

Athens vs. Sparta

Civil Conversation Lesson Plan

Materials

- Handout A: Middle School Text
- Handout B: Civil Conversation Guide
- Teacher Presentation

Standards and Topics

- CCSS.SL.6-12.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively
- CCSS.R.6-12.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- C3.D2.His.16.6-8. Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.
- CA.HSS.6.4 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Ancient Greece.

Topics: Greek city-states, Athens, Sparta, world history, democracy, oligarchy

Overview

In this Civil Conversation, students discuss the positive aspects and downsides of life in ancient Athens and Sparta. First, they examine a text that offers multiple perspectives on governance in each Greek city-state. Next, they participate in a Civil Conversation on the text. In this structured discussion method, students are encouraged to engage intellectually with challenging materials, gain insight about their own point of view, and strive for a shared understanding of issues.

Objectives

1. Evaluate life and governance in ancient Athens and Sparta
2. Participate effectively in a civil discussion by expressing clear and persuasive arguments, while building on others' ideas
3. Consider other perspectives with a sense of empathy

Procedure

I. Focus Discussion

- A. Tell students to decide whether each statement is a “Myth” or a “Fact” based on what they know about ancient Greece. Ask students to explain their reasoning. Then, reveal the myths to students.
 - Ancient Greeks were known for their strong military and rigorous training programs.
 - Ancient Greek women had no involvement in physical training and were expected to stay home.

- B. Inform students that ancient Athens and Sparta had very different ways of life. Their task today is to consider which city-state had a better system of governance by examining multiple perspectives.

II. Reading : Which city-state had a better system of governance: Athens or Sparta?

- A. Briefly provide students with an overview of the purpose and rationale of the Civil Conversation activity. Use the overview above to help you.
- B. Give each student a copy of Handout A: Which city-state had a better system of governance, Athens or Sparta?
- C. Distribute a copy of Handout B: Civil Conversation Guide to each student to complete as they read. Each student should fill in their own guide.

III. Civil Conversation

- A. Divide the class into groups of 3–4 students. You may want to have each

group select a leader who will get the discussion started, ensure the group stays on-task, and finishes on time.

- B. Determine how much time the groups have to complete the discussion. (You will know what's best for your students, depending on the length of the reading and how experienced your students are in student-directed discussion.)
- **Time:** Conversations for classroom purposes should have a time limit, generally ranging from 15 to 45 minutes and an additional five minutes to reflect on the effectiveness of the conversations. The reflection time is an opportunity to ask any students who have not spoken to comment on the things they have heard. Ask them who said something that gave them a new insight that they agreed or disagreed with.
 - **Small Groups:** This discussion strategy is designed to ensure the participation of every student. Groups of 3-4 students are ideal. If you are scaffolding text for various reading levels, group students who will use the same text together.
- C. Review the rules of a Civil Conversation (listed under Step 3 on the Guide) and direct the groups to follow the instructions on the guide to get started.
- D. Let groups know you will be circulating to listen in on their conversations and that each person in a group is expected to participate. The goal is for everyone to contribute equally to the conversation.
- E. If necessary, remind groups of the time and urge them to move to the next steps.

IV. Assessment / Closure

- A. After the groups have completed their discussions, debrief the activity by having the class reflect on the effectiveness of the conversation:
- What did you learn from the Civil Conversation?
 - What common ground did you find with other members of the group?
 - Ask all participants to suggest ways in which the conversation could be improved. If appropriate, have students add the suggestions to their list of conversation rules.
- B. If you want to also debrief the content of the Civil Conversation, you might ask students:
- Was there any surprising information you learned from the reading? What was it?
 - What are the similarities between ancient Athens and Sparta? Differences?
 - Which city-state had a better system of governance?
- C. For assessment, look for the following on each student's Civil Conversation Guide:
- Step 2 – A, B: Basic understanding of text.
 - Step 2 – C, D: Text-based arguments.
 - Step 2 – E: Appropriate and compelling questions about the text.
 - Step 4 – A: Level of participation (should be “about the same as others”).
 - Step 4 – B: Answer is appropriately related to topic/issue presented in text.
 - Step 4 – C, D: Specificity/text-based.
- D. For additional assessment, you may want to collect the article/text students used to assess the annotations they made in terms of connections to prior knowledge/experience, questions they had while reading, and comments they made.



