

The “Antithetical” Spartan Family

Excerpted From: "Athenian and Spartan Families: The "Antithetical" Spartan Family." *World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras*. ABC-CLIO, 2013.

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The Greek household (*oikos* or *oikia*) typically comprised an extended rather than nuclear family, frequently with three generations living under one roof: the grandparents, the father and mother, their sons and unmarried daughters, their sons' wives and children, and the slaves. Quite commonly, therefore, there would have been about 10 people living under one roof, often, one suspects, in rather cramped quarters. Only very trusted slaves would have lived in proximity to their masters or mistresses. Although we know next to nothing about slaves' living quarters, it is likely that most families domiciled them in a separate building, perhaps in some cases in a stall shared by livestock.

The overriding duty of an Athenian wife was to provide her husband with offspring, preferably boys, to ensure that his household did not die out. In addition to the pressure to conceive that came from the husband and the husband's family, there would also have been pressure from society at large, because every Greek community expected its citizens to beget legitimate children in order to keep the population at parity. Because of the high level of infant mortality, it is estimated that each married couple would have had to produce four or five children to achieve this modest target. Women spent most of their time at home. When a respectable woman went out of doors, she rarely did so unaccompanied, if only for her safety's sake.

All that we know about the Spartans suggests that their way of life was ideologically antithetical to that of most other Greek communities—so much so that Herodotus in his history treats them as something of an ethnographical oddity. The Spartans were antithetical to other Greeks foremost in the fact that the needs of the family were subordinated to the requirements of the state.

From birth onward, the obligation to the state overrode not only any duty to the family but also one's right to life, in that Spartans practiced the compulsory exposure of newborn males in the case of those deemed unfit for rearing. Plutarch, in his *Life of Lycurgus*, writing around the beginning of the second century CE, tells us that the father was required to present his offspring to the elders of the tribes for inspection. Then, "If the child was strong and lusty, the elders ordered him to raise it; if it was not, he had to expose it at a chasm-like place called Apothetai (Place of Exposure)."

The Spartan home was hardly a home in our sense of the word, because children spent most of their time with their peers. Even the first years of a boy's life were not completely free of discipline, as Plutarch goes on to tell us: "Spartan nurses taught Spartan babies to avoid any fussiness in their diet, not to be afraid of the dark, not to cry or scream, and not to throw any other kind of tantrum."

housed

children of married
parents; stable

opposed in beliefs
cultural

under the authority of

mandatory or expected

47 At the age of six, boys were removed from the care of their parents and subjected
48 to a tough system of state education known as the *agoge*, or training. The aim of
49 the *agoge* was to instill obedience, discipline, and resourcefulness. It probably had
50 the further consequence of turning the child first into a brat, then into a bully. Boys
51 were divided into packs and placed under the general control of an educational
52 director known as a *paidonomos*. At about the age of 12, a Spartan boy became
53 a *meirakion* or youth. He lived in barracks and was kept on a minimal diet, the
54 expectation being that he would supplement it by stealing. When a youth reached
55 the age of 16 (or possibly 18), he became a member of the *krypteia*. This, as its
56 name from the Greek verb *krypto*, meaning "conceal," indicates, was a kind of
57 secret police force. During this period, the youth lived out in the wild and had to
58 fend for himself. At the age of about 20, a Spartan youth's education came to an
59 end. He was now liable for military service, though he did not yet possess full
60 rights of citizenship. Even now, however, he was still required to lead a communal
61 life, eating with his peers and sleeping in army barracks. Only occasionally would
62 he be allowed to sleep with his wife. Even on his wedding night, a Spartan
63 bridegroom was permitted to spend only a short time with his bride and was
64 required to return to his army barracks before dawn.

65
66 On reaching age 30, a Spartan finally became a full citizen, the word for which
67 is *homoios*, meaning one who is equal. He now enjoyed something resembling a
68 regular home life, though he was still required to take a number of his meals away
69 from home. Qualification for Spartan citizenship, in fact, depended on membership
70 in a *syssition*, or dining club. He was now a professional soldier, owning an
71 exclusive obligation to the state. Only when he reached age 60 was a Spartan man
72 finally released from military obligations, though, like many other retired
73 servicemen, he probably continued to feel as much at home in the army as he did at
74 home.

75
76 Although Spartan home life was extremely restricted, women enjoyed a number of
77 privileges that were denied their counterparts in other parts of the Greek world. In
78 particular, girls were allowed to mix freely with boys. They also underwent an
79 intensive physical training program, which included running, discus and javelin
80 throwing, and wrestling. The purpose of this training program was to ensure that
81 they became fit and healthy breeders of Spartan babies. Another unusual feature of
82 Spartan society is that women were permitted to own property, which was not the
83 case in Athens. In fact, given the dearth of Spartan citizens by the fourth century, it
84 may well have been the case that, over time, a great deal of landed property passed
85 into the hands of women.

86

lack of

Text-Dependent Question Creation Worksheet

Name of Text: **The “Antithetical” Spartan Family**

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First and Last Names of the Question Composers: Marcia Motter and Temoca Dixon

Teacher Note: There are many Tier 2 vocabulary words in the third paragraph. These words may be taught separately focusing vocabulary instruction of roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

Questions in Finalized Order	What is the point of this question? Why did you write it. Is there an overarching understanding you are trying to reach with students? Include all answers (words, phrases, sentences with line numbers)
What is the topic of this article? Which communities are discussed to highlight this topic? Which Greek communities are being discussed in this article?	Families (lines 1-2, 7) Greek household (6) Athenian and Spartan (Line 2, the title) The Greek household... (Line 6) Paragraphs 2 and 3 discuss both the Athenians and the Spartans <i>Students should know that the Greeks were made up of various communities and cultures. The Spartans were very different from other Greek communities. Students may struggle with the word “antithetical” in the title. Direct questions back to the text to have students search out context clues for this understanding (lines 26-30, especially with the comparisons with “other Greek communities,” the word “oddity,” and the sentence that describes how the needs of the family were “subordinated” showing opposition to the previous paragraph.</i>
What is the difference between an extended family and a nuclear family?	An extended family has more than one generation of that family living together under one roof. For the Greeks, there could be up to 3 generations living together in one household. Up to 10 people could be living together in one house. (Lines 6-11) A nuclear family is the opposite of an extended family. A nuclear family is a mother, father and their children. <i>This article discusses Greek families. Students should know the basic foundation for a Greek family.</i>

Questions in Finalized Order

What is the point of this question? Why did you write it. Is there an overarching understanding you are trying to reach with students?

