae and the brother of the king of Sparta lead the Greeks in an attack on Troy.

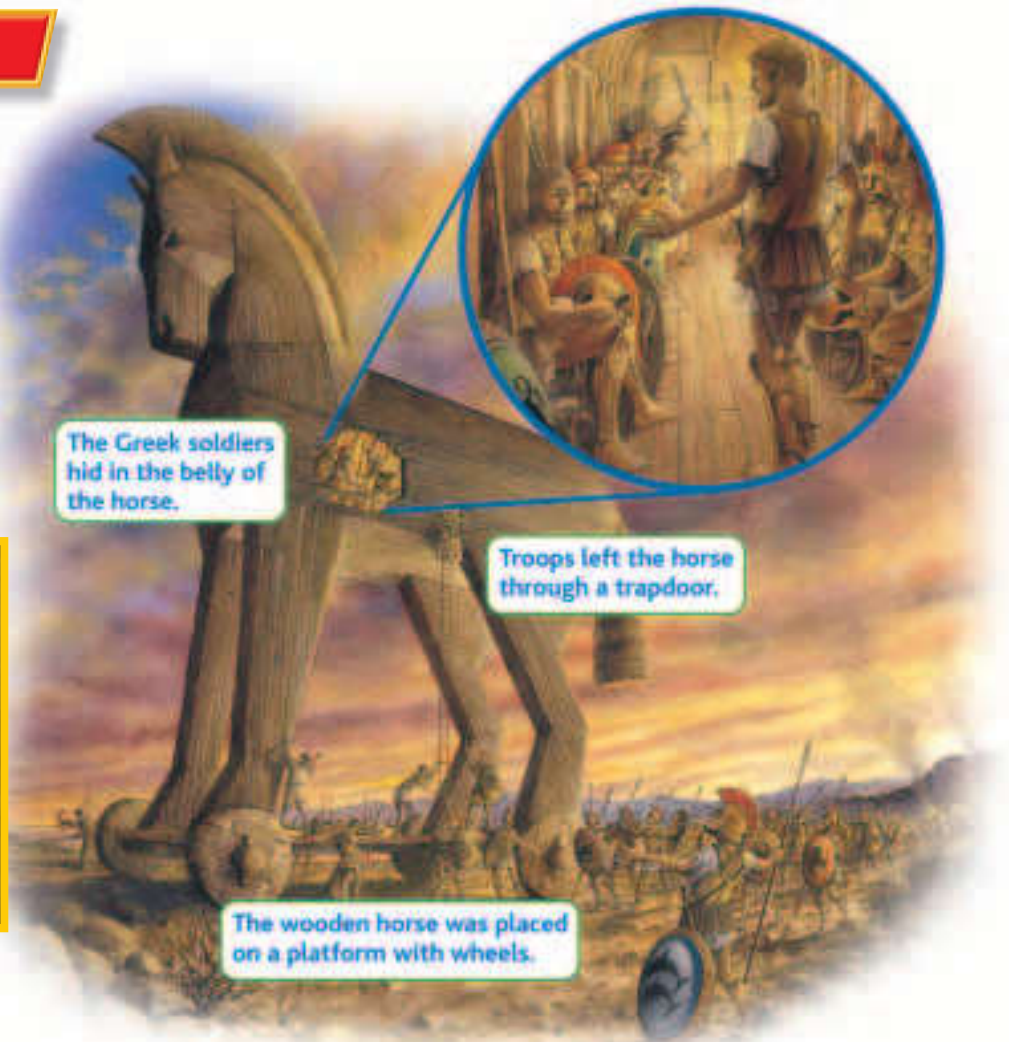
The battle for Troy drags on for 10 years. Finally, the Greeks come up with a plan to capture the city. They build a huge, hollow, wooden horse. The best Mycenaean warriors hide inside the horse.

