

Ancient Greece

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is about ancient Greece, which was an extremely interesting and influential set of periods in time. This lesson covers:



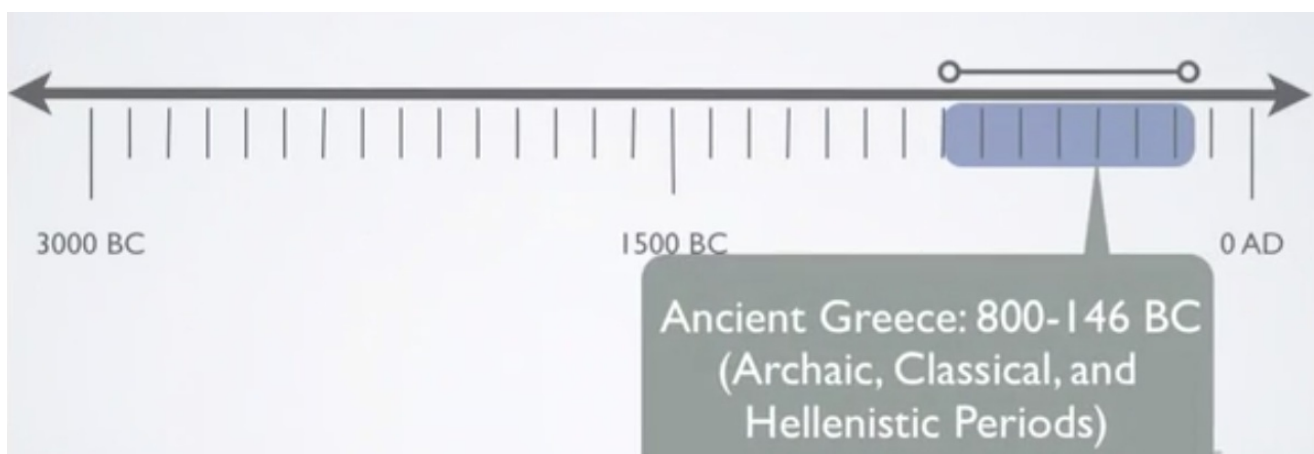
BIG IDEA

Ancient Greece developed into one of the most influential civilizations and cultures in human history.

1. Time Period and Location: Ancient Greece

Like other major civilizations that span centuries, ancient Greece is broken up into periods by historians. The time frame that we'll be exploring in this lesson covers the years from 800 to 146 BCE. This period in time, highlighted in the timeline below, included:

- The Archaic Period (rise of Greece)
- The Classical Period (influential period of Western Civilization)
- The Reign of Alexander the Great
- The Hellenistic Period (from the death of Alexander to the conquest of Greece by the Romans)



Ancient Greece had a great number of very important city-states, arguably the most important of which would be Athens.

2. Overview of Ancient Greek Religion

It is fascinating to study ancient Greek religion. This lesson highlights some of the most important aspects so that you can gain a deeper understanding of the major players.

IN CONTEXT

When studying this religion, you will realize how much it is a part of the art, poetry, stories, and architecture of ancient Greece. This basic introduction leaves out a large number of deities in order to focus on a few of the primary ones and how they relate to one another.

Let's start with the belief that the original creator gods were a race of super gods called the Titans. The two principal deities and first generation of the Titans were Uranus, the sky god, and Gaia, the earth goddess. They were married to each other.

Their children were Cronus, Rhea, and Aphrodite. **Aphrodite** was born from the detached genitals of Uranus, courtesy of Cronus. The three children made up generation two. Cronus and Rhea had a number of children together who constitute the majority of the group of gods called the Olympians. Aphrodite is sometimes referred to as an Olympian, sometimes a Titan. Regardless, she's of an earlier generation.

The Olympian group includes such notables as **Poseidon**, the sea god, and the god **Zeus**, as well as his sister-wife Hera. Zeus had a number of children, but **Athena** is an important god in that Athens is named after her. Zeus led an uprising in which the Olympians eventually overthrew the Titans and became the principal deities among the Greeks.



TERMS TO KNOW

Aphrodite

The Greek goddess of love.

Poseidon

The Greek god of the sea.

Zeus

The Greek father of all the gods.

Athena

The Greek goddess of wisdom.

3. Greek Culture and History

Greek culture and history are very rich for many reasons:

- **The city-state:** The city-states are an important part of the makeup of ancient Greece. They functioned independently of one another. Greece wasn't so much a country in a modern-day sense, but rather a collection of independent city-states that had a common ancestral lineage.
- **Elitist nature:** The Greeks were also very elitist in many respects. They referred to themselves as civilized,

while non-Greeks were "barbarians," whom they were constantly fending off. One of these groups of non-Greeks was the Persian Empire. The war with the Persians and its aftermath is historically very significant in the political shaping of ancient Greece.

- **Concept of the deity:** Greece's concept of the deity was another interesting aspect of their culture. In other religions, gods were seen as operating on a completely different plane from mortals, but this wasn't always the case in ancient Greece. The Greek deities are portrayed as constantly interacting with mortals and asserting their power in some way. In many ways, deities of this time are portrayed as extremely narcissistic. They're often depicted in myth as suffering for the same fallibilities as humans, which is characteristically very different from what we see in the depictions of most deities, particularly in later religions.

➔ **EXAMPLE "Man is the measure of all things"** is a statement made by the ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras, often interpreted to mean that human beings, rather than the gods, determine the ultimate value of all things in the world.



TERM TO KNOW

"Man Is the Measure of All Things"

A statement made by the ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras, often interpreted to mean that human beings, rather than the gods, determine the ultimate value of all things in the world.



SUMMARY

Ancient Greece, which lasted from 800 to 146 BCE and was made up of several historic periods, was very influential. In this lesson, you learned about the **time period and location of ancient Greece**.

The lesson also covered an **overview of ancient Greek religion**, as you looked at a number of the important deities from this period and their relationships to each other.

Finally, we covered **Greek culture and history**. Remember, Greek culture and history are very rich for many reasons. Greece wasn't so much a country in a modern-day sense, but rather a collection of independent city-states. Greeks also referred to themselves as civilized versus barbaric. The deities in ancient Greece were also important and are portrayed as constantly interacting with mortals and asserting their power in some way.

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