Lesson 3  The City-State and Democracy

MAIN IDEAS
Government  Instead of being a unified country, Greece was organized into separate city-states.

Government  Different political systems evolved in the various city-states. Some governments changed because of conflicts between rich and poor.

Government  The city-state of Athens developed democracy, which is rule by the people.

The Rise of City-States

ESSENTIAL QUESTION  How was Greece organized politically?

Greek City-States
• Geographic features separated Greece into small regions
• Form of government in Greece, including colonies, was the city-state
  - the polis—Greek name for a city-state—common around 700 B.C.
• Most city-states were small—fewer than 20,000 people—due to geography
  - Athens and Sparta were largest
  - small size caused people to form a close community

Layout of the City
• Center of life was the agora—open space for business, gatherings
  - political discussions, festivals, athletic contests
  - statues, temples, public buildings
• Many cities had a fortified hilltop—acropolis, or “highest city”
  - used for military at first, but later had temples, palaces

REVIEW QUESTION
What was the role of the agora in a Greek city?
Forms of Government

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION**  What different political systems evolved in the city-states of Greece?

**Monarchs and Aristocrats**
- Each city-state was independent, used its own form of government
  - some kept political systems for centuries, others changed systems
- Earliest governments were monarchies ruled by king or queen
- **Aristocracy** — upper class, nobility; in Greece, born into a high family
- Most city-states, like Corinth, began as monarchies
  - by 700s B.C., most were ruled by an aristocracy

**Oligarchy**
- **Oligarchy** — means “rule by the few”
  - people rule because of wealth, land, not birth

**Tyrants**
- In monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, poor lack power—at times rebelled
  - wealthy person seeking power could use anger of poor to gain support
- **Tyrant** — someone who took power illegally, was not of royal birth
  - not necessarily cruel in Greece—some tyrants helped the poor
- Tyrants helped overthrow oligarchy, united people for change

**REVIEW QUESTION**
How were oligarchy and aristocracy similar?
Athens Builds a Limited Democracy

ESSENTIAL QUESTION  How did limited democracy develop in Athens?

Citizenship
• People learned they could influence government, demanded more power
• Greeks invented idea of citizenship
• Citizen—person loyal to government and protected by government
  - in Greece, must be born to free citizens, either upper or lower class
  - in much of Greece, only upper-class citizens had power
• Lower-class citizens demanded power; slowly created major change

Solon and Cleisthenes
• Poor farmers who owed money worked for others or became slaves
• Solon, elected around 594 B.C., made reforms to prevent revolt
  - no citizen could be enslaved; social class based on wealth, not birth
  - all citizens could serve in assembly, elect leaders
• Around 500 B.C., Cleisthenes took more power away from nobles
  - organized citizens into groups by residence, not wealth

Direct Democracy
• In democracy, all citizens make political decisions in government
• Athens had direct democracy—all citizens meet to decide on laws
  - United States has indirect democracy—people elect representatives

Limited Democracy
• Athens had limited democracy—only free adult males were citizens
  - women, slaves, foreigners could not take part in government
  - noncitizens could not become citizens

REVIEW QUESTION
How did reformers change the government of Athens?
Lesson Summary

- The people of Greece lived in independent city-states.
- Greek city-states had various types of government: monarchy, oligarchy, and direct democracy.
- Over time, the male citizens of Athens gained the power to make political decisions.

Why It Matters Now . . .

Athens is often called the birthplace of democracy. Many people in today’s world are seeking to replace other forms of government with democracy.