2500 years ago, two totally different city-states dominated Greece. Athens was an open society, and Sparta was a closed one. Athens was democratic, and Sparta was ruled by a select few. The differences were many.

In 431 BCE, a war broke out between Athens and Sparta. It was called the Peloponnesian War. This is because Sparta was located on the Peloponnesian Peninsula. If you look at a map of Greece, you will see that the southern part of Greece is attached by a small strip of land. This southern part is called the Peloponnesian Peninsula.

Sparta

Sparta began as a city-state of farmers. As the population grew, Spartans needed more land to farm. To get more, they invaded their neighbors, the Messenians. After a long war, they finally **conquered** the rich land of Messenia in 715 BCE and enslaved the Messenians. The Messenians outnumbered the Spartans by 10–1. Treated brutally, the Messenians rose in revolt in 650. It took almost 30 years for the Spartans to put down the revolt.

The revolt changed Sparta forever. Spartans felt that they had to control the Messenians. They saw only one way to do this: They built a strong army, which every male Spartan had to join.

The training lasted almost a lifetime. At birth, unfit babies were left to die. At age 7, boys left home and lived in barracks. They underwent training to make them strong and fearless. They made their own clothes and prepared their own meals. They learned how to fend for themselves.

At age 20, they went into the army. For the next 10 years, they remained in barracks as soldiers. They had to get married at 20, but did not live with their wives until age 30. They remained in the army until 60. Older men inspired the younger men. If duty called, they answered. The Spartan army was the **fiercest** in Greece.

Since the men's only job was fighting, most of the other work was left to enslaved people and women. Enslaved people (and some free non-Spartans) tended the fields and did chores. Because Spartans feared another slave revolt, they did not allow enslaved people to go out at night.

With the men away for so long, the women took charge. As in other Greek city-states, they could not vote or hold office. But they could own land and even go to court. Women owned about one-third of Spartan land. They married older (age 18)

Pronunciation Key

Dionysus DIE uh nie sus

ephors EFF ors

Messenians Mess SEN ee uns

Peloponnesian Pell uh puh
NEE zhun



Map of Modern-Day Greece with the locations of Athens and Sparta

conquered to win or overcome
something or someone

fiercest the strongest and most
intense

than other Greeks. They were known for standing up to their husbands. A famous Greek writer said that “the men of Sparta always obeyed their wives.”

Other Greeks thought Spartan women were shameless. They went out in public, talked with other people, and did not cover their legs. They exercised hard and competed in sports.

Like their husbands, they devoted their lives to Sparta. They wore no jewelry or fancy clothes. They married to have children who would fight for Sparta. It was said that Spartan mothers had a simple message when their sons left for war: “Come home with your shield or upon it.” In other words, return with the army alive or be killed in battle.

Life in Sparta was tough and dull. Even the food tended to be the same day after day. After tasting Spartan food, one outsider said, “Now I know why Spartans don’t fear death.”

The government of Sparta consisted of a Council of 30. The council had 28 elders, who served for life, and two kings. The kings led the army. A citizen assembly elected five leaders, called “ephors,” each year. The ephors had total power during their time in office. They could even arrest the kings or elders.

Athens

Athens was different in almost every way. Spartans did as they were told.

Athenians loved their freedom. Sparta was ruled by a select few. Athenians were their own rulers. They debated and voted on laws in the Assembly.

In their democracy, Athenians had duties. They had to obey the laws, serve in the military, help run the city, pay taxes, and serve on juries. A jury consisted of 500 or more citizens. If an Athenian broke the law or failed to live up to his duties as a citizen, he could be **ostracized**. This meant that he was forced to leave Athens for 10 years.

