

# **Seventy-Five Key Lessons in History**

75 One-Page History Lessons Every  
Student Should Know  
with Intriguing History Games

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## Introduction

*Seventy-Five Key Lessons in History* is designed to preview or review history in a time-efficient manner. Each succinct lesson contains key vocabulary words that are presented in bold and then defined on the next page. It is broken into three sections: Ancient and Medieval History, Modern World History, and American History. John De Gree is author of lessons 1-40 and 51-70. Dr. Mike Allen is author of lessons 41-50, 71-75, and edited lessons 51-70.

### How is *Seventy-Five Key Lessons in History* useful?

**1. Time-Efficient:** The teacher can take a lesson and teach it immediately. The teacher need not spend any time preparing for the lesson. The first four games in this book, The Word Game, History 20 Questions, Playing Games A. and B. with Multiple Lessons, and History Illustration, require no preparation. Read the lesson with your students, read out loud the vocabulary words, and play the game. We strongly recommend playing The Word Game with each new lesson. Depending on the size of your history class, each lesson could take one classroom hour.

**2. Fun and Educational:** Learning history with games is fun, and many kids learn better when they can play a game with the materials. Learning history is valuable for many reasons. Young kids like to play games. *Seventy-Five Key Lessons in History* combines fun and education to provide guaranteed strategies that work to teach history.

# **I. Intriguing Activities to Aid in Learning and Memorizing History**

## **A. The Word Game**

1. Students have in front of them the “Items to Memorize” list with the definitions from one lesson. One person chooses one and describes it, not saying the actual item. Other students guess which one is being described.
2. After the initial round, the teacher writes only the terms on the board, and students are not allowed to look at the definitions. Students then play the Word Game.
3. In the third round, students reread the lesson, choosing items that are not listed on the “Items to Memorize” list. Then, students play the Word Game with the new list. Note: Each student keeps his Item List a secret. If nobody can say what term is being described, the reader “wins.”

## **B. History 20 Questions**

One student chooses an item either from the “Items to Memorize” list, or from his own Items that he created from the previous game (Play the Word Game, number 3.) The student does not tell the other students what the item is. The other students have to ask questions that can only be answered with “yes” or “no.” The first 10 questions are not allowed to be “Item-Specific.” This means that the first 10 questions have to be general. For example, “Is the item from the Hebrews?” If no student is able to guess within 20 questions, the reader “wins.”

## **C. Playing Games A. and B. with Multiple Lessons**

1. Once your group has learned more than one History One Sheet, you can play these games with multiple sheets. The more sheets you use, the more challenging the games will be.
2. If your group has multiple students, we strongly suggest you break the kids up into teams and have team contests with the Multiple Sheets.

## **D. History Illustration**

1. Players form 2 or more teams of 2 – 5 players.
2. How To Play: Split the players into teams. Choose one or more lessons you want to play with. Write the vocabulary words that are *nouns* on separate cards, one vocabulary word per card. Place the cards face down in the middle of the teams. Choose one person from each team to be the first to illustrate. One of the players chosen to draw picks a card from the deck. The players chosen to draw from each team see the card and have 10 seconds to think of an idea. Somebody says, “Go!” and the chosen players draw their ideas. Teammates guess what is being drawn. The players drawing may not say any words, and may only nod yes or no.
3. To Win: The team that guesses what is on the card within the time allotted, before the other team, gets one point. Before playing, teams agree on how many points will decide a game.

### **\*OPTION: History Illustration BASEBALL**

In this game, one team draws, while the other watches. If the drawing team guesses the card within one minute, it scores a “run.” Play continues



until there is one out. Once there is one out, it's the other team's turn to draw (bat). Play as many innings as you have time for!

### **E. Chronology Game**

1. How to Play: Choose the lesson or lesson you want to review. Write down vocabulary words that are names of people or events on cards – one person or one event per card. Order the cards in chronological order. Write the order down on a master list. Have the students study the cards in order. Then, mix up the cards. Challenge the student to line the cards up as fast as he can. Or, split the group into teams and have the teams line up the cards in chronological order. Time the students. For every mistake, add 10 seconds.
2. How to Win the Game: The child who lines the cards up the fastest wins. For each card that is out of place, add 30 seconds to the final score.

