

CLASSIC STUFF





A DIP INTO THE CLASSICS

The subject of classics is the study of the history, art, and language of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations.

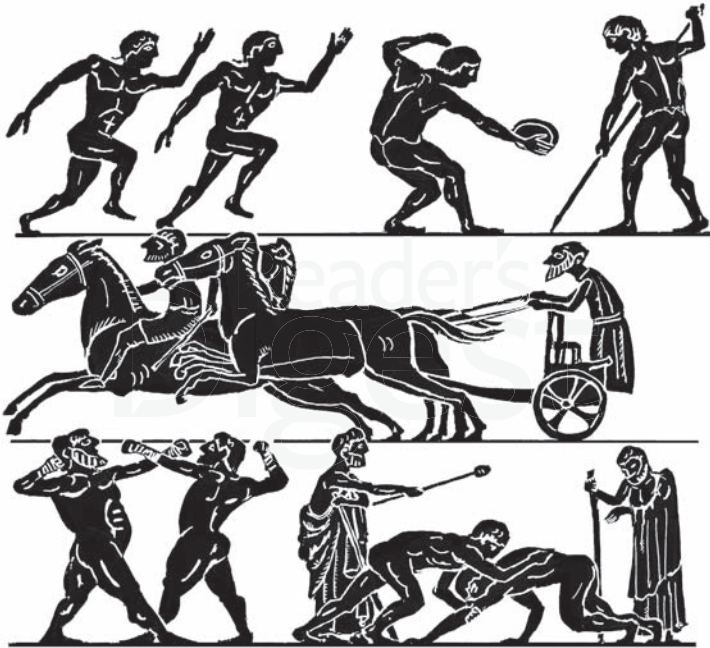
Ancient Greece

The civilization of ancient Greece flourished between about 1,000 b.c. and 300 b.c. The Greeks had ideas about science, art, philosophy (thinking about the meaning of stuff), and politics that are still valued today. They came up with the idea of democracy—a political system in which ordinary people play a major role in governing themselves. It is the form of government that the majority of countries still use.

The Greeks were famous for their great philosophers. In the 5th century b.c., for example, a man named Socrates (SOK-ra-teez) asked his students questions, such as “What is right and wrong?” to help them think about the world around them. However, Socrates didn’t leave anything written down, so Plato, one of his students, jotted it all down instead. Plato started The Academy in Athens, a forerunner to today’s universities. His most famous student, Aristotle, became a great scientist as well as a philosopher.

Greece was also home to many talented storytellers. According to legend, a blind poet named Homer (not to be confused with Homer Simpson!) was said to have composed two very long poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. People told each other his stories, and they were passed down from one generation to the next. However, writers such as Sophocles (SOF-o-kleez), Aeschylus (EE-ska-lus), and Euripides (you-RIP-id-eez) wrote lots of great plays, many of which are still performed today.

Life wasn't all studying for the ancient Greeks. They also held huge sporting events. One of these took place in a city called Olympia every four years. Men from all over the Greek world took part in events, such as javelin, discus, and chariot racing (women had their own competitions). Most sports were performed naked, as you can see here:



It was not until 1896 that the modern Olympic Games began (though people now prefer to get dressed first).

The Roman Empire

According to legend, Mars, the god of war, had two sons, Romulus and Remus, who were abandoned and cared for by a wolf. These brothers grew up to establish the great city of Rome in about 750 b.c. Although this story is highly unlikely,

Rome came to have immense power. Whenever the Romans conquered an area, their skilled craftsmen built towns with aqueducts (to bring water), bridges, bathhouses, theaters, and temples. They also built roads so that their army could move around quickly. You can still visit many Roman buildings in places all over Europe, North Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Despite their advanced civilization, the Romans could be very cruel. At the Colosseum, an arena in Rome, thousands of people watched as gladiators (warriors) fought to the death or as prisoners were thrown to lions.

For many years Rome was ruled as a democracy in a similar way to Greece. One of the men thought to have brought about the end of this democracy was Julius Caesar, a successful Roman general. He conquered many lands and, when he returned to Rome, made himself dictator for life. This meant that he was not elected by the people and had unlimited powers. It was short-lived, as he was assassinated soon afterward, in 44 b.c., on the ides of March. (In the Roman calendar the 15th of March, May, July, and October and the 13th of every other month were all called the ides.)