The land around Athens was difficult to farm. Athenians grew olive trees and grapes, but had to import food from other places. They built a trading society, selling olives, grapes, wine, pottery, and other goods. Athenians were known as fine craftsmen and artisans.

The city of Athens impressed everyone. Its buildings and statues are still admired today.

Homes of the rich had courtyards and large rooms. Most people, however, lived in simple homes. Men spent most of the daylight hours outside the home. They worked. They went to the marketplace. They hung out in the streets. They played sports and talked at the gymnasium. They went to the theater and saw plays. When it got dark, they went home to eat and sleep.

Women were expected to stay at home and do housework. They cleaned, cooked, and wove cloth. When a husband had guests, the wife was supposed to disappear into another part of the house. If women **ventured** out of the house, they covered themselves and wore veils to hide their faces. Rich women **seldom** left the house. Poorer women had to work outside the home.

ostracized when someone is left out or excluded by a group

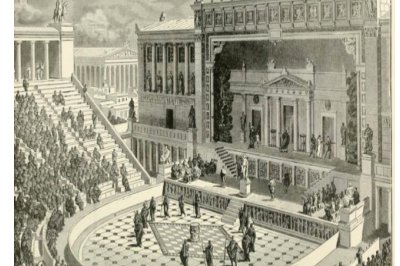
ventured when you try something new or take a risk

seldom not happening very often

Like most of the ancient world, Athens enslaved people captured in wars. About 100,000 enslaved men and women made up about a third of the population. Almost every home had at least one enslaved person. The rich might have 50. Even so, other Greeks complained that Athenians treated them as equals. This was not true, but they did treat them better than the Spartans treated their enslaved people.

Every year, Athenians held many festivals and contests. The rich paid for their cost. One festival honored Dionysus, the god of wine and drinking. Among other merrymaking at this festival, Athenians watched plays and judged which was the best tragedy and comedy. The Theater of Dionysus held 17,000 people. The performers wore large masks, and a chorus of actors spoke many lines.

As a trading city, Athens sent its men to sea. To protect its ships, it built a navy. In time, it developed into the greatest naval power in Greece. It slowly gained control over other city-states.



Theater of Dionysus (Buhlmann / Public Domain)

Athens vs. Sparta

Civil Conversation Guide

Step 1: Read.

A. Read through the entire selection without stopping to think about any particular section.

B. Re-read the selection and annotate (“talk to”) the text:

- Underline the main/most important points. You can comment on these points in the margins.
- Circle words or phrases that are unknown or confusing to you.
- Write down any questions you have in the margin labeling them with a “?”.
- Draw an ➡ in the margin next to text that connects to something you know from outside the text. Note what the connection is, such as a news item or personal experience.

Step 2: Think about the reading to prepare for the discussion.

A. This reading is about...

B. The MAIN POINTS are:

C. In the reading, I agree with:

D. In the reading, I disagree with:

Which city-state had a better system of governance, Athens or Sparta?

E. What are two questions about this reading that you think could be discussed? (The best questions for discussion are ones that have no simple answer and that can use the text as evidence.)

1.

2.

Step 3: Discuss and Listen.

You will have ____ minutes to discuss. Your goal is to engage with each other and the text to gain insight about your own point of view while finding a shared understanding of the issue.

Start by taking turns sharing your answers to the questions in Step 2, sections A-D. Then, you will likely find at least one discussion question at the end of the reading. If time permits, you can discuss questions you came up with in Section E above.

Rules for a Civil Conversation

1. Everyone in your group should participate in the conversation.
2. Listen carefully to what others are saying
3. Ask clarifying questions if you do not understand a point raised
4. Be respectful of what others are saying.
5. Refer to the text to support your ideas.

Step 4: After your conversation...

A. Compared to others in your group, did you speak? ____ Less than, ____ About the same as, ____ More than others.

B. Note some of the ways you added to the discussion.

C. What evidence did you use from the text to add to the discussion? Why was this evidence helpful?

D. What did you learn about the topic from the Civil Conversation? (Be sure to reference the text!)