

**CLASSICAL GREECE  
(4TH-5TH CENTURIES  
BCE): SPARTAN  
SOCIETY: MILITARISM**



# CLASSICAL GREECE (4TH-5TH CENTURIES BCE): SPARTAN SOCIETY: MILITARISM

## Description

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the organization of Spartan society in the age of Classical Greece, the roles males and females each played in that society, and how Spartans themselves saw the concepts of freedom and equality for all citizens.

## Subjects

World History, Government, Economics

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- [Ancient Sparta](#)

## Essential Questions

- Where was Ancient Sparta?
- How and why did the Spartan military control everyday life in Ancient Sparta?
- What was a male's role in Spartan society?
- What was a female's role in Spartan society?
- How did Sparta see the role of all citizens in society?

## Academic Summary

Come back with this shield...or on it.

*Saying attributed to Spartan mother as she sent her son to battle, from Plutarch, Sayings of Spartans, 1st century CE*

Another, in the thick of the fight, was about to bring down his sword on an enemy when the recall sounded, and he checked the blow. When someone inquired why, when he had his enemy in his power, he did not kill him, he said, "Because it is better to obey one's commander than to slay an enemy."

*Plutarch, Sayings of the Spartans, 1st century CE*

...he ordered the maidens to exercise themselves with wrestling, running, throwing, the quoit, and casting the dart, to the end that the fruit they conceived might, in strong and healthy bodies, take firmer root and find better growth, and withal that they, with this greater vigor, might be the more able to undergo the pains of child-bearing. And to the end he might take away their over great tenderness and fear of exposure to the air, and all acquired womanishness, he ordered that the young women should go naked in the processions, as well as the young men, and dance, too, in that condition, at certain solemn feasts, singing certain songs, whilst the young men stood around, seeing and hearing them.

Nor was there anything shameful in this nakedness of the young women; modesty attended them, and all wantonness was excluded. It taught them simplicity and a care for good health, and gave them some taste of higher feelings, admitted as they thus were to the field of noble action and glory. Hence it was natural for them to think and speak as Gorgo, for example, the wife of Leonidas, is said to have done, when some foreign lady, as it would seem, told her that the women of Lacedaemon were the only women in the world who could rule men; "With good reason," she said, "for we are the only women who bring forth men."

In their marriages, the husband carried off his bride by a sort of force; nor were their brides ever small and of tender years, but in their full bloom and ripeness. After this, she who superintended the wedding comes and clips the hair of the bride close round her head, dresses her up in man's clothes, and leaves her upon a mattress in the dark; afterwards comes the bridegroom, in his everyday clothes, sober and composed, as having supped at the common table, and, entering privately into the room where the bride lies, unties her virgin zone, and takes her to himself; and, after staying some time together, he returns composedly to his own apartment, to sleep as usual with the other young men. ... he made it, nevertheless, honorable for men to give the use of their wives to those whom they should think fit, that so they might have children by them; ridiculing those in whose opinion such favors are so unfit for participation as to fight and shed blood and go to war about it. Lycurgus allowed a man who was advanced in years and had a young wife to recommend some virtuous and approved young man, that she might have a child by him, who might inherit the good qualities of the father, and be a son to himself. On the other side, an

honest man who had love for a married woman upon account of her modesty and the well-favouredness of her children, might, without formality, beg her company of her husband, that he might raise, as it were, from this plot of good ground, worthy and well-allied children for himself.

Lycurgus was of a persuasion that children were not so much the property of their parents as of the whole commonwealth, and, therefore, would not have his citizens begot by the first-comers, but by the best men that could be found; the laws of other nations seemed to him very absurd and inconsistent, where people would be so solicitous for their dogs and horses as to exert interest and to pay money to procure fine breeding, and yet kept their wives shut up, to be made mothers only by themselves, who might be foolish, infirm, or diseased; as if it were not apparent that children of a bad breed would prove their bad qualities first upon those who kept and were rearing them, and well-born children, in like manner, their good qualities. These regulations, founded on natural and social grounds, were certainly so far from that scandalous liberty which was afterwards charged upon their women, that they knew not what adultery meant.

