

Athenian Envoy Speaks to the Argives on the Eve of the War

"No one needs to be afraid of Athens. Athenians have a free and open society, and we hope other city-states throughout Hellas will learn from our example. Solon, who was very wise, welcomed foreigners into our land. He hoped that foreigners would bring their crafts and knowledge to help Athenians grow and succeed. Themistocles convinced the Athenians to build the triremes (large boats) that destroyed the battle fleet of Xerxes at Salamis. These boats are now carrying goods and produce to other lands. We are unique and smart enough to continue to grow and try to make things better. Athens also had a king at one time. And we were also ruled by oligarchs. Pisistratus was a tyrant, though he was very kind, and he reorganized the four tribes into ten and made more people citizens. Now Athens has 45,000 citizens, and we give citizenship to all who are qualified by owning land when they turn 18. Not all Athenians are happy with the policies of Pericles, but more people can take part in government and politics. Five hundred citizens, chosen at random, make up the Council. They propose new laws that must be approved by the Assembly, which includes all Athenian citizens. Many people in Athens are slaves, but we do not treat them as badly as Sparta treats its slaves. Women take care of the home and children. Our society has a lot to offer, and 300,000 Athenians are happy with the way they live.

The Spartans should not be afraid of the Delian League. Our port at Piraeus is doing so well and making a lot of money. It is the center for all the shipping and goods of the Mediterranean world as they make their way to Attica and the agora in Athens. The success of this port makes Sparta worry about what we might want to do in the future, but they are just jealous.

In Athens we are proud that we give our young people such a good education. Our young men attend schools and are given special instruction by tutors. The young girls also learn to read and write, but they are expected to marry, have children, and take care of the household. Our agora is much more than just a simple market place. Citizens gather here to discuss issues and politics and business. In Athens we have symposiums, which are formal gatherings where men of Athens can talk about their thoughts and opinions on many subjects. Our gymnasiums are places where Athenian youth exercise to improve their bodies, which is expected among the Greeks.

In our small world, we have done what no other polis in Hellas can match. Athenian society allows talent, creativity, and the imagination to grow. High up on our Acropolis stands the Parthenon, which honors our patron goddess, Athena. The statue that Pheidias carved is a beautiful monument to her. Mnesticles is one of the best living architects. We have shown the Greeks the gift of the theater, and brilliant minds like Sophocles and Euripides have given Athenian audiences tragedies and dramas that will last for centuries to come. Our polis shows the glory of the Greek world. We value intelligence, creativity, and expanding the mind. We encourage our citizens to be the best they can be."

Spartan Envoy Speaks to the Argives on the Eve of the War

"Listen to me, people of Argos. Athens is too interested in power, and it will result in the destruction of their polis. Their empire is a threat to our safety and security. Other city-states have joined the Delian League, but Sparta was not invited to join. We would not have joined the league, but if they are as open-minded as they say, they should have asked us. We Spartans are the best warriors in all Hellas. The other poleis (plural for polis) build walls to protect themselves from their enemies, but in Sparta the fighting men are enough to protect us. Our mothers and wives are proud that they have given birth to the best soldiers in all the lands of the Greeks.

Sparta does not need the luxuries that are traded in the agora of Athens. We have no need for foreigners in our polis. We will not allow our Spartan men to do anything but train for war. When we conquered the Messenians we made them helots (slaves), and they do all the chores and labor. We allow free people to live with us and work at their crafts. But our 10,000 citizens, our Spartan men, have one purpose, and that is to train for war. For this reason, we leave unhealthy, deformed, or unwanted infants to die in the night or to be eaten by wolves. We must have only those who are able, fit, and strong enough to be great warriors. Our young men must reach the age of 30 before they become citizens, but they value citizenship because they have had to wait. Other Greeks make fun of Spartans, calling us 'dull,' 'lacking in intelligence,' 'witless,' and 'slow moving.' But our young people learn to read and to write like other Greeks, but boys know they will be soldiers and girls know they will be wives and mothers. It is true that our young boys are taken from their parents at the age of seven. They are sent to live in the barracks with the other men, and they will begin to train to be strong warriors and citizens. The Spartan man serves the polis as a warrior until he is 60 years old. The boys must practice physical exercise, mostly running, wrestling, throwing the javelin and the discus; and the girls are also expected to exercise and build their strength. Married men continue to live in the barracks most of their adult lives, away from their wives. We lead simple lives, training in the arts of war. We practice using the javelin, the sling, the bow, the sword, and fighting together as a phalanx. Many people in other Greek states don't like the way we teach our soldiers to tell lies and to steal if they have to in order to survive. We allow the young men to go out once a year to hunt down helots who are dangerous to Sparta, but we should not be criticized for this. The slaves must be controlled, and we also have a secret police to help us control them.

Ephors are the elders who make the laws that govern our polis. Our two kings help to carry out the laws the Ephors pass. Our government is an oligarchy, a group of men who help to make laws and policies that help our polis.

We know the Athenians deserve credit for defeating the Persians at Salamis. But, Argives, remember that King Leonidas and 300 Spartans held the pass against the Persians at Thermopylae, knowing that they would all die. That was as big a sacrifice as the ones made by the Athenians."

Magnetic Debate Between Athens and Sparta Chart

Category	Athens	Sparta
Government and Politics/ Citizenship		
Morals and Ethics		
Military and Naval Strength		
Slaves: Treatment and Population		
Attitude Towards Visitors/Trade		
Role of Men		
Role of Women		
Role of Boys		
Role of Girls		
Entertainment		