The Trojan Horse

After building the Trojan horse, the Greeks returned to their ships and pretended to retreat. Despite warnings, the Trojans brought the horse within their city as a war trophy. The Greeks inside the horse opened the city gates for their fellow soldiers and captured the city. **What epic included the story of the Trojan horse?**



▲ Clay carving of the Trojan horse



The Greek soldiers hid in the belly of the horse.

Troops left the horse through a trapdoor.

The wooden horse was placed on a platform with wheels.



Aesop



▲ According to legend, Aesop was freed from slavery and became an adviser to Greek rulers. **What is a fable?**

The Trojans, thinking the horse was a gift from the Greeks, celebrate and roll the giant horse into the city. That night, the Greek warriors quietly climb from the horse and capture the city.

The *Odyssey* tells the story of Odysseus, another Greek hero. It describes his journey home from the Trojan War. Odysseus faces storms, witches, and giants before returning to his wife. Because it took Odysseus 10 years to get home, we use the word *odyssey* today to mean a long journey with many adventures.

Greeks believed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were more than stories. They looked on the epics as real history. These poems gave the Greeks an ideal past with a cast of heroes. **Generations** of Greeks read Homer's works. One Athenian wrote, "My father was anxious to see me develop

into a good man . . . [so] he compelled me to memorize all of Homer."

Homer's stories promoted courage and honor. They also taught that it was important to be loyal to your friends and to value the relationship between husband and wife. The stories showed heroes striving to be the best they could be. Heroes fought to protect their own honor and their family's honor. Homer's heroes became role models for Greek boys.

Who Was Aesop? About 550 B.C., a Greek slave named **Aesop** (EE • SAHP) made up his now famous fables. A **fable** (FAY • buhl) is a short tale that teaches a lesson. In most of Aesop's fables, animals talk and act like people. These often funny stories expose human flaws as well as strengths. Each fable ends with a message, or moral.

One of the best-known fables is "The Tortoise and the Hare." In this fable, a tortoise and a hare decide to race. More than halfway into the race, the hare is way ahead. He stops to rest and falls asleep. Meanwhile, the tortoise keeps going at a slow but steady pace and finally wins the race.

The moral of the story is "slow and steady wins the race." Some of the phrases we hear today came from Aesop's fables. "Sour grapes," "a wolf in sheep's clothing," and "appearances often are deceiving" are examples.

For about 200 years, Aesop's fables were a part of Greece's oral **tradition**. This means they were passed from person to person by word of mouth long before they were ever written down. Since then, countless writers have retold the stories in many different languages.

Reading Check Describe What are the characteristics of a fable?

Biography



WH6.4.4 Explain the significance of Greek mythology to the everyday life of people in the region and how Greek literature continues to permeate our literature and language today, drawing from Greek mythology and epics, such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and from *Aesop's Fables*.

HOMER

c. 750 B.C.

Homer ▶

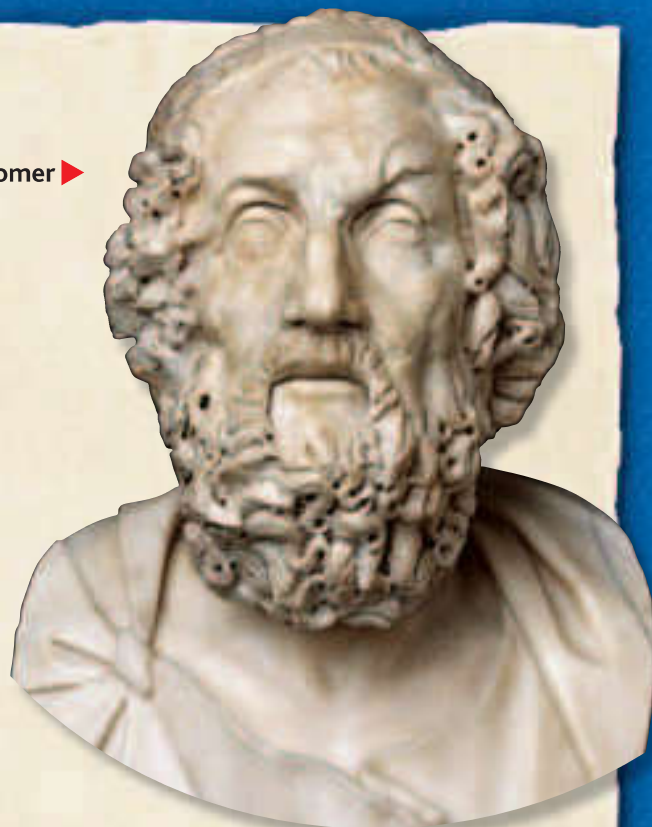
Homer's epic poems—the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—are famous, but until the 1900s, historians believed that Homer never existed. Historians now know Homer was a real person, but they still debate whether he wrote his poems alone or with the help of other poets.