Nor was it in the power of the father to dispose of the child as he thought fit; he was obliged to carry it before certain triers at a place called Lesche; these were some of the elders of the tribe to which the child belonged; their business it was carefully to view the infant, and, if they found it stout and well made, they gave order for its rearing, and allotted to it one of the nine thousand shares of land above mentioned for its maintenance, but, if they found it puny and ill-shaped, ordered it to be taken to what was called the Apothetae, a sort of chasm under Taygetus; as thinking it neither for the good of the child itself, nor for the public interest, that it should be brought up, if it did not, from the very outset, appear made to be healthy and vigorous. Upon the same account, the women did not bathe the new-born children with water, as is the custom in all other countries, but with wine, to prove the temper and complexion of their bodies; from a notion they had that epileptic and weakly children faint and waste away upon their being thus bathed while, on the contrary, those of a strong and vigorous habit acquire firmness and get a temper by it, like steel.

*Excerpts from Plutarch, Lives of the Spartans: Lycurgus, 75 CE*

Spartan society demanded absolute obedience from its citizens. Their lives were not their own, but rather lived in service to the state and to each other. From birth, all Spartan children were designated as state property.

As soon as a child was born, the young boy or young girl was dipped in wine to “temper” them against the brutality of the world. All children were taken by their fathers before the elders of the city for inspection. Those deemed healthy and well-formed were allowed to live. Any child not so judged was taken outside the city and left to be “exposed” (left to die). Efficiency was the only consideration.

Males were born to serve in the Spartan army. They were brought up under a strict set of rules and guidelines specifically designed to teach them obedience to authority. At age 7, young men were taken from their homes and brought to the Spartan military

facility. Over the next few years, these boys would endure a brutal physical, mental and psychological training program designed to forge them into soldiers. Food was deliberately withheld to teach Spartan soldiers to do without. Beatings were regular. Discipline was absolute. Punishments were severe. By his mid-teens, a young Spartan man was a killing machine. In the ancient world, no fighting force could match that of Ancient Sparta.

Women had a place in Spartan society as well. Unlike women in other Greek city-states of the time who often had no legal status or value before the law, women in Sparta had an equality with men in society. Women in Sparta were educated. Whereas laws across the Peloponnesus forbid women from owning property, so many women did that in Sparta that, by the beginning of the 4th century BCE, women landowners were a majority. Make no mistake, equality did not necessarily mean freedom. Women in Spartan society were born with a purpose: to have healthy male babies for the army. Their bodies, therefore, belonged first to the state and then to their husbands. Having children was so important to the continued welfare of Sparta that husbands were authorized by the laws of the state to give their wives to other men to increase the population. Women were breeders, plain and simple.

Most modern westerners would be appalled at the laws and culture of Ancient Sparta. Infanticide, bigotry and forced rape were commonplace in Spartan society. A complete and total obedience to the state goes against the 18th century enlightenment ideas on which modern western society was founded. One must be careful, however, when judging the past through the eyes of today. Ancient Sparta may indeed have no place in 2014, but it was highly successful in the 4th century BCE. Spartan men and women considered themselves fortunate to live in such an orderly, efficient and free society, one where each citizen had a purpose, one where each citizen was judged not on his or her birthright or financial status, but rather on his or her deeds and actions.

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the organization of Spartan society in the age of Classical Greece, the roles males and females each played in that society, and how Spartans themselves saw the concepts of freedom and equality for all citizens.

## **Objectives**

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the organization of Spartan society in the age of Classical Greece.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the roles males and females played in Spartan society in the age of Classical Greece.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Spartans saw and understood the concepts of freedom in equality for all citizens in the age of Classical Greece.

## Procedure

### I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What's more important for society: individual freedom or equality for all? Is it possible for a society to protect and cherish both concepts? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

### II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Sparta (20 min)
- Video – Ancient Warriors: Spartans (20 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on Spartan society, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework before class.
- Suggestion: Advanced/AP students should focus on primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on Spartan society in the age of Classical Greece (15 min)

### III. Closure

- Assessment / DBQ – Essay: Explain in detail the organization of Spartan society in the age of Classical Greece, the roles males and females each played in that society, and how Spartans themselves saw the concepts of freedom and equality for all citizens.

## Extension

### On tour: Sparta, Greece

While on tour in Greece, students can visit Ancient Sparta, where they can see for themselves where Leonidas, the Spartan king who led “the 300” at the Battle of Thermopylae, is buried. On the site is a huge statue to Leonidas. Archeological digs at the site are ongoing. While in Sparta, perhaps students can reflect on what it means to “come back with this shield... or on it.” How many of them would want to have lived in Sparta?