For the rest of its history, Rome was ruled by emperors who had control of a highly disciplined army. The army was divided into sections called legions, which each had around 4,800 soldiers, plus supporting horsemen and archers.

Some of these emperors were not very pleasant. Nero, for example, who reigned from a.d. 54 to a.d. 68, was said to have murdered his own mother, executed his first wife, and may have murdered his second. His cruelty wasn't limited to his family; he was said to have had Christians burned to death at night to light up his garden. Eventually, the senate (the Roman government) had enough and sentenced Nero to death. Nero avoided execution by killing himself.

ANCIENT LANGUAGES



Many people describe ancient Greek and Latin, the language of ancient Rome, as “dead” languages. This is because no one has spoken them as everyday languages for a long time. However, they are still important today because thousands of words in modern languages come from Latin and Greek.

For example, in Latin the word for moon is *luna*—you’ll spot it being used in English in words such as “lunar” (a lunar cycle is the cycle of the moon) and “lunacy” (another word for madness, because people once thought that the moon affected people’s behavior). *Aqua*, the Latin for water, appears in “aquatic” (aquatic creatures live in water). *Ignis*, or fire, can be seen in words such as “ignite,” which means to set alight.

In ancient Greek *angelus* meant “messenger,” which is where the word “angel” comes from, because angels are described as messengers from God. The word for an octopus comes from *okto*, the Greek word meaning “eight.” The link isn’t always so obvious, though. For example, the word “hippopotamus” comes from the Greek *hippos* (horse) and *potamos* (river), so a *hippopotamus* is a “river horse.”

Ancient words can be used in combination to make new words, too. For example, the words “tele” and “phone” mean “far away” and “voice,” so a telephone is just a “far away voice.”

The Greek Alphabet

Although the Romans wrote using pretty much the same letters as English, the Greek alphabet was (and still is) very different. You will probably come across some of these letters when you study math and science, but on the next page, you will find all of them listed in the correct order.

Greek	Letter	Greek	Letter
Alpha	Α α	Nu	Ν ν
Beta	Β β	Xi	Ξ ξ
Gamma	Γ γ	Omicron	Ο ο
Delta	Δ δ	Pi	Π π
Epsilon	Ε ε	Rho	Ρ ρ
Zeta	Ζ ζ	Sigma	Σ σ
Eta	Η η	Tau	Τ τ
Theta	Θ θ	Upsilon	Υ υ
Iota	Ι ι	Phi	Φ φ
Kappa	Κ κ	Chi	Χ χ
Lambda	Λ λ	Psi	Ψ ψ
Mu	Μ μ	Omega	Ω ω

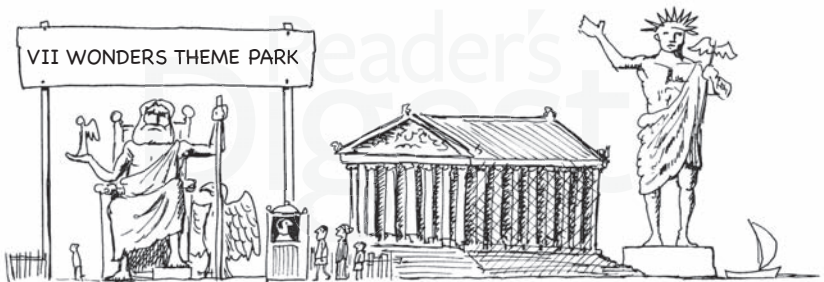
Notice that the first two letters are alpha and beta, which are where the word “alphabet” comes from when the two words are combined.

THE SEVEN WONDERS



There were many wonders in the ancient world, and those that the ancients regarded as the most amazing are known as the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Sadly, only one is still standing today.

1. The Statue of Zeus at Olympia. The statue took a Greek sculptor, named Phidias, eight years to complete. It was nearly 39 feet (12 m) tall and stood in Zeus's temple at Olympia. It showed him sitting on his throne, and it was decorated with gold, precious stones, and ivory.



