Topic 5: Ancient Greece
Lesson 2: The Greek City-States
Overview

The Mediterranean and Aegean seas were as central to the development of Greek civilization as the Nile was to the Egyptians.

Ancient Greeks absorbed many ideas and beliefs from the older civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt.

At the same time, they developed their own ways that differed greatly from those of the river valley empires.

The Greeks developed new ideas about how best to govern a society.
Physical Geography of Greece

Greece is part of the **Balkan Peninsula**, which extends southward into the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Mountains divide the peninsula into isolated valleys.

Hundreds of rocky islands spread into the Mediterranean and Aegean.
Geography Influence on Settlements

The Greeks farmed the valleys or settled on the scattered islands.

Did not create a large empires.

They built many small city-states, and were cut off from one another by mountains or water.

Each included a city and its surrounding countryside.
Early Greek City-States

Greeks felt strong loyalty to their city-states and fiercely defended their independence.

Endless rivalry led to frequent wars between the city-state.

At times the city-states were conquered by outsiders, Non-Greeks.
The Mediterranean and Aegean seas were central to the Greek world provided a link to the world outside of Greece. With its hundreds of bays, the Greek coastline offered safe harbors for ships.
The Influence of the Sea

The Greeks became skilled sailors

Cargoes of olive oil, wine, and marble, sailed to Egypt, the Middle East, and Asia Minor

Grains, metals, and ideas came back on those ships

Greeks adapted these ideas to their own needs
Lasting Influence

One of the most important ideas by Greeks was the expanding of the Phoenician alphabet.

The Greek alphabet in turn became the basis for all later Western alphabets.
Spread of the Greek Way of Life

By 750 B.C.E., rapid population growth forced many Greeks to leave their own overcrowded valleys.

With fertile land limited, the Greeks expanded overseas.

Greek colonies took root on islands all around the Mediterranean.

Wherever they traveled, Greek settlers and traders carried their ideas and culture.
Change with Growth

After 750 B.C.E., the Greek city-states change in structure and are called a polis. The polis was built on two levels. On a hilltop stood the acropolis, with marble temples dedicated to the gods and goddesses. On flatter ground below was the walled main city.
Life in a Polis

The population of each city-state was fairly small, which helped the citizens share a sense of responsibility for its triumphs and defeats.

Free men spent much time debating issues that affected their lives.

The whole community joined in festivals honoring the city’s special god or goddess.
Life in a Polis

The rights of citizens were unequal
Male landowners held all the political power
Women had no political power or rights
Government Structure

Between 750 B.C.E. and 500 B.C.E. Greeks developed different forms of government.

At first, the ruler of the polis, like those in the river valley empires, was a king.

A government in which a hereditary ruler, such as a king or queen, exercises central power is a monarchy.
Government Structure

Slowly power shifted to a class of noble landowners.

Only they could afford bronze weapons and chariots making them the military defenders of the city-states.

These nobles defended the king, until they started winning power for themselves, creating an aristocracy, or rule by a landholding elite.
Government Structure

Trade expanded, creating a new middle class of wealthy merchants, farmers, and artisans.

They challenged the landowning nobles for power and came to dominate some city-states.

The result was a form of government called an oligarchy, with power in the hands of a small, wealthy elite.
Military of City-States

Changes in military technology increased the power of the middle class

650 B.C.E. iron replaced bronze for weapons

Iron was cheaper and allowed ordinary citizens to afford iron helmets, shields, and swords
Military of City-States

A new method of fighting emerged as well.

The phalanx, a massive tactical formation of heavily armed foot soldiers.

It required long hours of drill to master.

Shared training created a strong sense of unity among the citizen-soldiers.
Military Influences on Society

Having the defense of the city-state in the hands of ordinary citizens, the phalanx reduced class differences.

However, it led the two most influential city-states—Athens and Sparta—to develop very different ways of life.