

Athenian Democracy Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
Was ancient Athens truly democratic?

Materials:

- Athenian Democracy PowerPoint
- Copies of Docs A-E and Guiding Questions
- Copies of Structured Academic Controversy Directions and Graphic Organizer

Plan of Instruction:

Note: To allow more time for the SAC activity in class, you have the option of assigning the documents and Guiding Questions as homework beforehand.

1. Use the PowerPoint to introduce or review information on Athenian democracy and to introduce the Central Historical Question.
 - a. Slide 2: Background. *In the 6th century BCE, Athens was the site of ongoing fighting between the rich Athenians, who controlled the government, and poor Athenians, who were farmers and merchants. In 508 BCE, a wealthy Athenian named Cleisthenes rose to power in the city-state. The following year, he introduced a system known as democracy.*
 - b. Slide 3: Definition of Democracy. *A democracy is a form of government where political power comes from citizens. The word comes from the Greek demokratia. Demo means “the people,” and kratia means “power” or “rule.” Athenian democracy was a direct democracy. This means that citizens were allowed to vote directly on laws and government actions. This is different from a representative democracy, in which citizens elect officials to vote on laws.*

Note: Depending on students’ prior knowledge of democracy, adjust the amount of time you spend on this slide. Students need to understand what democracy is in order to be successful in this lesson.
 - c. Slide 4: Athenian Democracy. *The Athenian democratic government was divided into three branches: the Ekklesia, the Boule, and the Dikasteria.*
 - i. **The Ekklesia** was Athens’s main governing body and made the most important decisions, including voting on laws, deciding whether to go to war, and determining foreign policy. Any Athenian citizen could attend and vote in the Ekklesia, which met 40 times per year. Decisions required a simple majority to pass.

Document B

The Athenian Constitution, written by Aristotle. Translated by Frederic G. Kenyon. Retrieved from http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/athenian_const.mb.txt

Document C

Modified from Ober, J. (2016). *The Rise and Fall of Classical Greece*. Princeton University Press.

Document D

Mogens, H.H. (1989). *Was Athens a Democracy? Popular Rule, Liberty, and Equality in Ancient and Modern Political Thought*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard.

Document E

John McK. Camp, "Ostracized in Athens: Ancient Greeks knew how to dump bad pols." *The New York Times*, July 24, 2003.

Acknowledgments

We thank Professor Walter Parker at the University of Washington's College of Education for helping us see the enduring value of the SAC approach in the history classroom.