

Lesson 2 Beliefs and Customs

MAIN IDEAS

Belief Systems Like other ancient peoples, the Greeks believed their gods controlled the human and natural worlds.

Belief Systems The Greeks honored their gods by worshiping them and by holding festivals and games in their honor.

Culture Early Greek literature included stories that taught lessons, and long poems that told of adventures.

Greek Gods and Myths

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What was Greek religion like?

The Gods of Greece

- Greek gods looked like humans, only more powerful and beautiful
 - had human emotions, got involved in peoples' lives
- **Zeus** ruled the gods
 - 12 major gods, goddesses lived on **Mount Olympus**, Greece's highest peak
- Each city protected by a god or goddess, such as Athena for Athens
 - Athena was goddess of wisdom, a warrior, patron of crafts

Greek Mythology

- **Myths**—stories people tell to explain beliefs about the world
 - often begin as oral stories, might be written down later
- Greek myths explained creation of world, humans
 - also described relationships between gods, goddesses, humans
 - Prometheus stole fire from gods, gave it to humans, was punished
 - myths often made humans, like Prometheus, heroes

REVIEW QUESTION

How were Greek myths and religion connected?

Honoring the Gods

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the Greeks honor their gods?

Holy Festivals

- Important to honor gods; did so with statues, temples, events
 - Greeks believed angry gods could cause trouble for humans
- Monthly holy days included festival of Noumenia for new moon
- Important festivals honored Olympian gods, such as Athena
 - featured weaving, procession, races, athletic games, poetry

The Olympics

- In Greece, games were part of religious festivals
- **Olympics**—largest games, held every four years to honor Zeus
 - were held in stadium in city of Olympia; only men competed
- Oldest Olympic records date to 776 B.C., but may have started earlier
 - races, wrestling, jumping, throwing tested soldiers' skills
- Girls competed at same time to honor goddess Hera, Zeus' wife

REVIEW QUESTION

Why did the Greeks hold the Olympics?

Early Greek Literature

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What literature did the early Greeks produce?

Epics of Homer

- **Epic poems**—long tales of ancient heroes; show us early Greek life
 - most famous were said to have been composed by Homer: *Iliad* and *Odyssey*
- *Iliad*—Troy besieged; Trojan War fought over stolen wife of Greek king
 - story of heroes, such as Greek warrior Achilles; one weakness was heel
- *Odyssey*—an epic about Odysseus’ difficult return home after Trojan War

Aesop’s Fables

- **Fable**—short story, often with animals, that teaches moral lesson
 - storyteller Aesop said to have written down many Greek fables
- Aesop’s fables include “The Hare and the Tortoise” race story
 - overconfident hare beaten by steady, hard-working tortoise

REVIEW QUESTION

Why are Homer’s epics important?

Lesson Summary

- The ancient Greeks created stories about their gods, who were important to their daily lives.
- The ancient Greeks honored their gods through festivals that included rituals and athletic games.
- Early Greeks wrote fables and epic poems.

Why It Matters Now . . .

Greek mythology, epics, and fables continue to influence our literature, language, and movies.