### **F. The Baton Game**

1. Players form 2 teams. Teams can have up to 20 students per team.
2. Preparation To Play: Students learn a number of lessons. The teacher writes the vocabulary words on cards: one vocabulary word per card.
3. To Play: One representative from each team approaches the front of the room, or if playing outside, he comes to the front of the group of students. Each representative has a piece of paper rolled up into a baton. The teacher will then choose a card, and explain the card without saying the vocabulary word. The first student to hit his hand

with a baton answers first. If the answer is wrong, the other team gains a point, and the other team gets a chance to answer. Whoever answers correctly first wins a point for his team. After each turn, the next player from each team will take the baton and come to the front to play. Each player is allowed to have only one guess. If neither student knows the answer, the teacher says the answer.

4. After each round, the student with the baton chooses which student to next have the baton. To speed things up, the teacher can count down from 10 or 5 to 1, so that the students choose someone quickly.
5. To Win: The first team to score a certain number of points wins.

**\*Fun Modification:** Instead of having the students just hit the baton when they know the answer, they can turn around, jump up once, and then hit the baton. The movements can be modified in any way you choose.

## **G. History Charades**

1. The teacher chooses which lesson or lessons to review, and writes the nouns on cards: each card with one noun.
2. Most likely, your students will have never played charades before, and you will have to teach them some basics of sign language. Tell students that Mimes are not allowed to say any words. The first thing the Mime does is show with his fingers how many words are in the answer. Once his team shouts out the correct number, the Mime nods yes and moves on. Through acting out what is on the card,

the teammates make guesses. If the Mime grabs his ear, this means, “Sounds like.” The Mime will then act out something that sounds like the word that is on the card. This is done if the card is especially hard.

3. To Play: Students are broken into teams. The cards the teacher has explained are placed face down in a single deck. One person from one team begins the game by choosing the top card from the deck. Then, the teacher says, “Go,” and the Mime has 60 seconds to act out what or who is on the card. Only the Mime’s team is allowed to guess by shouting out loud. The other students are watching and thinking. If the team guesses correctly, the team earns 2 points. After the 60 seconds are up, if the Mime’s team is unable to guess the card, the other teams then writes the answer down. The Mime then reads out loud the card, and whichever team has the correct answer receives a point. Then, the next team gets a chance.
4. To Win: The team with the most points wins.

## **H. Fencing for Cards – History and Action Game**

1. Equipment Needed: Styrofoam Cups, Scotch Tape, and Noodles used in Pools as Floation Devices.  
Note: The first part of this game is the same as the Baton Game.
2. Preparation To Play: Students learn a number of lessons. The teacher writes the vocabulary words on cards: one vocabulary word per card.
3. To Play: One representative from each team approaches the front of the room, or if playing

outside, he comes to the front of the group of students. Each representative has a piece of paper rolled up into a baton. The teacher will then choose a card, and explain the card without saying the vocabulary word. The first student to hit his hand with a baton answers first. If the answer is wrong, the other team gains a point, and the other team gets a chance to answer. Whoever answers correctly first wins a point for his team. After each turn, the next player from each team will take the baton and come to the front to play. Each player is allowed to have only one guess. If neither student knows the answer, the teacher says the answer.

4. Fencing: Then, each player tapes a Styrofoam cup on the hip opposite the strong arm of the participant, and with the strong arm, he holds a Noodle that is commonly used in a pool as a floatation device. For example, if a player is right-handed, then the Styrofoam cup is taped onto his shirt at the left waist. Use scotch tape, or another tape that is not too strong. To play, the player with the cup on his left side places his left hand behind his back. With the Noodle, the player then tries to hit the Styrofoam cup off of his opponent's shirt. Whoever knocks the cup off first wins one point for his team.
5. To Win: The first team that scores a certain number of points wins.

The movements can be modified in any way you choose.

2. Stage a battle with each team arming themselves with a Noodle and Styrofoam cup.

## II. Ancient and Medieval History

### 1. The Fertile Crescent

The **Fertile Crescent** is an area in the Ancient Near East, including northern Africa, and encompasses the Euphrates, Tigris, and **Nile rivers**. Fertile means that crops grow well because the soil is rich. Crescent refers to the visible shape of the moon when it is less than half. Interestingly, the Fertile Crescent, in the shape of a crescent moon, is where the first great civilizations began. Thus, this area is the beginning of our story of American history, because the Fertile Crescent cultural lifestyle influences us today. America's cultural ancestors came from the Fertile Crescent.