Many historians have speculated, or made educated guesses, about Homer's personal life. Some say that Homer came from Ionia and seven cities claim to be his birthplace. Some believe that he was blind. Others believe that he wandered from town to town.

Legends tell of Homer's strong influence on his readers. For example, as a young child, Alexander the Great is said to have slept with a copy of the *Iliad* under his pillow.

Homer used the term *aoidos* for a poet. This word means "singer," which tells us that the poetry created during Homer's time was memorized and recited, not written down. Usually, short, simple poems that were easy to remember were told to an audience as entertainment.

Homer created a different style of poetry that influenced all Western literature that followed. His epics are long and involve complex characters, dramatic action, and interesting events. Because each section of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* has these characteristics, most historians today think that only one poet could have created both epics. Whoever Homer was, his two epics have influenced readers for nearly 3,000 years.



**"I hate as I hate [Hades']
own gate that man who
hides one thought within
him while he speaks
another."**

—Homer, the *Iliad*

Then and Now

Review the characteristics of an epic. Then do research to identify a modern epic.



WH6.4.4 Explain the significance of Greek mythology to the everyday life of people in the region and how Greek literature continues to permeate our literature and language today, drawing from Greek mythology and epics, such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and from *Aesop's Fables*. **WH6.4.8** Describe the enduring contributions of important Greek figures in the arts and sciences (e.g., Hypatia, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Thucydides).

Greek Drama

Main Idea Greek drama still shapes entertainment today.

Reading Connection Think about your favorite movie. How would you describe it? Is it a tragedy? Is it a comedy? Read to find out how Greek plays still influence our entertainment.

What is **drama** (DRAH•muh)? Drama is a story told by actors who pretend to be characters in the story. In a drama, actors speak, show emotion, and imitate the actions of the characters they represent.

Today's movies, plays, and television shows are all examples of drama.

Tragedies and Comedies The Greeks performed plays in outdoor theaters as part of their religious festivals. They developed two kinds of dramas—comedies and tragedies.

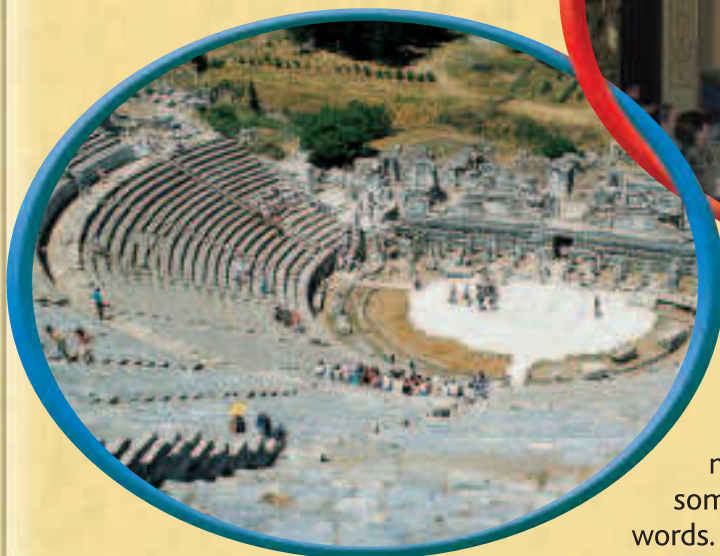
In a **tragedy** (TRA•juh•dee), a person struggles to overcome difficulties but fails. As a result, the story has an unhappy ending. Early Greek tragedies presented people in a struggle against their fate. Later Greek tragedies showed how a person's character flaws caused him or her to fail.

