



Founders' Influence:
SS.7.CG.1.1
Ancient and Religious Influences
READING #1

Name: _____

Date: _____



SS.7.CG.1.1 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will explain the influence of ancient Greece on America's constitutional republic (e.g., civic participation, legislative bodies, polis, voting rights, written constitution).

Ancient Greece is 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." Originally, ancient Greece was ruled by a form of government, whereas political power was inherited and held by a select few privileged people called **aristocrats** or nobles. Aristocrats were considered the most qualified to rule because of their intelligence.

Ancient Greece and its cities were geographically separated by mountains and hills. This isolation resulted in the formation of an independent government called a **polis**, or **city-state**. The largest city in ancient Greece was Athens. Athens was known for its many contributions to Greek society, including philosophy and trade. Particularly, Athens was important because it experienced different forms of government. Athens began as an **oligarchy**, or a government in which power is only held by a small group of elite and wealthy people. Oligarchies are often characterized as being ruled by the few for corrupt or unjust reasons.

Athens developed one of the first democratic governments called a **direct democracy**. A direct democracy is a form of government where the power to govern is directly in the hands of the people rather than elected representatives such as the elite and wealthy. In most democracies, government is limited by a **constitution**, or a written set of laws that determine the powers and duties of the government. Specifically, in Athens, three groups governed society; the assembly, the council, and the courts. The **Assembly** was the **legislative body** made up of any male citizens who wanted to participate in government. This body had the **authority** to pass new laws, make **judicial** decisions through a supreme court, and appoint executive members such as generals for the military. Citizens also served on juries with the responsibility of deciding court cases.

The other city-state in ancient Greece was Sparta. Sparta was known for its powerful army, and characterized as a military city-state because it required all males to serve in the Spartan army. Most of Sparta's population consisted of slaves that were forced to live under the **tyranny** of the Spartan government. Sparta, just like Athens, was governed by a constitution. The Spartan constitution **vested** supreme power in the hands of an Assembly composed of all citizens.

Finally, despite Athens and Sparta having many differences, such as Athens being a direct democracy and Sparta being a **monarchy** ruled by dual kings, they shared similar thoughts about the concept of citizenship. In Athens, citizens had to be native-born males and not slaves. If people met these requirements, they could vote and participate in politics. In Sparta, citizens also had to be male and not a slave.

aristocrats - a form of government in which political power is inherited and held by a select few privileged people

Assembly – legislative body in ancient Greece that passed new laws and made judicial decisions

authority - the power to direct the actions of people or to make decisions

constitution - the basic principles and laws of a nation or state that determine the powers and duties of the government and guarantee certain rights to the people in it; usually a written document

democracy - a system of government in which political power is held by the people

direct democracy - a form of government where power to govern is directly in the hands of the people rather than elected representatives

judicial - the power of government to interpret laws

legislative body – a group of people that make, amend, or repeal laws

monarchy - a form of government headed by a king or queen who inherits the position, rules for life, and holds power that can range anywhere between limited to absolute

oligarchy - a form of government in which total power is only held by a small group of elite, or wealthy people

polis – city-state

tyranny - a government that abuses its power

vested – to assign, secure, or give power