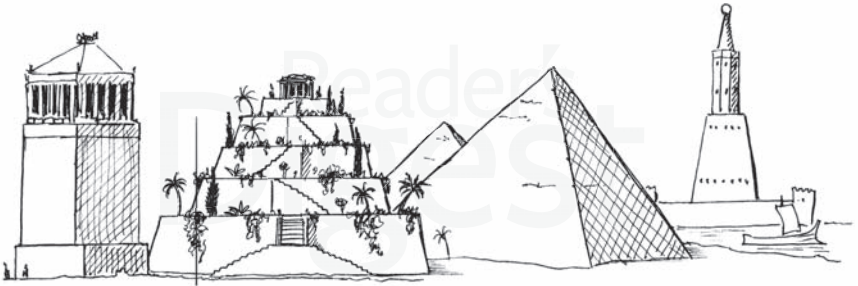
2. The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus. This huge temple, in what is now Turkey, was decorated with beautiful works of art. It was so magnificent that Philon of Byzantium, who had seen all the other wonders, wrote that when he saw the temple, "all these other wonders were put in the shade."

3. The Colossus of Rhodes. The people of the Greek port of Rhodes defeated an invading army and celebrated by building a 105-foot (32-m) tall bronze-and-iron statue of the sun god, Helios. When it was destroyed by an earthquake less than 60 years after it was finished, the citizens of Rhodes decided not

to rebuild it, because they thought that the statue may have angered Helios.

4. The Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. This tomb in Turkey was built by Artemisia for her husband, King Mausolus, when he died. She sent for the best artists in the world to decorate it with statues and carvings. Artemisia died before the building was complete and was placed next to her husband.

5. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon. The gardens, in what is now Iraq, were said to be full of exotic trees, plants, and flowers, arranged on high platforms. It is said the gardens were built by King Nebuchadnezzar as a gift for his wife.



6. The Pyramids of Giza. The three pyramids were each built to hold the body of an Egyptian king (Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure). The Great Pyramid of Khufu needed 2,300,000 huge stone blocks and took tens of thousands of workers many years to complete. Despite being roughly 4,500 years old, the pyramids are the only wonder you can still see today.

7. The Pharos of Alexandria. The Pharos was a huge lighthouse, built to guide ships into the Egyptian port of Alexandria. There was a fire constantly burning at the top of a tower that was at least 377 feet (115 m) tall, with a large mirror of polished metal to reflect the light across the sea.

MYTHOLOGICALLY SPEAKING



The ancient Greeks worshipped hundreds of gods and goddesses. They believed that the gods lived on Mount Olympus, which they thought linked Earth to Heaven. Later the Romans often gave Greek gods Roman names and worshipped them, too. Gods and goddesses could stand for different things and really didn't behave very well. Here are just a few, followed by some stories about them.

Greek God	Roman God	Role
Zeus	Jupiter	Sky god and ruler of all the other gods—his weapon was a thunderbolt.
Hera	Juno	Zeus's wife, and goddess of marriage, known for being angry and jealous because Zeus often betrayed her.
Hades	Pluto	God of the underworld.
Apollo	Apollo	Son of Zeus and god of healing and music, as well as lots of other things.
Artemis	Diana	Goddess of hunting and wild animals, twin sister of Apollo.
Ares	Mars	God of war—in Greek stories he was thoughtlessly violent but was much more likeable in Roman versions.
Aphrodite	Venus	Goddess of love and beauty.
Hermes	Mercury	The messenger of the gods with winged sandals, he was thought to bring luck to and protect travelers.
Athena	Minerva	Goddess of war and wisdom (and handi-crafts). Her symbol was the owl.
Hephaestus	Vulcan	God of fire and craftsman for the gods who used volcanoes (which are named after him) to forge weapons.
Poseidon	Neptune	God of the sea.
Persephone	Proserpina	Daughter of Zeus and Demeter (goddess of the harvest).

Persephone

Lots of myths were told to help explain how the world worked. For example, the story of Persephone describes the changing of the seasons. She was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter. Hades, god of the underworld, wished to marry Persephone, but her mother wouldn't let him, so Hades kidnaped Persephone. Demeter was so angry that, as goddess of the harvest, she refused to let crops grow, threatening to starve the human race to death.

Zeus sent the messenger Hermes to force Hades to release Persephone. He agreed, but gave her a pomegranate before she left. Persephone was not allowed to eat food in the underworld, so after eating only one seed, she was forced to spend a third of every year in the underworld. Demeter would become so sad during this time each year that winter came and crops did not grow.