The life of a hunter and gatherer is challenging. It is hard to build a permanent home, because when the animals move, a hunter must follow. These people were called **nomads**. Thus, hunters and gatherers never created large societies. This way of life changed in Sumeria, an early advanced Fertile Crescent civilization. Sumerians developed farming on a large scale. They learned that plants grow from seeds and how to grow crops. They also developed irrigation, a system to water large areas of land so crops could grow. Their food supply was stable, and the Sumerian population grew. With this stable food supply, Sumerians did not need to roam the land, and they built permanent shelters. They also created the first written language, called **cuneiform**, in about 3,000 B.C. The Sumerians wrote perhaps the oldest written story, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Other great civilizations rose and fell in the Fertile Crescent. The Babylonians developed a **lunar calendar** with 12 months, a 7-day week, a 24-hour day, and a 60-

minute hour. King Hammurabi of Babylonia was the first to write down all laws and have them publicly displayed. **“Hammurabi’s Code”** protected all people. Since the law was written and displayed, everyone knew what was the law and everyone had to follow it.

The Hittites were one of the first peoples to make iron. The Phoenicians were a sea-going people who traveled and traded throughout the Mediterranean Sea. Phoenicians created the world’s **first alphabet**. Later, the Latins would alter this and create the Latin alphabet, which we use today. The Latins were the people who established the Roman Republic.

Some ancient people groups of the Fertile Crescent valued reading, writing, and arithmetic. People wrote on wet clay tablets that hardened. The Assyrians had a library in Nineveh with thousands of clay tablets containing arithmetic, literature, and chemistry. **The Chaldeans** were the first to divide the circle into 360 degrees.

In the Fertile Crescent, leaders, such as kings, chiefs and pharaohs, believed either that they were the representatives of God, or that they were one of the gods. Ideas of what was right and wrong depended solely on the leader. This meant that if the leader told a person to kill someone and the person followed through with this order, he did what was right. When the pharaoh of Egypt ordered someone killed, Egyptians took it to mean the voice of God and obeyed. Only one ancient people of the Fertile Crescent did not accept this view—**the Hebrews**. Hebrews believed in one God, the idea of monotheism.

## **Facts to Know for the Fertile Crescent**

1. **The Fertile Crescent:** This is an area in the Middle East, also known as the Near East, in the shape of a crescent, that is the location of the first great civilizations.
2. **Nomad:** This is a person who does not have a permanent home but follows herds of animals.
3. **Cuneiform:** This is the written language of Sumeria and the world's first written language. It was not an alphabet but wedge-shaped characters.
4. **Lunar Calendar:** This calendar was based on the movement of the moon.
5. **Hammurabi's Code:** Hammurabi's Code was a publicly-displayed written set of laws of the Hittite Empire.
6. **First alphabet:** Phoenicians most likely created the first alphabet.
7. **360 degrees:** Chaldeans divided the circle into 360 degrees.
8. **Hebrews:** The Hebrews were the first people who believed in one God.
9. **Nile River:** The Nile River is the largest river system in the world.
10. **The Epic of Gilgamesh:** This is perhaps the world's oldest story.

## 2. Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egypt was one of the first ancient civilizations to develop permanent homes, farming, and a very large and efficient government and society. Around 3100 B.C., **King Menes** united the communities of Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt to establish the first Egyptian dynasty. Egypt formed around the **Nile River**, one of the largest rivers in the world. It flows from south to north and empties into the **Mediterranean Sea**. It flows into the sea as many small rivers. Greeks believed the end of the river resembled the triangular fourth Greek letter, Delta, and so named the area the **Nile Delta**.

Religion played an important role in ancient Egypt. Egypt's leader, called **Pharaoh**, believed he would live eternally. After death, Egyptians embalmed the Pharaoh and wrapped his body in linen. Called a **mummy**, Egyptians then placed the dead Pharaoh in a tomb with many treasures that he could enjoy after death. Near the **Great Pyramid of Giza** stands a statue of one of Egypt's mythical creatures, the Sphinx. Called the Terrifying One, or the Father of the Dread, it is a statue of a lion's body and a human head. It stands on the bank of the Nile River, in Giza, Egypt, close enough to the Great Pyramids to be called their guardian. It is not exactly known when the Sphinx was built and which Egyptian built it, but historians believe it was constructed around 2,500 B.C. Some believe the **Sphinx** involved solar worship, but no one is completely sure.

The Pyramids of Giza, Egypt, were built around 2,500 B.C. as tombs for Pharaohs. The largest one, called the Great Pyramid of Giza, is the oldest of the three pyramids. Of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, it is the oldest and the only one that is still intact. Originally, the pyramids had



a smooth outer surface. Egyptians believed that after death, their pharaohs entered into the after-life and could take material possessions and their slaves with them.

