






# Athens and Sparta: A Conversation Between Two City-States

## Overview:





Students will learn the differences between two rival city-states in Greece around 500 BCE by doing a role play and discussion afterwards.

## Objectives:







At the end of the lesson students will be able to:

-  **Explain** how the geographic locations of these two entities influenced what kind of city-states they became with respect to: their governmental structure, education, and economy.
-  **Identify** what strengths each city-state had.
-  **Hypothesize** what might bring these two bitter rivals together.


## Preparation:

-  Prior to the lesson, make a copy of the attached map of Greece with Athens, Sparta, and Corinth to be used on the overhead projector. Alternatively, you can draw one on the board.
-  For the play: place olives, feta cheese, lemon, garlic, oregano, dates, and grape juice in a basket and have grape juice in a pitcher with two cups.
-  Prepare table cloths and sheets for students to make Greek togas. Provide an olive branch crown for Athens and a farmer's hat for Sparta.
-  Bring in books of works by Plato, Socrates, or Aristotle.


## Materials:

-  Table cloths and sheets for togas and belts; jewelry for Athens; farmer's hat for Sparta
-  Handout I: "Script for Athens and Sparta"
-  Props for the play
-  Mediterranean foods: olives, feta, lemon, garlic, oregano, dates, pita bread, and grape juice in a basket
-  A plate for food
-  Attached map of Greece showing Athens and Sparta



## On the Board:

-  Vocabulary
-  Reflection Questions

## Suggested Snack:

-  Olives (from the garden) paired with feta cheese and pita bread

## Vocabulary:

 plain (flat land)  
 bitter rivals

 artisans  
 philosophers

 economy  
 isolated

### Learning Activities:

1. Introduction (5 min.)
  - A. Explain that the students will take part in a play about two rival cities in Ancient Greece.
  - B. Have students create their own togas out of table cloths, sheets, and belts to hold them in place.
2. Role Play (25 min.)
  - A. Ask for volunteers to play Athens and Sparta and provide them with costumes and props. Have them act out the role play on the handout.
  - B. Thank the students for their performance and have them sit in front of the class for the following discussion.
  - C. Then, lead a class discussion using the following questions:
    - What did you like about this performance?
    - What did you learn about Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece?
    - What were each of the cities' strengths and weaknesses?
    - How did their geographic locations affect their lives, issues, cultures?
    - Why did these rival city states finally want to work together?
3. Snack: Serve olives (from the garden) with feta cheese, pita bread, and grapes or grape juice. (5 min.)
4. Have students answer the Reflection Questions in their garden journals. (5 min.)

### Student Reflection Questions:

1. What kinds of food did Athens and Sparta share? Have you tried these foods before? Do you like them?
2. What brought the two rivals together in the end? What things did they have in common? What did they not have in common?

### Assessment Questions:

1. What brought the two rivals together in the end? **(A common enemy)**
2. Explain the differences in location between Athens and Sparta. **(Athens is only four miles from the Aegean Sea, so they liked to travel and trade. Sparta is more isolated with mountains surrounding it so they were suspicious of outsiders.)**

**Standards:**

**Common Core State Standards**

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.



## Athens and Sparta Get Together for a Meal

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**Athens:** Thank you, Sparta, for inviting me to lunch and bringing produce from your farm. May I ask what you have in your basket?

**Sparta:** It's my pleasure — I'm glad we could meet halfway here in Corinth since our cities are bitter rivals. I have brought much to eat (*Sparta transfers the following from basket onto a plate: olives, feta cheese, lemon, garlic, oregano, dates, and pours grape juice from a pitcher into cups.*) Let's eat! (*Passes the plate to Athens and then takes some for her/himself.*)

**Athens:** I've brought a few gifts for you from our artisans — you probably know that Athens is known for its arts, culture, and philosophers/thinkers. Here's a little box made out of clay and a pottery figurine with a goat painted on it; and here is a pottery figurine of the Greek goddess Medea with snakes on her head. Also, I want to read you a little from our philosopher Plato.

**Sparta:** Thank you for these. I will put the pottery gifts by the window in my farmhouse, along with the quote from Plato. By the way, could you tell me how the economy is doing in your city-state of Athens?

**Athens:** Our economy is doing very well — we have been trading our honey, olive oil, silver, and pottery with Italy. And we get wood from them. We also trade these things with Egypt for their grain. As you know, we get much of our food from your city-state Sparta in exchange for our leather jewelry and some of our slaves.

**Sparta:** Yes, we have needed more slaves to work on our farms. Our government you know is run by a small Council of Elders, and they say we need more slaves. One thing we've done is that we have fought wars with our neighbors and turned the prisoners into slaves.

**Athens:** We are lucky where our city-state is located. We are only four miles from the Aegean Sea. It allows us to look outward to the world beyond our city. We like to travel, trade our goods elsewhere, and we are eager to spread our ideas and learn from others.

**Sparta:** Our city is located on a plain, in a valley, between the mountains and the sea. So we are isolated. I have to admit that we are very suspicious of outsiders and their ideas.

**Athens:** Well I hope you are not suspicious of me. Thank you for your invitation to have a meal together. Our two city-states have been bitter rivals, but I'd like to talk with you about a way we could get together to protect ourselves from the expanding Persian Empire.

**Sparta:** Wow! We were hoping you would say that! We have a common concern. Let's talk!

