

# POLIS PROFILE: ATHENS



## THE GREEK POLIS

Most Greeks in the classical era of their history lived in city-states called poleis (PO•lays). Each polis (PO•liss) was fiercely independent and fortified its territory against outside invaders, including neighboring city-states. The several thousand people who lived in the polis paid allegiance to their city-state. In return, the polis offered its citizens protection, inclusion, and a full and abundant life. To most Greeks, being banished from their polis was worse than death. (Socrates had the choice!) Each polis had a strategic hill called an acropolis (ah•CROP•oh•liss). The acropolis was the focal point for Greek life and served three important functions. It was a defensive position when the city was under attack and a place to discuss affairs of state. It also served as a shrine to honor and worship Greece's many gods and goddesses.

*What is another name for city-states?*

*What is the word for a single city-state?*

*Why did Greeks fortify their poleis?*

*What were the three functions of an acropolis?*

*What is the name given to citizens who came from Athens?*

*Who is your polis's patron god or goddess?*

*What other symbols were shown on Athenian coins?*

*In what century was Athens considered the glory of Greece?*

*What did Sparta stress and what did Athens stress?*

## ABOUT YOUR POLIS

You are an Athenian and your loyalty is to the polis of Athens (A•thenz), often called "the school of Greece." Your polis is located on the Attica peninsula. Your patron goddess is Athena, Goddess of Wisdom. Athenian coins always showed the likeness of Athena on one side. On the other side was a standing owl and an olive branch with two leaves and a berry. There were also the Greek letters Alpha Theta Epsilon, an abbreviation for Athens.

Even in ancient times your city-state clearly served as the shining example of the model polis. For it was in Athens that democracy flourished and sculptors, mathematicians, philosophers, playwrights, and common citizens lived in freedom. In this freedom, Athenians produced theories, statues, buildings, and plays so wonderful that we still marvel at them today. No one knows why these Athenians were different from other Greeks. What is clear is that, in the fifth century BCE, the glory of ancient Greece reached its zenith in Athens. You should be proud to be an Athenian citizen. Where-

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*Which three groups  
were not a part of  
Athenian "democracy"?*

as your rival city-state Sparta became a "boot camp" stressing all things military, Athens stressed using the mind and encouraged its free citizens to participate in state decisions. Over a period of 200 to 300 years, your polis went from an oligarchy (ruled by a rich and powerful few) to an early form of democracy (ruled by the people). Athenian democracy, however, was not perfect. Fifty percent of its "free" population were women, and, in those days, women were denied equal rights. Also there were as many as 30,000 slaves and foreigners in Athens who had no say in the government.

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*List four famous  
Athenians and be  
prepared to say  
their names.*

However, because of the democratic institutions that developed in Athens, its citizens made history. Thousands of famous Athenians enriched Western civilizations with their work and ideas. The ruler Pericles (PEAR•eh•kleez), the sculptor Phidias (FID•ee•us), the philosopher Socrates (SOC•ra•teez), and the math/science genius Archimedes (AHR•kih•mee•deez) all came from Athens.

You and your fellow Athenians must work to continue this tradition. Let the achievements of the Athenians who came before you inspire greatness through honor, victory, and money to your city-state.

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## Important Note

*The following confidential information should NOT be part of your oral presentation to the other poleis.*

## ATHENIAN GOALS IN THIS SIMULATION

1. The tradition to be the best of all Hellenes should inspire you. Strive for victory in all activities and tasks, especially those emphasizing the mind. In every activity look for the opportunity to show the leadership of Pericles, the art of Phidias, the logic of Socrates, and the genius of Archimedes.
2. If Athens cannot win the most Hellaspoinits in the simulation, at least try to beat Sparta, your archrival. This will be tough because the Spartans will go to any lengths to win! Prepare to work hard, cooperate, and do your personal best to win the honors!
3. Try often to use the letters Alpha, Theta, and Epsilon to your advantage. Dress alike, and wear identical logos and insignias. Say clever and witty things to show the rest of the Greeks that Athenians are the most cultured, intelligent, and educated.
4. Athenians loved perfection. Try to have perfect attendance and turn in papers with perfect spelling. Whoever is chosen archon for each day should make it a point to encourage all Athenians to achieve perfection in all they do.

## HOW ATHENIANS SHOULD ACT

1. Show unity and loyalty. Creating a clever logo should help. (Consider Athenian history and its goddess.) Try to enter the classroom together. Make up a secret handshake.
2. Be courteous to all Greeks, regardless of city-state affiliation. Be especially supportive and helpful to other Athenians. If they are absent, encourage them to get well and return to the polis soon.
3. Give undivided loyalty and your best efforts to the archon and strategos for the day or activity. Remember you may be in a leadership position soon, and then the "table will be turned."
4. Be prepared to cheer for Athenian victories with a clever but quiet and respectful chant or song. Sing or say it each time some Athenian among you brings honor to the polis.
5. Be model students for your teacher who has worked so hard to plan and implement this simulation. Your cooperation will no doubt ensure a more successful and meaningful unit.