Most women in Egypt, just like most men, were poor farmers, servants, or slaves. But for those women who were free and upper class, they could own land and control property. The **Egyptian free woman** had complete equality of rights with men, could borrow money, sign contracts, initiate divorce, etc. The Egyptian woman was expected to run the household and be the primary caregiver to the children of the family. Common clothing for women was a dress worn low, near the ankles.

Ancient Egyptians were great warriors and conquered a large area of land. One of the vehicles Egyptians used in battle was the **war chariot**. It probably originated in Sumer, but Egyptians improved the chariot by making it lighter and faster. Nearly all parts of the war chariot were made of wood, including the tires and spokes. Chariots could not be used on rocky terrain because they would easily tip over. Egyptians fought with chariots in close ranks and used their bows to try to send a massive wave of arrows toward the enemy.

## **Facts to Know for the Ancient Egyptians**

1. **King Menes:** Around 3100 B.C., Egyptian King Menes united Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt to establish the first Egyptian dynasty.
2. **Nile River:** The Nile River is the longest river in the world. Ancient Egypt developed around the Nile River.
3. **Mediterranean Sea:** The Nile River empties into the Mediterranean Sea. This sea is one of the most important in the ancient world.
4. **Nile Delta:** The Nile Delta is the lush farmland in the area where the Nile empties into the Mediterranean Sea. The Greeks named it this because it resembles the Greek letter Delta.
5. **Pharaoh:** The title of the leader of Ancient Egypt was Pharaoh.
6. **Mummy:** Ancient Egyptians embalmed and wrapped their dead pharaohs in linen. The dead pharaoh wrapped in linen is called a mummy.
7. **Great Pyramid of Giza:** The Great Pyramid of Giza is a large pyramid located near Cairo, Egypt, along with other large and smaller pyramids.
8. **Sphinx:** The Sphinx is an Egyptian mythical creature believed to protect the pharaohs and their families buried in the pyramids at Giza.
9. **Egyptian Free Woman:** A free woman of Egypt enjoyed more rights than many free women around the world in ancient times.
10. **War Chariot:** The Egyptians used the war chariot during battles.

### 3. Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia is often called the “**Cradle of Civilizations.**” This means that many of the world’s earliest civilizations started there. “**Mesopotamia**” means “the land between two rivers.” It lies in Asia Minor, between **The Euphrates River and the Tigris River**. These two large rivers provided water for a fertile soil, drinking, and fresh water fishing. Today, the area corresponds to modern-day Iraq, Syria, and Kuwait.

In one of the earliest civilizations of Mesopotamia, writing developed called **cuneiform**. Cuneiform is the oldest known form of writing. Emerging around 3,000 B.C., it consists of wedge-shaped marks on clay tablets, made with a reed for a stylus. Cuneiform consists of pictures that represent words. Many civilizations used cuneiform, including the Sumerians, Akkadians, Eblaites, Elamites, Hittites, and others. The Phoenician invention of the **alphabet** replaced cuneiform. The alphabet used symbols to represent sounds and was easier to form words.

In Mesopotamian society, religion was very important. People believed in many gods, and that each civilization was protected by a god. **Ziggurats** were large structures of terraced step pyramids built for religious reasons by civilizations of Mesopotamia, such as Sumer, Babylonia and Assyria. It is not known exactly what ceremonies occurred on the ziggurats, but it is believed that on top of each ziggurat was a shrine and that it may have been the site of a sacred marriage during the new year festival. Historians think that Mesopotamians believed gods resided on top of the ziggurats.

The **Hanging Gardens of Babylon** in Mesopotamia was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. They were most likely built by **King Nebuchadnezzar II** of ancient Babylon around 600 B.C. There is no archaeological evidence of the gardens, but it is believed King Nebuchadnezzar II built them for his wife, Queen Amytis, who missed the green hills and valleys of her homeland. Some think that the gardens never existed except in Greek and Roman stories.

