

Time travel just happened...to you!

Directions:

1. Read for understanding, and react on your Annotation Sheet.
2. Look up definitions as needed. Some are provided on the final two pages.

The best way to learn about how ancient Greeks lived would be to take a time machine back to the year 500 BCE. **And that's what you'll be doing with this assignment.**

Once you are transported to ancient Greece and become a teen boy or girl in an ancient Greek family, you will learn a lot very fast.

Imagine that this pre-reading assignment is your crash course on being ancient Greek. Pay attention to what you read and use the **annotation sheet** provided, because you will need to use it in order to solve a **dilemma**.

Your surroundings

Think of a mall.

Make it some place big, with a huge parking lot, strolling crowds, a **spacious** food court, indoor and outdoor stores, a movie theater with twenty screens, and working fountains with loose change in the basins.

Got it?

Now imagine that instead of being transported to a shopping wonderland, you are now in a place just as crowded and busy—but instead of attractive stores with soaring **façades** on a wide "main street," **you see** one- and two-story apartment houses lined up on narrow alleyways.

The parking lots? Now they're farmed fields.

Instead of a food court, you see sausage and anchovy vendors bunching themselves in the center of town.

Instead of a movie theater, there is a semi-circular outdoor **amphitheater**—or perhaps just the grassy slope of a hillside with a single olive tree at the foot of it. Instead of a fountain, there is a well with a **shrine** to the local spirit of springs or a shrine to the local hero, the ancestor of the most prominent clan in the town.

And by the way, you're not welcomed by banners and signs encouraging you to shop and buy, but instead by a defensive wall with gates that are closed at night.

The mall-town you're imagining is a typical ancient Greek community—a **polis** (city).



The Dilemma of the Time-Traveling Teen

Community Togetherness, Not Country Living

Let's be honest: you feel a bit out of place despite the similarities to your American homeland! Time travel has a way of doing that.

With a bit of quiet poking around and questions, you figure out that the *polis* was extremely necessary for the Greeks because they needed to stick together to survive.

In addition to the wall, the polis usually had a defensive hill (an **acropolis**) with another wall at its foot where people could retreat if attacked by an enemy.

Why so many walls?

If the Greeks lived in the open, on small country farms or even in a modern **suburb**, it would be simple for raiders to come in and take what they wanted. Greeks had farms, but they were usually outside the *polis* itself. Farmers would often commute to their fields or live in small houses near their fields in certain seasons.

So Greeks grew up and lived in community. They were used to everyone helping each other and everyone being “all up in their business.” There was no real police force, grocery store, or fire department. And there was no such thing as privacy. In fact, the word “idiot” comes from a Greek word that means someone who is trying to live a private life without helping—or being helped by—his friends.

Totally “idiotic,” if you live in ancient Greece!

Few people moved away from their *polis* because in a world where friends and family helped you with everything, you couldn't survive in a place where no one knew you.

If you're the kind of person who loves people and can't get enough of doing things together, this is the ideal situation for you. You work, play, and eat with others, and at night you don't have your own bedroom. If you are a girl, you sleep in the “women's quarters” (girls and women were expected to be separate and by themselves most of the time, in fact), and if you are a boy over the age of seven you might sleep outside or on the roof of your house depending on the weather, but always with any unmarried male relatives close by.

You also notice that there is no entertainment to be enjoyed privately. **Music, storytelling, religious ceremonies, and plays are all done in front of audiences.** If you play a musical instrument you're expected to entertain others with it, unless of course you are a shepherd who spends a lot of time on the mountainside looking after animals. Shepherds were famous for being poets who would practice their instruments and sometimes be visited by gods and goddesses while alone in an isolated place.

Your *Oikos* Is (not?) My *Oikos*



So there you are in a small apartment in an ancient Greek *polis*, with your adopted ***oikos***.

Wait—*oikos* (plural, *oikoi*)?

An *oikos* is something like a family, but much more than that. It's the ancient Greek word for household.

We think of a household as a family maybe with a mother, father, and a couple of kids. The Greeks thought of the *oikos* as not only the **nuclear family** but the whole **extended family**, including grandmothers and grandfathers, unmarried aunts, slaves and other servants, young married couples without an *oikos* of their own, and anyone else that depended on the father of the household for his or her life. It also included any land that they owned, plus houses, animals, and other property.

