



The Founding: SS.7.CG.1.1
Influence of Ancient Greece
VIDEO SCRIPT



Influence of Ancient Greece

1. The foundation of America’s constitutional republic did not happen by coincidence. The Founding Fathers were influenced by two great civilizations that came before the United States was established; ancient Greece and ancient Rome. You’ve probably heard of these. In this video, we’ll explore how one of these civilizations, Greece, impacted early American views on government.
2. After watching the video, you will be able to
 - explain the influence of ancient Greece on America’s constitutional republic (e.g., civic participation, legislative bodies, polis, voting rights, written constitution).
3. So let’s begin with ancient Greece, a civilization often referred to as the birthplace of democracy. A democracy is a system of government in which political power is held by the people. The word “democracy” stems from the Greek word “demos”, which means “people”, and the word “kratos”, which means “rule”, or more accurately, power and strength. Hey, you might even recognize and remember that word Kratos from a popular video game character who was an ancient Greek who was known for power and strength! You can connect this ‘power or rule of the people’ to our own ‘We the People!’.
4. Ancient Greece was so large, that it was separated by mountains. This separation resulted in the creation of independent governments that formed a **polis**, or city-state. . Fun fact, by the way: the word ‘polis’ looks like the word ‘politics’, doesn’t it? That’s because ‘politics’ comes from ‘polis’ and has had to do with running a government, and we certainly have politics in the United States, don’t we! Some of these were places like Sparta and Troy, which you may have heard of before, and Thebes, but for us the Founding Fathers, the most influential was the city-state of Athens
5. Athens originally had a government called an oligarchy. Oligarchies are controlled by a small group of people who make all the decisions. You can probably see how this wouldn’t work. For example, your class takes a trip to the local ice cream store. When you arrive, your teacher selects three students to pick an ice cream flavor for the entire class without asking for your opinion. This is how power is structured under an oligarchy.
6. Remember that ice cream scenario where you didn’t get the chance to pick your own ice cream flavor? How did that make you feel? Now, this may be how the citizens of Athens felt about not having a voice in the decisions being made. Eventually, Athens transitioned from an oligarchy to a direct democracy We talked about democracy at the beginning of the video, political power is held by the people. This can take the form of a direct democracy, where every person has the power to be involved in every governmental decision, or an indirect or representative democracy, where people

have the power to choose elected officials to represent their interests, like ours. For ancient Athenians, this was much better than having little to no voice like they did under an oligarchy system.

7. One of the key decisions when establishing of a democracy, is determining how strong the government will be. In most democracies, a constitution or a written set of laws, determine the structure, powers and duties of government. Athens had a **written constitution** called the Athenaiion Politeia. (Doesn't that word politeia look a bit like polis and politics!) A similar model would be used by the Founding Fathers when establishing the government of the United States and creating our US Constitution.

8. In Athens, the power of the government was separated into three groups that governed society; the Assembly, the Council of 500, and the courts. The **Assembly** was the **legislative body** whose task was to make laws, much like our Congress. The Council was the executive body whose task was to oversee the daily running of government, and the courts were the judicial body concerned with issues of justice. Civic participation was also important for all citizens, as it is in the United States. In fact, citizens were **required** to participate in government, including by serving on juries. Juries, which are an important part of our own justice system, are a group of people who listen to the facts in a court case, and make a decision about guilt or innocence.

9. All citizens in Athens had the right to vote, just like the United States today. However, its important to remember that in ancient Athens, 'citizens' only meant people who were men over the age of 18 who had two Athenian parents and had completed their military service. This meant that only about 20% of the population of Athens were actually citizens and could participate in their direct democracy.

10. One example of voting was ostracism. Ostracism was a form of voting used to get rid of people who were becoming too powerful in Athens. Voters would drop pieces of pottery with a name on it into a pot, and whoever had the most votes had to leave Athens for ten years. This wasn't an election you would want to win!

11. Because so few people in Athens were actually citizens, it could have a direct democracy where everyone participated and voted on every single important decision. Imagine trying to do that in a country the size of the United States! That's one reason we have a constitutional republic with representative democracy instead, where we choose leaders to represent us in making decisions.

12. Be sure to watch the next video in this module to learn about how ancient Rome influenced the development of our nation.