## **Facts to Know for Mesopotamia**

1. **Cradle of Civilizations:** This term is used to describe Mesopotamia, because it is here where many civilizations began.
2. **Mesopotamia:** This means the land between two rivers.
3. **The Euphrates River and the Tigris River:** These two rivers form the boundary of Mesopotamia.
4. **Cuneiform:** Emerging around 3,000 B.C., this is the oldest form of writing and consists of pictures that represent words.
5. **Alphabet:** The Phoenicians invented the alphabet and consists of letters that represent sounds.
6. **Ziggurats:** These were large structures of terraced step pyramids built for religious reasons by civilizations of Mesopotamia
7. **Hanging Gardens of Babylon:** While there is no archaeological evidence for these, they were considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
8. **King Nebuchadnezzar II:** This king built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon for his Persian wife who missed the lush, green hills and valleys of her homeland.

## 4. The Hebrews

Western Civilization means the people that have certain shared ideas and beliefs. The idea of only one God, and that all people should be treated equally by the law, is part of **Western Civilization**. Many of these important ideas started with the Hebrews. The **Hebrews** were the world's first monotheists, which means they believed in only one God. Sometime between 2000 B.C. and 1600 B.C., the Hebrews believe that God spoke to one man, **Abraham**, and made a **covenant**, a special promise. God told Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, the Hebrews. Abraham promised God that the Hebrews would be loyal to only Him. As long as the Hebrews were loyal, God told Abraham that He would protect the Hebrews. Abraham and his wife **Sarah** heard God and traveled from the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (Mesopotamia) all the way to Canaan, where the Hebrews later founded a country, called Israel. This is roughly in the area of the modern-day country of Israel. The Hebrews came to be called the Jews and their religion, Judaism.

The Hebrews believed one God was the Creator of all, and they believed in **morality**, the idea that there is a right and wrong. Hebrews taught that all people lived under God's dominion and were ruled by the same Truth. We can also call this a moral order. Sometime around 1300 B.C., God gave the Hebrews a set of laws to live by. Called the **Mosaic Law**, it is one of the first sets of written laws that deal with relationships (Hammurabi's Code does as well), placing importance on respecting parents and helping those in need. Have you ever heard of the Ten Commandments? They are part of the Mosaic Law.

Whereas other Fertile Crescent civilizations saw their rulers as either gods or representatives of God, the Hebrews saw their leaders as *servants* of God. This crucial difference between the Hebrews and other ancient civilizations has influenced great numbers of people over the last three millennia. As servants of God, Hebrews could not change the moral code established in Mosaic Law. Laws of Hebrew leaders could not be self-serving, but had to serve the God of the Mosaic Law. This idea, of a moral code established by God, which the rulers must live by and enforce, was passed onto all the cultures of Western Civilization, including the United States of America.

The government of the ancient Hebrews gives us an example of the first **balanced government** in the world. Balanced means that there was not one person ruling, but instead different people or groups held governmental powers. When power in government is separated, citizens have more liberty because no one person can take all the power and tell everyone else what to do. When the Hebrews conquered the Canaanites, beginning in **1407 B.C.**, the Hebrews were ruled by judges chosen from different tribes. From c. 1050 B.C. through 922 B.C., the Hebrews established the **Kingdom of Israel**. The kings did not hold ultimate power, but shared authority with prophets (messengers from God), the **Torah** (sacred scripture), and religious leaders.

## **Facts to Know for The Hebrews**

1. Western Civilization: People that have shared beliefs, such as belief in one God and belief in morality as expressed in the Mosaic Law are part of Western Civilization.
2. Hebrews: The Hebrews were the world's first monotheists and established the Kingdom of Israel. Hebrews are the ancestors of modern-day Jews.
3. Abraham and Sarah: Hebrews believe God spoke to Abraham and Sarah are the first Hebrews.
4. morality: Morality is the idea that God established right and wrong for all people.
5. Mosaic Law: The Mosaic Law, including the Ten Commandments, is the law of the ancient Hebrews.
6. Balanced government: A balanced government is one in which power is separated and held by different people, making it difficult or impossible for one person to become a dictator.
7. Kingdom of Israel: From c. 1050 B.C. through 922 B.C., Hebrews established the Kingdom of Israel.
8. Torah: The Torah is the sacred scripture of the Hebrews.
9. Covenant: Covenant is the promise God made to Abraham. God promised Abraham many descendants and his protection, as long as the Hebrews remained faithful to God.
10. 1407 B.C: At approximately this date, Hebrews conquered the Canaanites.



## 5. Ancient Civilizations of Asia

**Asia** is the largest continent of the world and in ancient times it was home to many civilizations. It stretches from Arabia to the west to the shores of the Pacific Ocean in the east. In the north it lies above the Arctic Circle and in the south it has a tropical climate. It may be the most varied of continents in terms of climate and geography.