Linking Past & Present

The Theater

PAST Tragedies and comedies were staged at a theater on the slopes of the Acropolis in Athens. The plays included music and dance. Greek actors wore costumes and held large masks. The masks told the audience who the actor was supposed to be—a king, a soldier, or a god. All the actors were men, even those playing female parts.

▼ A modern-day play



▲ Ruins of a Greek theater

PRESENT Actors today include both men and women—and even children and animals. Special effects and makeup have replaced handheld masks. Music in modern theater is sometimes just as important as the actors' words. *If you watched a Greek play, what might it tell you about life in ancient Greece?*



In a **comedy** (KAH • muh • dee), the story ends happily. Today we use the word *comedy* to mean a story filled with humor. The word actually means any drama that has a happy ending.

Greek stories dealt with big questions, such as:

- What is the nature of good and evil?
- What rights should people have?
- What role do gods play in our lives?

The three best-known writers of Greek tragedies were Aeschylus (EHS • kuh • luhs), **Sophocles** (SAH • fuh • KLEEZ), and **Euripides** (yu • RIH • puh • DEEZ). The best-known writer of Greek comedies was Aristophanes (ar • uh • STAH • fuh • NEEZ).

Early Greek tragedies had only one actor who gave speeches and a chorus that sang songs describing the events. Aeschylus was the first to introduce the idea of having two actors. This let the writer tell a story involving **conflict** between the two people. Aeschylus also introduced costumes, props, and stage decorations—all items we still use today.

One of Aeschylus’s best-known plays is a group of three plays called the *Oresteia* (ohr • eh • STY • uh). Aeschylus wrote the plays in 458 B.C. They describe what happens when the king of Mycenae returns home from the Trojan War. The *Oresteia* teaches that evil acts cause more evil acts and suffering. In the end, however, reason triumphs over evil. The moral of these plays is that people should not seek revenge.

Sophocles, a general and a writer of plays, developed drama even further. He used three actors in his stories instead of one or two. He also placed painted scenes behind the stage as a backdrop to the action. Two of Sophocles’ most famous plays are *Oedipus Rex* (EH • duh • puhs REHKS) and *Antigone* (an • TIH • guh • nee) In *Antigone*, Sophocles



▲ This artwork shows actors preparing for a play. **When and where were Greek plays performed?**

◀ Comedy and tragedy masks

asks the question “Is it better to follow orders or to do what is right?”

Euripides, a later playwright, tried to take Greek drama beyond heroes and gods. His characters were more down-to-earth. Euripides’ plots show a great interest in real-life situations. He questioned traditional thinking, especially about war. He showed war as cruel and women and children as its victims.

The works of Aristophanes are good examples of comedies. They make fun of leading politicians and scholars. They encourage the audience to think as well as to laugh. Many of Aristophanes’ plays included jokes, just like popular television comedies do today.

Reading Check Summarize What two types of drama did the Greeks create?



WH6.4.8 Describe the enduring contributions of important Greek figures in the arts and sciences (e.g., Hypatia, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Thucydides).

Greek Art and Architecture

Main Idea Greek art and architecture expressed Greek ideas of beauty and harmony.

Reading Connection Do you consider any building in your neighborhood a work of art? Read on to find out about buildings that people have admired as art for centuries.