Daedalus and Icarus

Daedalus, who was an inventor and architect, was asked to build a labyrinth (or maze) for King Minos of Crete. Since Daedalus knew how to escape the labyrinth, he was not allowed to leave the island. To get away, he made a pair of wings for himself and his son, Icarus, by joining feathers together with wax. Icarus was thrilled. He flew higher and higher until he was too close to the sun. The heat melted the wax, causing him to plummet to his death in the sea below.



Sisyphus

Sisyphus certainly knew how to annoy the gods. One day he betrayed Zeus and was supposed to be punished with death. However, instead of dying, when Hades came to take him to the underworld, Sisyphus took Hades prisoner.

While Hades was trapped, no one in the world could die. Hades was rescued by Ares, and together they made sure that Sisyphus got to the underworld this time. However, Sisyphus was sneaky and escaped death again. This time Zeus sent Hermes to fetch him, and Sisyphus was condemned to push a huge rock up a hill forever. As soon as he'd get near the top, the rock would roll back down to the bottom and Sisyphus had to begin pushing all over again.

Pandora

Zeus was very angry at the titan Prometheus for stealing fire from the gods, so he sought revenge by making a beautiful woman named Pandora (which means all gifts). Zeus sent Pandora down to Earth and gave her as a present to Prometheus's brother, Epimetheus. Zeus told Epimetheus that he should marry Pandora, and he sent Pandora with a sealed pottery vase with instructions never to open it. Pandora was very curious about what was in it. Time and again, she begged Epimetheus to let her open the vase, but he always said no. Finally one day, when he was sleeping, she broke the seal and opened it up.

Suddenly, out flew every kind of trouble that people had never known about before, such as sickness, worry, hate, and envy. The bad things all began to fly away like little bugs, all over the place. Pandora, very sorry now that she had opened the vase, tried to catch the bad things and put them back inside, but it was too late. They all flew away. The very

last thing to fly out was hope, which Zeus had sent to keep people going when bad things get them down.

Heracles

From an early age Heracles*, a warrior and half god, was harassed by Hera, Zeus's wife. She hated him because Zeus was his father. She even sent two snakes to try to kill him when he was a baby. However, young Heracles was so strong that he strangled them both.

Instead of killing him, Hera tormented Heracles and drove him so mad that he killed his own wife and children. The Oracle at Delphi told Heracles that to make amends for the murders, he must serve King Eurystheus and perform any task set for him. With Hera's help King Eurystheus came up with a series of what seemed to be impossible tasks, known as the "Labors of Heracles" (see opposite).

Heracles was a true hero, however, and completed all the tasks. He continued to have adventures until he died, poisoned by the blood of a centaur (a creature that is half man and half horse). Here are the tasks Heracles was given:

* The Roman name for the Greek demigod Heracles is Hercules, son of Jupiter; the Roman equivalent of Zeus.

LABORS OF HERACLES



1. TO KILL AND SKIN THE NEMEAN LION



2. TO SLAY THE NINE-HEADED MONSTER, HYDRA



3. TO CATCH THE SACRED AND SWIFT-RUNNING ARCADIAN HIND (DEER)



4. TO CAPTURE THE FLESH-EATING ERYMANTHIAN BOAR



5. TO CLEAN THE OVERFLOWING CATTLE STABLES OF KING AUGEAS



6. TO DEFEAT THE MAN-EATING STYMPHALIAN BIRDS



7. TO CAPTURE THE FIRE-BREATHING CRETAN BULL



8. TO CATCH THE MARES OF KING DIOMEDES—FLESH-EATING HORSES



9. TO BRING EURYSTHEUS THE GOLDEN BELT OF HIPPOLYTE, QUEEN OF THE FIERCE FEMALE AMAZON WARRIORS



10. TO STEAL THE CATTLE OF GERYON, THE STRONGEST MAN IN THE WORLD



11. TO STEAL THE GOLDEN APPLES OF IMMORTALITY FROM THE HESPERIDES, DAUGHTERS OF THE GOD ATLAS



12. TO DESCEND INTO THE UNDERWORLD AND CAPTURE THE MANY-HEADED GUARD DOG, CERBERUS