## Web Links

### Lesson Plan Websites

- <http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/lycurgus.html>  
Plutarch: Lycurgus (primary source)
- [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Sayings\\_of\\_Spartans\\*/unknown.html#51](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Sayings_of_Spartans*/unknown.html#51)  
Plutarch: Sayings of the Spartans (primary source)
- [www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/xeno-sparta1.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/xeno-sparta1.asp)  
Xenophon: The Polity of the Spartans (primary source) – from the Ancient History Sourcebook at Fordham University
- [www.shsu.edu/~his\\_ncp/Xenspart.html](http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Xenspart.html)  
Xenophon on the Constitution of the Lacedaimonians (primary source) – from Nicholas Pappas, Professor of History at San Houston State University (TX)
- [www.sparta.net/listingview.php?listingID=5](http://www.sparta.net/listingview.php?listingID=5)  
Life in Sparta (website)
- [www.livescience.com/32035-sparta.html](http://www.livescience.com/32035-sparta.html)  
History of Ancient Sparta (website)
- [www.mrdowling.com/701-sparta.html](http://www.mrdowling.com/701-sparta.html)  
Ancient Sparta (website)
- [www.ancientmilitary.com/spartan-military.htm](http://www.ancientmilitary.com/spartan-military.htm)  
Ancient Military: Sparta (website)
- [www.ancientgreece.co.uk/staff/resources/background/bg1/home.html](http://www.ancientgreece.co.uk/staff/resources/background/bg1/home.html)  
Ancient Greece: Spartan Life (class / study outline)
- [www.historyteacher.net/EuroCiv/Resources/reading-AncientSparta.pdf](http://www.historyteacher.net/EuroCiv/Resources/reading-AncientSparta.pdf)  
Ancient Sparta (worksheet PDF) – from Susan Pojer, AP history teacher from Horace Greely High School, Chappaqua, NY
- [www.allempires.com/article/index.php?q=the\\_spartans](http://www.allempires.com/article/index.php?q=the_spartans)  
The Spartans (website)
- [www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jrea/Sparta.ppt](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jrea/Sparta.ppt)  
Sparta (PowerPoint) – from Jennifer A. Rea, Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Florida
- [www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1)  
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEKL0gKO33s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEKL0gKO33s)  
Ancient Warriors - Spartans (video). 25-minute video from the Discovery Channel that does a good job outlining Spartan society. Highly recommended for all classes. Probably the best video out there for students.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq1T-y0SIno](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq1T-y0SIno)  
Ancient Worlds – The Spartans (video). 150-minute video from the BBC featuring Bettany Hughes, historian, author and broadcaster. Perhaps the most complete video on Sparta, it is probably too long for most in-class viewings, but great for out-of-class showings. Highly recommended for all classes, and

especially AP/Advanced students.

## **Background Information**

- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sparta](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sparta)  
Sparta – Wikipedia article
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lycurgus\\_of\\_Sparta](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lycurgus_of_Sparta)  
Lycurgus of Sparta – Wikipedia article
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agoge](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agoge)  
Agoge (of Sparta) – Wikipedia article
- [www.passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/greece/country\\_profile](http://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/greece/country_profile)  
On the Road: Greece – from Passports Educational Travel

## **Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans**

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-iliad](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-iliad)  
Ancient Greece – Homer's Iliad
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-odyssey](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-odyssey)  
Ancient Greece – Homer's Odyssey
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/ancient-greece-minoan-civilization](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-minoan-civilization)  
Ancient Greece – Minoan Civilization on Crete
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/classical-greece-alexander-the-great](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-alexander-the-great)  
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Alexander the Great
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/classical-greece-sparta](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-sparta)  
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Sparta
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/classical-greece-athens-democracy](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-athens-democracy)  
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Athens
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-marathon](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-marathon)  
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Battle of Marathon 490 BCE
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-thermopylae](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-thermopylae)  
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Battle of Thermopylae: Leonidas and the 300
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/plato-allegory-of-the-cave](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/plato-allegory-of-the-cave)  
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Allegory of the Cave
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/classical-greece-plato-euthyphro](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-plato-euthyphro)  
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Euthyphro
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/plato-republic-philosopher-kings](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/plato-republic-philosopher-kings)  
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Philosopher Kings and the Republic
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/greece/classical-greece-socrates](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-socrates)  
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Socrates: Father of Western Philosophy



## **Key Terms**

- Ancient Greece
- Sparta