Your “dad,” the *Kurios*

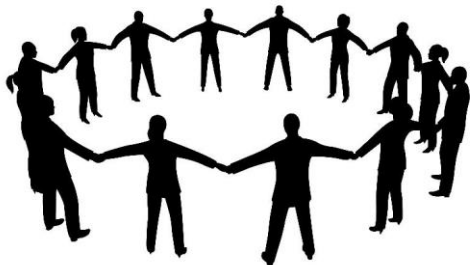
The leader of the *oikos* was the father, also known as the **patriarch** or, in Greek, ***kurios***. The father in the household had **absolute power**. In addition to being able to boss around everyone in the *oikos*, the *kurios* was able to determine whether he wanted to keep you in the family or not. So if you were a kid in an *oikos*, you did what you were told!

What does it mean for a *kurios* to keep a child in the family? It doesn't mean he kicked you out if you didn't take out the garbage on time. The Greeks loved their children, too! But if a father decided the family couldn't afford to have another mouth to feed, he might have a newborn baby put out on a mountainside or in a forest. The Greeks felt that if the gods wanted to save the baby, they could. That's why there are a large number of stories in Greek mythology about unwanted babies who are found on places such as mountainsides and who grow up to become important.

There must have been plenty of *oikoi* where the father was very nice and let other people in the *oikos* make some decisions. The family was not a democracy, however, and things that we would consider "unfair" the Greeks often didn't worry about or talked about in stories only.

The job of the *kurios* was to manage the "outdoor" affairs, which included the farm, business affairs, and any **civic** duties he might have, such as voting, holding political office, serving on committees, or being in military service.

A *kurios* did not spend a whole lot of time at home. His job was to make sure the *oikos* had enough food and money to keep it going and to make sure the *polis* was so strong, both in politics and its own defense, that other cities wouldn't attack it.



Your “mom,” boss of the home

The wife in the *oikos*, who was often much younger than the *kurios* tended to the "indoor" duties, which meant children, cooking, housekeeping, and **textiles**, an important business for many Greek families. Female members of the *oikos*—the wife, the daughters, and any others such as an unmarried aunt or grandmother—were expected to help with weaving wool into fabric and things made from fabric such as rugs, blankets, and clothing.

Women were not allowed to vote, have a career outside the home (unless they were poor or did not have a husband), or generally do most of the things that men did. Men spent their days outdoors and women spent theirs indoors, most of the time.

This does not mean that women had no power to decide things. At home, they did have quite a bit of say-so. But if they wanted to go against the will of the *kurios*, they would need to be creative and **savvy**.

You, the child

As an ancient Greek teenager, you were expected to obey your parents with no questions asked.

Your dreams about the future were not as important as what your parents wanted you to do.

The *kurios* would determine his children's career, which usually meant doing what the *kurios* did. If you were the son of a farmer, you would be a farmer. Girls tended to have even less choice—the *kurios* determined who they would marry, and then the husband would decide what he wanted her to do. If girls didn't marry and were chosen for a job like priestess, they were expected to embrace their new role dutifully.

Not all the time, but most of the time.

Both boys and girls would have their spouses chosen for them, usually by an arrangement between the *kurioi* of two neighboring *oikoi*. Sometimes the **betrothal** would take place long before the two children were adults.

Young women tended to get married as teenagers, while young men would most often spend some time doing military service and then working for their fathers before being given enough land and money to start a family of their own.

School's out

Few children went to school. School was considered a **privilege** given to the sons and daughters of wealthy *oikoi*, or of people whose jobs required them to have children who could read. In fact, the word “school” comes from the ancient Greek word *schola*, which means “leisure.” Learning in ancient times was supposed, by **philosophers** at least, to be fun! Unfortunately for modern-day students, however, early years of school mostly meant memorizing the *Iliad*, a famous poem. If you don't like memorizing things, ancient Greek school is not really for you.

In general, it was not necessary for ancient Greeks to be readers, because they could get by in life by communicating face-to-face with people. Books were luxuries for the one percent of people in Greece who had the time and interest to think deep thoughts. However, some families did want children to be educated in order for them to be important members of the *polis* and bring honor to the family.

