



Name: _____ Date: _____

Study Guide #14 **The Golden Age of Greek Culture**

Religion. The Greeks believed in the same group of gods that other Indo-European peoples worshipped, and each Greek city-state believed it was under the special protection of a particular god or goddess. The Greeks offered praise and religious sacrifices to their gods in exchange for protection and advice. The Greeks also honored their gods with festivals and athletic competitions, including the Olympic games. Winning these competitions was everything to the Greeks. Winners were heroes, while losers were disgraced.

As they were exposed to other civilizations of the eastern Mediterranean, some Greek thinkers began to move away from believing the world was controlled by the gods. They began to take a more rational view of the world.

The Origins of Greek Philosophy. Thales of Miletus is understood to be the first Greek philosopher. Pursuing a clearer understanding of the universe, he concluded that water was the basic substance and that everything came from it. He also thought that all things in nature must be explainable by natural processes. Another philosopher, Pythagorus, searched for meaning in numerical relationships and developed the Pythagorean theorem. Parmenides applied mathematical thinking to philosophy, establishing **formal logic**. According to formal logic, all assertions must be based on reasoned proof. Democritus, another philosopher, built on formal logic and mathematics. He believed that all things were formed by the constant collision and combination of atoms, or basic units of matter.

Literature. Greek writers were mainly interested in praising human accomplishments and questioning human flaws. Homer's epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are the earliest examples of Greek literature. The brave heroes and human emotion in these poems were used as examples for young Greek men. Pindar, the greatest poet of the 400s B.C., wrote "victory odes" to celebrate individual athletes. Most Greek theater was performed in an attempt to explore the nature of the world. Usually, performances honored Dionysus, the god of wine. By the 400s B.C., Greek theater focused on the meaning of human existence and was an educational experience for the audience. All plays were financed by the rich, and the poor received free tickets.

The three greatest Athenian playwrights of the 400s B.C. were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Both Aeschylus and Sophocles were interested in the idea of **hubris**, or pride. For Aeschylus, this meant defying the gods; for Sophocles, it meant going against the natural order of the universe. Euripides allowed his human characters

to control their own destinies, while the gods remained neutral. Aristophanes was a comic playwright who made fun of everything, attempting to convey the absurdity even of serious matters, such as war.

History. The Greek interest in human nature led to an interest in history. In the 400s B.C. a Greek named Herodotus, referred to as the Father of History, wrote about the Persian Wars. He wanted to record great human accomplishments. Another Greek historian of the same period was Thucydides. He had been a general in the war against Sparta, and he used his military experience to write the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. He focused on human choice, not the will of the gods, in explaining how the Greeks brought about this terrible catastrophe.

Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. Greek artists were fascinated by the human form. The Greeks created a unique artistic culture, which appeared often in paintings on vases and drinking vessels. These paintings were heavily influenced by Egyptian art forms. By the 500s B.C., the Greeks were concerned with depicting the perfect human form on vases and in sculpture. Vase painters learned to depict detailed images by using orange clay on a contrasting black background. *The Discus Thrower*, a statue sculpted by Myron, captured motion in a still figure and showed the athlete's excellence in competition. The Greeks believed art was meant for public enjoyment. Sculpture stood in public buildings, and architecture was designed to be visually appealing.

Answer the questions below in your own words and in complete sentence. Highlight your evidence.

1. The Greeks offered praise and sacrifices to their gods in exchange for what?

2. What outside influence had an effect on Greek religious views?

3. What were four ways Greek philosophers attempted to understand the universe?

4. What did the idea of hubris mean to Aeschylus and Sophocles?

5. Who were the two leading Greek historians of the 400s B.C., and what events did each write about?

6. Who was meant to enjoy Greek art? How was it made available?