One influential ancient Asian was **Siddhartha Gautama**. He lived in India c. the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. He left his wife and child to search for what he believed to be enlightenment. He found that through meditation and giving up his desires and wants, he was able to achieve a type of peace that he could not otherwise. His followers say he became the “**Buddha**,” meaning the “enlightened one.” Millions of people today call themselves Buddhists. Buddhists strive to be peaceful by following the ways of Siddhartha Gautama. Buddhists do not say if there is a God or if there is not a God.

Beginning in the seventh century B.C., the Chinese built a wall of stone, brick, wood, packed earth, and other materials to separate itself from people to the north. The wall is actually a number of walls that are not connected, stretches east to west, and in the third century B.C., **Emperor Qin** (pronounced “Chin”) expanded the wall. **The Great Wall of China** served not only defensive purposes, but also allowed China to impose taxes on imports and exports, and to control immigration. In the 1400s and 1500s, the Ming Dynasty strengthened and expanded the wall.

**Confucius** lived in ancient China in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. He was a philosopher who lived during a time of violence.

**Confucius taught** that individuals need to be respectful of their elders, their government, and all authority figures. He also taught that leaders need to be respectful of people under them, and that all people need to be patient. In ancient China, Confucius' thoughts received official approval and formed part of a national curriculum.

One of the most successful and ruthless Asian conquerors was **Attila the Hun**. Attila ruled the Huns and conquered immense territory in Asia and Central and Eastern Europe in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Europeans called him the "**Scourge of God**," which means the punisher. Huns were nomads who fought on horseback, shooting arrows and throwing javelins. Historians report that Attila's army completely destroyed cities, and after the destruction of the city **Naissus**, dead bodies clogged the Danube River for years.

## **Facts to Know for Ancient Civilizations of Asia**

1. Asia: This is the largest continent in the world and has the most population.
2. Siddhartha Gautama: He lived in 5<sup>th</sup> century India and is the founder or inspiration of Buddhism.
3. Buddha: This means the enlightened one. Buddhists say that Siddhartha Gautama reached this stage, where he did not desire to possess anything and lived in peace.
4. The Great Wall of China: This is a series of defensive walls built in the north of China for protection.
5. Emperor Qin: Emperor Qin lived in the third century B.C. and greatly expanded building the Great Wall of China.
6. Confucius: He lived in the fifth century B.C. in China and was an influential philosopher.
7. Confucius' teachings: Confucius taught the importance of respecting your elders, authority, and tradition.
8. Attila the Hun: Attila was a fifth century Hun who conquered a large amount of land in Asia and in Europe.
9. Scourge of God: Europeans called Attila the Scourge (Punisher) of God, and believed that Attila was punishing the Europeans for not being good believers in God.
10. Naissus: Attila besieged and attacked this city of the Eastern Roman Empire. According to historians, dead bodies and bones littered the banks of a nearby river for years after the fighting.

## 6. Ancient Greece

Many argue the birthplace of **Western Civilization** is Ancient Greece. A seafaring people, living on rugged and mountainous terrain, the Greeks were pioneers in philosophy, drama, law, government, art, math, history, natural sciences, and more. Forming small political communities called **city-states**, ancient Greeks did not live in one country but many, smaller, independent societies. When challenged from abroad with conquest, Greeks banded together and fought. After over 1,000 years of freedom, ancient Greek city-states were eventually conquered by the Roman Republic

Religion played a crucial role in the life of ancient Greeks. Greeks worshipped many gods and had daily rituals honoring their deities. Today, we call the ancient Greek religion **Greek mythology**. In Ancient Greece, Greeks believed in many gods. **Zeus** was considered the king of the gods and men. He was the son of Rhea and Cronus. Greeks believed that Zeus, like other gods, interacted with humans, influenced human affairs and fathered many children with different women and goddesses. Symbols of Zeus are the thunderbolt, eagle, bull, and oak.

In the fifth century B.C., ancient Greeks built the **Parthenon**, a temple in Athens to honor the goddess Athena. Inside the Parthenon was a massive statue of Athena created of ivory and gold. The Parthenon is built in the **Classical style**, which refers to buildings of ancient Greece and ancient Rome. Columns and symmetry are two characteristics of Classical style.

**Socrates**, a 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Greek philosopher, is often called the “Father of Western Philosophy.” We know about

Socrates mainly through the writings of **Plato**, one of his students. Socrates taught young men in the city of Athens during a time of war and is associated with the phrase “know thyself.” He wanted his students to know the reasons for their actions and thoughts, and he questioned the belief in the gods of Athens. The city leaders convicted Socrates of corrupting the youth and he was forced to kill himself by drinking the poison **hemlock**.

