

# Greek Philosophers, Writers, and Intellectuals

\* DO NOT WRITE ON THE HANDOUT \*

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Aristotle

Aristotle (pronounced AR-uh-STAH-tull), a philosopher and scientist, was born in northern Greece around 384 B.C.E. He studied with Plato, another famous Greek philosopher, for 20 years. Aristotle wrote about almost every branch of learning including philosophy, biology, medicine, psychology, physics, mathematics, drama, and music. He founded the Lyceum (pronounced ly-SEE-um), a center for studying science and history. In his book *History of Animals*, he gave detailed descriptions of animal and fish life. With his students' help, he classified more than 500 types of animals.



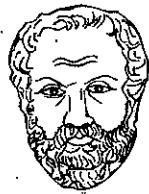
Aspasia

Aspasia (pronounced ah-SPAY-zhah), a teacher and writer, was born in Miletus in Asia Minor around 470 B.C.E. As a young woman, she traveled to Athens, where she met and became the companion of Pericles, a well-known Athenian politician. In Athens, Aspasia opened a school and taught philosophy and debate. She supported women's rights and argued that the city should educate women as it educated men. Some scholars claim that Aspasia wrote Pericles' *Funeral Oration*, the powerful speech he delivered in praise of Athenian soldiers who had died in battle.



Sophocles

Sophocles (pronounced SOFF-ah-kleez), one of Athens' greatest playwrights, was born in Athens around 496 B.C.E. Sophocles wrote 123 plays, the most famous of which is *Oedipus Rex*, a story about the tragic fall of a powerful king. Sophocles introduced several changes into Greek drama. He used three actors instead of two, and increased the size of the chorus from 12 to 15 members. Sophocles was the first playwright to use painted backdrops for scenery. In addition, he told a complete story in a single play, unlike previous Greek playwrights who often took three separate plays to complete their plots.



Thucydides

Thucydides (pronounced thoo-SIH-dih-deez), a historian and a writer, was born in Athens around 455 B.C.E. He briefly served as a general during the Peloponnesian (pronounced puh-loh-puh-NEE-shen) War between Athens and Sparta, but was exiled for his failure in battle. During his 20 years in exile, Thucydides wrote a history of the war. Unlike previous historians, who had explained events as the actions of the Gods, Thucydides wrote an account of the war that was free of legends and myths. He carefully checked the accuracy of his information and thoughtfully analyzed actions of the war based on evidence. His manner of investigating and recording events became a model for later historians to follow.



Pericles

Pericles (pronounced PER-ih-kleez), a military and political leader, was born in Athens around 495 B.C.E. His family's wealth and influence helped him enter Athenian politics. Pericles believed that all citizens should actively participate in democracy, but he knew it was difficult for poor citizens to do so. Therefore, he suggested that people be paid for serving on juries and on the Council of 500 that ran the daily operations of government. To mark the end of the Persian Wars in 479 B.C.E., Pericles beautified Athens with many new buildings, including a magnificent entrance gate to the Acropolis, and the *Parthenon*, a grand temple to honor the Goddess Athena.



Plato

Plato (pronounced PLAY-toh), a philosopher and teacher, was born in Athens around 427 B.C.E. He was a student and close friend of Socrates, another famous Greek philosopher. In his book *The Republic*, he wrote that the best state was one in which every citizen performed the task for which he or she was best suited. According to Plato, some people would be farmers and merchants, some would be military leaders, and some would be rulers. In 386 B.C.E., Plato founded a school called the Academy, which historians consider the Western world's first important institution of higher learning. At the Academy, scholars studied philosophy, law, mathematics, and astronomy under Plato's guidance.



Pythagoras

Pythagoras (pronounced pah-THAG-or-iss), a philosopher and mathematician, was born on the island of Samos, off the coast of Asia Minor, around 570 B.C.E. Historians consider Pythagoras to be one of the world's greatest mathematicians. He developed the *Pythagorean* (pronounced pah-THAG-or-EE-an) *Theorem*, a mathematical theorem that describes the relationship among the sides of a right triangle. He also used the seven-stringed *lyre*, a Greek musical instrument, to show that notes can be measured mathematically. He established that if a musician plucks a lyre string to produce a note, then holds the middle of the string down with his finger while the note is still sounding, a new note will be produced that is exactly one tone, or *octave*, higher than the first.



Sappho

Sappho (pronounced SA-foh), one of ancient Greece's few known female poets, was born on the island of Lesbos, off the coast of Asia Minor, around 630 B.C.E. Sappho grew up in a wealthy family, received a fine education, and established a respected school of poetry and music for young women. Before Sappho, most poets wrote *epic* poems, long verses about great heroes, which were read aloud. Sappho was one of the first poets to write *lyric* poems, short verses that describe strong feelings and that were usually sung to the accompaniment of a lyre. Scholars admire her poems for their direct expression and honesty.