Include all answers (words, phrases, sentences with line numbers)

What was the primary responsibility of an Athenian wife? Why is this responsibility important to Greek culture?	<p>The primary responsibility for an Athenian wife was to provide her husband with children, primarily- healthy boys. This would ensure that the family name would continue. Many children died during this time period, so married couples needed to have at least 4-5 children to have a few healthy, surviving children. Also, the goal was to keep the population at a certain level or rate to ensure the prosperity of the Athenians. (Lines 15-22)</p> <p><i>The goal of the Athenians when it came to having children, especially boys was different from that of the Spartans. Athenians wanted to secure the family name and the prosperity of their community. The Spartans were interested in raising strong, healthy boys that would be raised in a military tradition. They were boys that would be groomed for a lifetime of military service to Sparta.</i></p>
Using the quote beginning on line 37, describe the meaning of the word “exposure” as it is used in this paragraph (lines 34 and 29).	<p>“Exposure to the natural elements” is likely a different use of the word exposure than students are accustomed to seeing/using. It is important that students stop and figure out this word in order to understand that Spartan male babies, born with imperfections, were left outside to die as they would not serve the society well.</p>
Give examples of how Spartans contributed to the success of the state “Sparta” as a whole.	<p>Spartans had an obligation to the state that overrode any duty to their family and to themselves, including their right to life. This started with newborn males. If the child was strong and healthy it would be allowed to be raised in a Spartan family. (Lines 32-39)</p> <p>Children spent most of their time with their peers, away from their families. There are many examples of this in lines 41-74.</p> <p><i>The way of life for a Spartan was about the success of the state. It started from birth. Only the healthy were allowed to live and to help the community prosper. Their entire lives were devoted to the success of the state of Sparta.</i></p>
Spartan society was based on a military system and values. How were Spartan boys prepared for this way of life?	<p>Spartan boys were prepared for this from the very beginning. As small children they were taught not to complain and show emotion. (Lines 43-45)</p> <p>At the age of 6, Spartan boys were sent to a military type of school. They were taught to be tough. Their lifestyle was about being resourceful and taught the boys how to fend for themselves.</p> <p>This training prepared them for their life in the military when they turned 20. (Lines 47-59)</p>

Questions in Finalized Order

What is the point of this question? Why did you write it. Is there an overarching understanding you are trying to reach with students?

Include all answers (words, phrases, sentences with line numbers)

	<p><i>Everything in a Spartan boy's life prepared him for his life in the military. He was trained at an early age how to survive and to fend for himself. He was raised in a "pack" mentality. He did not have moral values according to today's societal standards. His did not live for himself. He was part of a community and raised to be ready to contribute to that community.</i></p>
What privileges were Spartan women allowed that other Greek women were denied?	<p>Spartan girls were allowed to mix freely with boys. They also underwent an intensive physical training program. This training would ensure that the women were strong and healthy. (Lines 76-81)</p> <p>Spartan women were allowed to own property. (Lines 85-88)</p> <p><i>Spartan women were given certain rights that Athenians did not have. Their life was also based on contributing to the greater good of the state of Sparta. Women did this by being physically fit so they could create strong, healthy children. Students should refer back to paragraph 2 wherein Athenian women were seen in the role of mothers and homemakers, unable to leave the home unaccompanied.</i></p>
What important parts (components) of Greek life do you see in American society today? Provide a minimum of 2 examples.	<p>Women can own property. (Lines 85-86)</p> <p>A man can retire from work at the age of 60. (Line 71)</p> <p>Boys can go to military school</p> <p>The educational system ended at the age of 20 for a Spartan, in the United States, it is 18.</p> <p>Life in the military is a communal life.</p> <p>There are more extended families and nuclear families living in the United States today. The extended family isn't as big today as it was during Greek times.</p>

Please compose a clear writing prompt or question to follow this close analytic reading. Make sure that your writing prompt/question follows the CCSS writing standards (choose informational or argumentative) and that you use the terminology of the standards. The writing assignment can be a very formal essay or a fairly short piece, as long as it demonstrates that students have understood the document and can use evidence from it effectively.

How is the life of a Spartan different from that of an Athenian? Answer the question in a paragraph by making a claim and citing 3 pieces of evidence and reasoning from the text to support your answer. Cite the evidence correctly by using line numbers (Lines 3-4) at the end of the sentence. Connect the evidence to the claim with reasoning that explains the evidence.

A sample answer may include:

- *The life of a Spartan is different from the life of an Athenian. (Claim)*
- *For the Spartan, their life was devoted to the state. This was their main responsibility, even over the right to live their own life and to their family duties. (Lines 32-33) This was different for the Spartan because their culture was communal and based on the state or military. It was about the continued success of Spartan society by raising young men who would be ready to go into military service. (Evidence and reasoning)*

In their writing students should:

- Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories
- Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, and quotations
- Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts
- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone
- Provide a concluding statement that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented
- Quotations are cited correctly using line numbers from the text (Lines 8-9) at the end of the quote.