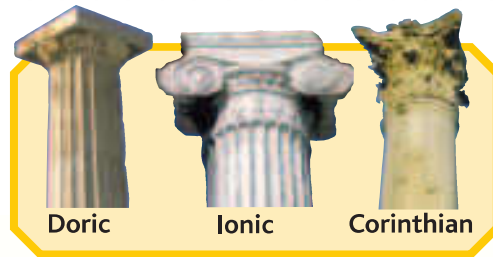
Artists in ancient Greece believed in certain ideas and tried to show those ideas in their work. These ideas have never gone out of style. Greek artists wanted people to

see reason, moderation, balance, and harmony in their work. They hoped their art would inspire people to base their lives on these same ideas.

We know that the Greeks painted murals, but none of them have survived. However, we can still see examples of Greek painting on Greek pottery. The pictures on most Greek pottery are either red on a black background or black on a red background. Large vases often had scenes from Greek myths. Small drinking cups showed scenes from everyday life.

The Parthenon

Standing at almost 230 feet long and 100 feet wide, the Parthenon was the glory of ancient Athens. It was built between 447 and 432 B.C. **What was the purpose of the Parthenon?**



▲ The Greeks used three different styles of columns in their buildings.

Treasure Room
Held the city's gold

Athena
The statue of Athena, covered in ivory and gold, was about 43 feet high.



▲ Today the Parthenon still rises above Athens.

Festival
Athenians came to honor Athena every four years.



In addition to making pottery, the Greeks were skilled architects. Architecture is the art of designing and building structures. In Greece, the most important architecture was the temple dedicated to a god or goddess. The best-known example is the Parthenon. Temples, such as the Parthenon, had a walled room in their centers. Statues of gods and goddesses and the gifts offered to them were kept in these central rooms.

Large columns supported many Greek buildings. The first Greek columns were carved from wood. Then, in 500 B.C., the Greeks began to use marble. Marble columns were built in sections. Large blocks of marble were chiseled from stone quarries and brought by oxen-drawn wagon to the building site. The sections

were stacked on top of each other. To keep them from toppling, the column's sections were joined with wooden pegs. Today, marble columns are common features of churches and government buildings. Some of the best-known buildings in our nation's capital, such as the White House and the Capitol, have Greek columns.

Many Greek temples were decorated with sculpture. Greek sculpture, like Greek architecture, was used to express Greek ideas. The favorite subject of Greek artists was the human body. Greek sculptors did not copy their subjects exactly, flaws and all. Instead, they tried to show their ideal version of perfection and beauty.

Reading Check Identify What was the most important type of building in Greece?

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Section 1 Review

Reading Summary

Review the Main Ideas

- The Greeks believed gods and goddesses influenced their lives. They believed oracles spoke for the gods and goddesses.
- The Greeks wrote long poems, called epics, and short tales, called fables, to pass on Greek values.
- The Greeks created the ideas of tragedy and comedy that are still used in drama today.
- Greek art forms, such as painting, architecture, and sculpture, expressed Greek ideas of beauty, harmony, and moderation.

What Did You Learn?

1. How and why did the Greeks honor their gods?
2. What values did the epic poems of Homer teach Greeks?
5. **Contrast** How do Greek tragedies and comedies differ? **CA 6RL3.1**
6. **Evaluate** Why did Greek artists include the ideas of reason, moderation, balance, and harmony in their works? **CA 6RC2.3**

Critical Thinking

3. **The Big Ideas** What are the main themes of Euripedes' plays? Would they be popular today? **CA 6RL3.6**
4. **Summarizing Information** Draw a table like the one below to describe the characteristics of Greek architecture and pottery. **CA 6RC2.4**
7. **Expository Writing** Greek literature tells us about Greek society. Choose a modern book or movie. Write a paragraph to explain what it would tell others about our society. **CA 6WA2.2**

Greek Architecture	
Greek Pottery	

8. **Reading Visualizing** Write a description of Greek architecture. Give details so readers can visualize them. **CA 6RC2.4**