Books—or movies, or television shows, or any kind of story that we think needs to be written down in some way, even if only to be spoken as lines by an actor—were most often not read but heard. You would not read a story from Greek mythology in a book, you would listen to the story as it was remembered by somebody in your family (who might tell, sing, or play musical accompaniment to the story around the **hearth** fire) or by a **rhapsode**, a professional reciter of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, or by a group of actors in a play or song.

In fact, the first collections of mythology stories were not created for children but for scholars, who wanted to analyze all the different versions of the stories that had been handed down through the generations.



Slavery

You've already read here that Greeks held slaves in their *oikoi* and that, the *kurios* had control over them. It's true: slaves were not considered human beings, but property, as was the case in the United States before the Civil War.

But ancient Greek slavery was not exactly like the American system: it didn't matter who you were, what country you were from, or who your family was—unlike here, where almost all slaves came from Africa, anyone could end up in slavery in ancient Greece if they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Most slaves were people who had been conquered in war. A few were even kidnapped as children by pirates. In ancient Greece, you were never guaranteed to live your whole life free.

Because there was little machine technology at the time, slaves were expected to do all kinds of work--from plowing fields to copying books. But slaves did have hope: their masters sometimes paid them wages with which they could buy their freedom after a certain number of years.

Why this system worked

So what's going on with this unfair way of having a family? Didn't the Greeks understand that people have better lives when they have freedom and equality?

It's actually true that the ancient Greeks themselves were the first in Europe to discuss ideas such as freedom and equality, and they had the first **democratic** government in Europe, although women and slaves were not allowed to vote.

But the ancient Greeks lived in a time when life was difficult. You've already read about the two sets of walls that many a *polis* had to maintain. And people did have to rely on each other to survive. Technology hadn't reached a point where most hard jobs could be done by machines.

Good land was scarce and farming took a lot of work. There were plenty of people out there, including those from other cities, who were willing to take from you what you had worked so hard for, if you couldn't defend yourself. So people were much more interested in surviving than they were with fulfilling their dreams.

In a world where the physical strength of men and women's ability to bear children were such important and basic needs, it isn't surprising that the father dealt with politics and war while the woman specialized in nurturing a family.



Exceptions to the rule

You might think it would be extremely boring to be an ancient Greek teenager, what with having to obey your parents all the time, no university or career to look forward to in another location, and not being able to date or marry the person you like best.

However, as in most places in the world, the system wasn't always as rigid as it seems.

For example, the rule of men on the "outside" and women on the "inside" had its exceptions. During religious ceremonies and festivals, which included athletic events and games, times of storytelling, plays, and performances of music and dance, many scholars agree that the whole *polis* was present and participated, male and female, young and old. Festivals were a time when people relaxed from the normal way of doing things. There was always room for exceptions during this time.

Even the Greeks knew their system could have been fairer—and could laugh at its shortcomings. Here is an **excerpt** from a play by the famous author Aristophanes called *The Clouds* that portrays the conversation between a father and a son after the son has been educated in a school of philosophy:

Son: First I will ask you this: Did you beat me when I was a boy?

Father: I did, through good will and concern for you.

Son: Then tell me, shouldn't I also give you a beating too, if I have concern for you? ... I too was born free.

Father: But this is not the law. Fathers have power over their sons.

Son: Then we should make new laws!

So the moral of this story is that in human communities, life is never as boring as it could be, and systems never run exactly as they are planned.

The Dilemma of the Time-Traveling Teen

There is always room in life for creativity and smarts. In some places, you just have to work a little harder for your freedom.



Definitions

Look up those words and phrases which are not defined for you and fill in their definitions below.

absolute power:

amphitheater:

etrothal: act of promising that two specific people will be married at some future time

civic:

democratic: related to government directly by the citizens

dilemma:

excerpt: portion taken out of a larger document or communication

extended family:

façade:

hearth: center of the home where family gathers

nuclear family:

philosopher: clear thinker who attempts to understand the deep problems of life and the world

privilege: a rare opportunity to do something not many get to do

rhapsode: professional performer of song and poetry in ancient Greece

savvy:

shrine:

spacious:

suburb:

textiles: