Warring City-States

BEFORE YOU READ
In the last section, you read about the rise of early cultures in Greece.
In this section, you will read about city-states and their governments.

AS YOU READ
Use the chart below to take notes on the city-states,

TERMS AND NAMES
- polis: City-state of ancient Greece
- acropolis: Fortified hilltop in an ancient Greek city
- monarchy: Government ruled by a king or queen
- aristocracy: Government ruled by a small group of noble families
- oligarchy: Government ruled by a few powerful people
- tyrant: Powerful ruler who gained control of a city-state’s government by asking the common people for support
- democracy: Rule by the people
- helot: Peasant forced to stay on the land
- phalanx: Side-by-side fighting formation of Greek foot soldiers
- Persian Wars: Wars between Greece and the Persian Empire

GOVERNMENT
- city-state: main political unit
- ways to rule city-states: monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy

SPARTA

ATHENS

PERSSIAN WAR

Rule and Order in Greek City-States (page 127)

How were city-states governed?
The center of Greek life was the polis, or city-state. A polis was made up of a city and the countryside villages surrounding it. Men would gather in the marketplace or on a fortified hilltop in the polis, called an acropolis, to conduct business.

The city-states had different kinds of government. Some had a monarchy, a government ruled by a king or queen. Some had an aristocracy, a government ruled by a small group of noble families. Later, some merchants and craft workers formed an oligarchy, a government ruled by a few powerful people.

Sometimes, the common people clashed with the rulers of the city-states. Powerful individuals called tyrants sometimes appealed to the common people for support. Tyrants would then rule the city-state. Unlike today, tyrants generally were not considered harsh or cruel. Rather, they were looked upon as leaders who did things for the ordinary people.
1. What types of government existed in the city-states?

Athens Builds a Limited Democracy (pages 128–129)

How was Athens governed?

In some city-states, most notably Athens, the idea of representative government took hold. In Athens, as in other city-states, wealthy nobles and poor people clashed. The people of Athens avoided major political problems, however, by making reforms. Reformers in Athens tried to build a democracy, or government by the people.

In 594 B.C., a trusted statesman named Solon came to power. He introduced far-reaching changes to the government of Athens. He gave citizens a greater voice. He made it possible for any citizen of Athens to join discussions in the assembly, which approved laws. About 90 years later a leader named Cleisthenes took power and introduced further democratic reforms.

Athenian citizens, then, were able to participate in a limited democracy. Not everyone was involved in making political decisions, though. Only free adult men were citizens. Women and slaves had few rights. They played little or no role in political life.

2. Why was Athens not a full democracy?

Sparta Builds a Military State (pages 129, 131)

How was Sparta governed?

Sparta was a very strong city-state in the south of Greece. It conquered its neighbor Messenia. The people of Messenia became helots. They were peasants forced to stay on the land they worked. They had to give the Spartans half their crops.

An assembly, the Council of Elders, and elected officials governed Sparta. Two kings ruled over Sparta’s military. Sparta prized military skills. Boys joined the army at the age of seven and went through a long period of training as soldiers. Spartan women ran the family estates, freeing their husbands to serve in the army.

3. What was Sparta’s focus as a city-state?

The Persian Wars (pages 131–133)

Who fought the Persian Wars?

Over the years, the Greeks developed the ability to make iron weapons. Because these cost less than weapons made of bronze, more people could afford them. Soon each city-state had its own army. In this army, soldiers stood side by side. They had a spear in one hand and a shield in the other. Together they formed a phalanx.

The Persian Wars were fought between Greece and the Persian Empire. In 490 B.C., Persian ships landed 25,000 soldiers on the coast of Greece. At the Battle of Marathon, the Greeks won a tremendous victory that saved Athens.

Ten years later, the Persians returned. The Greeks lost a battle on land, despite the heroic efforts of a small band of Spartans. The Persians also burned Athens. However, the ships of Athens won a great sea battle. The Greeks followed it with another victory on land. The threat from Persia was over.

4. What was the outcome of the Persian Wars?