Men, Women and Children in Ancient Greece
Ancient Greek Men, Women and Children

Although the city-states (see page 7) of Ancient Greece were powerful and prosperous, that power and prosperity was not equally shared among the people. The wealthy had a lot more power than the poor. Adults had many more freedoms than children and men were allowed to do much more than women. Slaves in Ancient Greece had far less power and wealth than those who were free.

Men in Ancient Greece

Men had the most power in Ancient Greece. Only men were allowed to take part in the government. The city-states of Athens and Sparta both had assemblies (see page 10) in which all male citizens could become part of the government. Ancient Greek men did not spend much time at home, as they were often out working or away fighting in the army.
WHO WAS IN CHARGE IN ANCIENT GREECE?

By the eighth century BC, Greece began to emerge out of what has been called a ‘dark age’ (see pages 6-7). The rulers of the larger cities began to control large parts of the land that surrounded each city. These areas were known as city-states. Each city-state was called a polis (which is where our word ‘politics’ comes from). The most important of these were Sparta and Athens. At first they were controlled by a handful of the most wealthy families and there were often struggles for power between them. By the middle of the sixth century BC, Cleisthenes, the ruler of Athens, created a new form of government in which citizens could participate. However, only male citizens were allowed to take part. Women, slaves and foreigners were excluded. The Spartans followed the Athenians with their own assembly but did not give it as many powers.

THE ASSEMBLY IN ATHENS

The assembly was the most important part of Athenian government. It decided on all new laws. The assembly was made up of all male citizens over the age of 18. It met every ten days on a hill called the Phyx. At least 6000 citizens had to be present and everybody had a right to speak.

These four pieces of broken pottery have the name of an Athenian politician called Themistocles. He was exiled in 470 BC.

EXILING POLITICIANS

In Athens, members of the assembly could vote to get rid of unpopular fellow members. They would scratch a name on a piece of broken pottery called an ostrakon. The names were then counted. If there was a large enough vote against one man, he would be exiled (or ‘ostracized’) from Athens for ten years.
**WOMEN IN ANCIENT GREECE**

Ancient Greek women had very little freedom and few rights. They could not leave home without being accompanied and were not allowed to take part in the decisions of the city-state. After a woman was married, she was put in charge of running the house, either giving slaves orders or doing the jobs herself. The women of Sparta had more rights than other women. They were allowed to own their own property and could even marry another man if their husbands were away from home for too long.

† This small statue shows a Spartan woman taking part in a running race (see page 24). The women of Sparta were trained to be strong and athletic.

**CHILDREN IN ANCIENT GREECE**

It was only boys from wealthy families who were sent to school in Ancient Greece. Wealthy girls usually had a private tutor at home. Children from poorer families had no education at all. Boys learned a trade or joined the army and girls were taught how to cook, weave clothes and run a home.

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**REAL LIVES**

**SAPPHO: A FAMOUS POET**

One of the most famous women from Ancient Greece was Sappho. She was born in 650 BC on the island of Lesbos. She came from a wealthy family and she was taught to read, write and play music. She was a poet who influenced many Greek writers such as Plato. Some historians believe that she also invented the plectrum, a kind of pick, to play the lyre.
DID ANCIENT GREEK CHILDREN GO TO SCHOOL?

In theory, education in Ancient Greece was available to every child but in practice only the wealthiest families could afford to educate their children. If a child did go to school, that meant they were not at home helping with household chores, or even earning a living. The Ancient Greeks believed that only boys needed to be educated. Girls were not expected to go to school because they were needed at home to help look after the house and to prepare for marriage. In Sparta, the state paid for, and provided, the education of every boy in order to prepare them to become warriors.

GOING TO SCHOOL

The sons of wealthy families went to school from the age of seven to 18. They usually had three teachers. One taught them reading, writing, mathematics and literature. The boys were supposed to learn long passages of poetry by heart. These were usually stories of brave deeds and daring adventures. Another teacher taught sports such as wrestling, athletics and gymnastics. The third teacher was a music master who taught singing and how to play instruments such as the lyre.

\[\text{One of the reasons why girls were taught to play a musical instrument was to entertain men during banquets. This vase painting shows a woman playing the pipes.}\]

THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS

Ancient Greek girls did not go to school but stayed at home and learnt household skills, such as weaving, from their mothers. The girls of wealthy families sometimes had teachers who came to their homes to teach them to read and write or to play a musical instrument.