Spartans were warriors. Spartans endured unbelievable pain and hardship to become a superior Spartan soldier and citizen! Sparta’s government was an oligarchy. The people were ruled by a small group of warriors. The Spartans spoke Greek, wrote Greek, thought of themselves as Greeks, but they were very different from the other Greek city-states, and proud of it.

Their educational system was certainly very different. The goal of Spartan education was to create a strong warrior. Boys were taken away from their parents at age 7. They lived a harsh and often brutal life in the soldiers barracks. Younger children were beaten by older children who started fights to help make the younger boys tough and strong. Children were often whipped in front of groups of other Spartans, including their parents, but they were not allowed to cry out in pain.

Children, during their training process, were given very little food. They were encouraged to steal food, instead. If caught stealing, they were beaten. To avoid severe pain, children learned to be cunning, to lie, to cheat, to steal, and how to get away with it!

Some children grew up to warriors. Others became members of the Spartan secret police. Their job was to spy on people, especially slaves. If they found a slave who showed any signs of leadership, their job was to kill that slave immediately. As adults, men did not live with their families. They visited their families, but men lived in soldiers barracks.

Women, unlike women in the rest of Greek world, had a great deal of freedom. Women were educated to be fighters. Some women became warriors. Many ran businesses. They were free to move about.

Marriage for a Spartan woman was an almost non-ceremonial event. The woman was abducted in the night by her suitor, her head was shaved, and she was made to wear men’s clothing and lye on a straw pallet in the dark. From there on she would meet with her husband for almost entirely procreative reasons. If she was formerly a girl, she became a woman through marriage. Any Spartan man could abduct a wife, which led to a system of polyandry (many husbands, one wife or vice versa) in Sparta. When a child was born, the woman had little to do with the his/her upbringing, rather nurses handled the child’s care (in addition, a female Spartan child was subject to the same tests of strength as a male child.).

Women’s roles in Sparta were not limited to marriage and procreation. Spartan women had many rights that other Greek women did not have. Namely, they could own and control their own property. They could also take another husband if their first had been away at war for too long. A woman was expected in times of war to overtake her husband’s property, and to guard it against invaders and revolts until her husband returned; hence many Spartan women are pictured as warriors.

Life was very different in ancient Sparta than it was in the rest of ancient Greek city-states. The Spartans were proud, fierce, capable warriors. No great works of art came out of Sparta. But the Spartans, both men and women, were tough, and the Greeks admired strength.
Athenians thought of themselves as the shining star of the Greek city-states. They were famed for their literature, poetry, drama, theatre, schools, buildings, and government.

Before the Greek dark ages, Athens was a small village. After the Greek dark ages, Athens grew rapidly until Athens was one of the two most powerful city-states in the ancient Greek world. (The other was Sparta.) The Athenians were very different from the ancient Spartans. The Spartans were famed for their military strength. Athenians were famed for their commitment to the arts and sciences.

The Greeks believed that each city-state in ancient Greece had a god or a goddess in charge of it, their special patron. For Athens, the patron was Athena, goddess of wisdom. Perhaps because Athena was their patron, Athenians put a great deal of emphasis on education.

Girls learned at home from their mothers. They learned how to run a home, and how to be good wives and mothers. Boys were educated quite differently. Until age 6 or 7, boys were taught at home by their mothers. From 7-14, boys attended a day school outside the home. There, they memorized poetry and learned to play the lyre. They learned drama, public speaking, reading, writing, math, and perhaps even how to play the flute. After middle school, they went to a four year high school and learned more about math, science, and government. At 18, they attended two years of military school. There was just cause for Athens to be proud of its system of education for its citizens.

The class system in Athens was made up of two distinct classes- slaves and citizens. These classes were rarely open to any of the other classes; citizenship alone was given only to male Athenians. The same hierarchy of classes existed within other Greek city states as well. At the core of each class was a specific list of duties and responsibilities given to a member of it.

Citizenship allotted many privileges to the population of Athens, thus it was difficult to attain and was only given to a male child if both parents were Athenian. Women were excluded from becoming citizens (with limited exception in the later Hellenistic period). Hereditary links however, did not just determine citizenship. From the time of their birth, young Athenian men were expected to attain an education. A citizen could own land, have heirs, own slaves, belong to the assembly, and could have some political sway. Citizens also played a large part in the year-round religious festivals of Athens.

Slaves alternately were below their citizen titled masters. They were excluded from the religious festivals of Athens, could not own land, were denied some civil rights, could not participate in political activities. They were able to hold dominance over many of the trades. Tradework itself was appalling to most citizens. Slaves were not expected to attain anything but a basic education in Greece, but were not excluded from it. Some masters allowed their younger slaves apprenticeships in their workshops; eventually the slaves wares and income would add to their master’s wealth. Some of the wealthier students in the Greek academies brought a slave with them to their classes.
Life in Greek City-States

Complete the reading on Athens and Sparta and respond to the following questions. Use complete sentences and fully explain your answers.

1. If the U.S. enacted an educational system like that of Sparta would it have a negative or positive impact on the school systems? How?

2. Do you believe the discipline system of Sparta would work in our school today? Why or why not? (Address both the discipline by older students and the public discipline).

3. Why do you think children were encouraged to steal, yet they were severely punished if caught stealing? What purpose would this serve?

4. How do the roles of a woman as both a wife and a citizen contradict one another? Explain.
5. How was Athena being the patron of Athens ironic when considering the role of women in the Athens city-state?

6. How were the role of boys and girls different in Athens? Provide at least 2 examples for each.

7. What conditions must have existed for one to become a citizen in Athens? What privileges came with citizenship?

8. What was the role of Athenian slaves? Why were some of the Athenian slaves educated?

9. What are the main differences between the powerful city-states of Sparta and Athens? What was valued in each of the city-states?