

## ANCIENT GREECE

### Discussion 2 : Different Interpretations of the Past

**Objectives :** To recognise that events in the past can be represented and interpreted in different ways and to give reasons for this.

**Materials:** War chapter – Story section

**Class set-up:** Whole class or small group

**Vocabulary:** Thermopylae, Persians, Spartans, Herodotus, interpretation, bias,

#### Discussion:

Together, read through the story about the Battle of Thermopylae, including the extra pages with accounts of the battle from Herodotus. DO NOT read the extra page on the last page of the story. Ask:

- What do these objects tell us about life in Sparta?
- In this battle, who were the winners and who were the losers?
- The Spartans lost the battle, but what do we feel about them?  
(Encourage children to explain why the Spartans seem heroic, despite losing; encourage them to find examples of Spartan bravery)
- What do we think about the Persians? Do we think they were brave and deserved to win? If not, why?

(Point out to children, if necessary, the role of the traitor, who enabled the Persians to come at the Greeks from two sides).

Explain that this story is based on Herodotus' account of the battle. Provide a few facts about Herodotus e.g. he was a Greek, he is called the 'father of history' and was writing in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century). Ask:

- What effect might the fact that Herodotus was a Greek have on his retelling of the events of the battle?
- What other things might have affected the accuracy of his account?  
(e.g. he was writing 30 odd years after the battle, he may have talked mainly to Greeks, the Greeks eventually won the Persian Wars, so Herodotus maybe emphasised Greek bravery, despite the fact they lost this battle).
- For the reasons we have given, Herodotus' account of the battle is pro-Greek. Do you think a Persian would have retold the battle in the same way?  
  
(This can be answered in an open way, but encourage children to think about bias – a Persian historian would be more likely to show the Persians in a favourable light).
- What have we learnt about the way that events in the past are represented in written evidence?

Finish by emphasising that we need to be careful with written evidence about events in the past, as people can have different views of those events.

## Background information sheets:

You may find the following Background Information sheets found on [www.ancientgreece.co.uk](http://www.ancientgreece.co.uk) useful for this activity:

History, Writing and Recording (*for information on Herodotus*)

Battle of Marathon (*for a summary of this battle of the Persian Wars*)

**Spartan Life**