**Sparta** was a city-state of Ancient Greece. Spartan men trained to be strong warriors from childhood and they were the best Greek warriors. From the age of 7, all boys left their mothers to live in barracks and train for war. Men could marry but could not live with their families until age 60. Slaves did most of the physical labor in Sparta. Sparta did not have a wall to protect the city because the warriors were so good that no enemy could break in. Women could run businesses and own property.

## **Facts to Know for Ancient Greece**

1. **Western Civilization:** This refers to the customs and traditions that a number of countries in the world share, such as the idea of liberty, individual rights, and reason.
2. **City-State:** The city-state is a very small country. In Ancient Greece, societies were organized as city-states.
3. **Greek Mythology:** Ancient Greeks believed that various gods controlled nature and man. We call their religion “mythology.”
4. **Zeus:** Greeks considered Zeus the king of gods and men. Symbols of Zeus are the thunderbolt, eagle, bull, and oak.
5. **Parthenon:** Greeks built this temple to honor the goddess Athena. It still stands today.
6. **Classical Style:** Classical style architecture refers to the style found in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome.
7. **Socrates:** He was a Greek philosopher who is called the “Father of Western Philosophy.”
8. **Plato:** Plato was a student of Socrates and wrote about what Socrates taught.
9. **Hemlock:** Hemlock is a poison Socrates was forced to drink that killed himself. The leaders of Athens did not like how Socrates made the young adults question authority and sentenced him to die.
10. **Sparta:** Sparta was a city-state of Ancient Greece and Spartan soldiers were perhaps the best warriors in the ancient world.

## 7. Athens

On hundreds of small islands and on steep mountains with rocky soil, groups of hearty men and women established the foundations of Western Civilization. For Western Civilization, the Greek city-state of Athens stands out because of all the cultural gifts this civilization passed on. In ancient Greece, there was no one nation of “Greece.” Instead, there were a number of Greek cities, each with its own laws, customs, army, and its own way of living. Called **city-states**, these cities had various governments, ranging from the most democratic Athens to the militaristic Sparta.

During what historians call **Classical Greece** (c. 5th century to 3rd century B.C.), ancient Athenians chose the system of direct democracy. In direct democracy, citizens vote directly for all laws. At the same time in the Roman Republic, Romans practiced representative democracy. In representative democracy, citizens vote for representatives who make the laws.

**Athens** was the birthplace of both philosophy and democracy. **Philosophy** is the study of knowledge, truth, and the best way to live. **Democracy** is where each citizen votes on every law. **Socrates** (470-399 B.C.), the father of Western philosophy, taught Plato, who wrote that the goal in life was to pursue truth, goodness, and beauty. Athenians believed that citizens should be free, and that it was wrong to have an all-powerful king. Athenians had three branches of government—executive, legislative, judicial—with each branch having a separate job. They did this so no one Athenian would become too powerful.

In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., Plato taught **Aristotle**, ancient Greece's most prolific writer on philosophy, government, and science. Aristotle believed that all people had a common human nature, that all people have reason, and that all should participate in government. He did not think there should be a certain group of special people in charge of government, but that all citizens over 18 should participate equally. (Some Athenian women were citizens but were not allowed to vote. Slaves, minors [those under 18], and foreigners living and working in Athens did not have citizenship rights.) Aristotle also wrote that the best life is lived by those who try to live lives of **virtue**. This means that if a person always tries to do the right thing, even when it is difficult or uncomfortable, he will live his life in the best way.

Aristotle wrote that there is something "just by nature." This means that justice cannot mean one thing in one society and another thing in another society, because there is a higher law than the one created by man. This idea can be called nature's law, or **natural law**. Aristotle also wrote that happiness is "activity of soul in accordance with nature," meaning a life lived in accordance with reason and virtue is a happy one.

The American Founding Fathers saw ancient Greeks and Romans as our ancestors and they even built many buildings in our nation's capital city to resemble those of ancient Greece and Rome. Our U.S. Capitol (where our Congressmen work), the Supreme Court building (where our most important judges work), and the White House were all built in the **Neoclassical architectural style** to resemble those found in ancient Greece and Rome.



## **Facts to Know for Athens**

1. Athens: Athens was a city-state of Greece and is the birthplace of democracy.
2. City-state: This was a city that functioned as a country, with an army and government.
3. Classical Greece: Classical Greece refers to a specific time period, c. 5<sup>th</sup> century and into the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., when Athenians practiced democracy and achieved great cultural advancements.
4. Socrates: Socrates is known as the father of western philosophy.
5. Aristotle: Aristotle is perhaps Greece's most important thinker and most prolific writer on philosophy, government, and science.
6. Virtue: Virtue is behavior showing high moral values.
7. Natural Law: Natural law is the idea that something is just by nature for all and that this idea, Natural Law, comes from a source higher than man.
8. Neoclassical Architecture: This is an architectural style that resembles buildings of ancient Greece and Rome.
9. Philosophy: Philosophy is the study of knowledge, truth, and the best way to live.
10. Democracy: In democracy, every citizen votes for every law.

## 8. The Roman Republic

The Roman **Republic** (509 B.C. to 48 B.C.) was perhaps the world's greatest **representative government** in the ancient world. Romans tried to create a government in which its citizens were treated the same by the law, and where a strong man could not become the dictator. In the Roman Republic, citizens were adult, free males who lived within the Roman Republic and who were not from a colony or province. Before and after the Roman Republic, the world is full of examples of determined, brutal leaders who took over and ruled a government by force, yet in the Roman Republic, each citizen could vote, and the powers of government were separated into three branches.

All Romans had to follow the law. This idea is known as "**the rule of law.**" It is important, because in most countries of the world then, and in many today, leaders do not have to follow the law and can change it as they like. In Rome, the laws, called the **Twelve Tables**, were publicly displayed, every citizen was under the law, and children memorized the laws. When laws are written, society is secure because everyone knows what is allowed or not allowed. The powerful cannot assert their will over others if it means breaking the legal code.

Romans also believed in freedom of thought, freedom of speech, that a person was **innocent until proven guilty**, and that the accused has a **right to confront his accuser**. All of these ideas are important in American society today. **Freedom of thought** means that each person has a right to think, even if his thoughts may offend others. **Freedom of speech** means that a person can say what he thinks, even if he opposes the government. When we say the accused has a

right to confront his accuser and that a person is innocent until proven guilty, it means that a person accused of a crime has the right to see the person who accused him, and the accuser must present evidence to show guilt.

**Cincinnatus** was a 5<sup>th</sup> century Roman who wanted to farm his land. However, enemy tribes were attacking Rome and his fellow countrymen needed his military leadership. They made him dictator so that he could defend Rome, and give orders to everyone quickly and decisively. However, two weeks after the Romans defeated their enemies, Cincinnatus peacefully gave up his power and went back to being a farmer. Romans and historians honor Cincinnatus as an example of a great and humble leader. Many years later, after leading the Continental Army during the American Revolution, George Washington also stepped down from power, and he surrendered power again when he resigned after his second presidential term. Many historians say that Washington acted just like Cincinnatus, displaying courage in the same way.

**Cicero** (106 B.C. to 43 B.C.) was a Roman statesman who wrote about man and his rights. The American Founding Fathers read his works, which greatly influenced them. Cicero wrote that true law is based on reason and that it is the same for all men everywhere in the world. Like Aristotle, he wrote that all men everywhere are ruled by something called natural law that humans have because of their birth. No great person or leader gives this natural law to someone. We have it because we are born.

## **Facts to Know for The Roman Republic**

1. Rule of Law: The “Rule of Law” is the idea that all people have to follow the law. In this way, leaders are limited and they cannot become dictators.
2. Innocent until proven guilty: This is the idea that the accused must prove that someone is guilty and that all people are assumed innocent before trial.
3. The right to confront the accuser: If someone accuses another of a crime, the accused gets to see who is accusing him and has an opportunity to defend himself in court.
4. Twelve Tables: These were laws of the Roman Republic, written and publicly-displayed in every major city.
5. Freedom of thought: This freedom is the right to think something, even if it offends another.
6. Representative government: This is a system where citizens vote for leaders and leaders make laws.
7. Cincinnatus: This Roman farmer assumed dictatorial powers to defeat an enemy of Rome then relinquished power to go back to farming.
8. Cicero: This Roman statesman believed in representative government and was killed because of his beliefs and writings.
9. Republic: A republic is a country with a representative government. Voters choose leaders and leaders make the laws.
10. Freedom of Speech: Freedom of speech means that a person can say what he thinks, even if this ideas are offensive or if the ideas oppose the government.