



A GREEK ADVENTURE

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Reading Group Notes

Ancient Greece

The Histronauts' adventure in ancient Greece takes place in Athens during a time that we have come to call the Classical Period. Readers will already be familiar with different names for historical eras that relate to time and place, for example, the Vikings, the Romans, the Victorians. But it is important to think about why these categorisations are useful and how they can fit together.

In your reading group, think about the reasons that historians divide history into different periods.

- What can you find out about the other periods of ancient Greece?
- Why do you think some periods are so much longer than others?
- What does the term 'Dark Age' tell us about our understanding of ancient Greece between c. 1100-800 B.C.?
- What causes a historical period to change or to end?
- Can you think of an appropriate name for the time period that we live in today?

Athens and Sparta

A Greek Adventure focuses on what life was like in ancient Athens, but there were hundreds of other city-states in ancient Greece. One of the most powerful was called Sparta. The Spartan way of life focused on its military society and all its boys were trained to become soldiers in a system called Agoge. Women in Sparta were better educated and had more rights than women in Athens.

Your reading group could investigate the differences between life in these two city-states and create a project about the differences between them.

- Who lived in Sparta and what was life like for them?
- What were the experiences of men, women and children?
- How was the life of a person who was a citizen different from a person who was not?
- Where would you have preferred to have grown up? Why?



Have a Socratic Debate

The philosopher Socrates would ask people questions and challenge their answers. This encouraged people to think about their responses and reach their own conclusions on a subject.

Have a Socratic debate! For example, should children be allowed to vote to elect the Prime Minister? Ask those who think that they should to explain why, then ask them to listen to those who think they shouldn't. See if anyone changes their mind or sees things from a different point of view. If they do, talk about the ideas that have persuaded them to change their minds.

Pottery

Archaeologists and historians use the pictures painted onto ancient Greek pottery to find out lots of things about the lives of the people of ancient Greece. Those images show clothing, food, musical instruments, animals, theatrical performances and stories of the gods.

Ask your reading group why they think that images can be a useful communication tool.

- Do you think that a painted bowl is as important a historical document as a written text?
- How can an image tell us something that we would not find in a piece of writing?



Repatriation of The Parthenon Marbles

The Histronauts visit the Parthenon Temple on the Acropolis of ancient Athens. The temple was once decorated with beautifully carved marble sculptures. In the early nineteenth century, the British Ambassador, Lord Elgin, began to remove many of these sculptures and brought them back to Great Britain where he sold them to the British Museum. They are still on display there today, but should they be? When Elgin first removed the marble sculptures some people accused him of vandalism, others said that he was protecting them. This debate still rages on two-hundred years later. Athens now has a dedicated museum space that can house and protect the marbles, but where do they belong?

This is a fantastic opportunity for your reading group to discuss the power and cultural relevance of objects.

- Why do the marble sculptures have such important meaning to both Greece and Britain?
- Do they belong anywhere?
- Should a person be able to buy something that 'belongs' to a place and to take it away?
- Should an object be displayed in a museum if the person or place that 'owns' it did not give their permission?
- Could one of the museums display a copy of the marbles? If not, why?

Encourage the group to think critically about objects that have been taken away from the places where they hold cultural meaning and put on display elsewhere.

Constellations

A constellation is a group of stars visible in the night sky that form a shape or pattern. In ancient Greece it was believed that the gods had immortalised heroes and monsters in the stars and many of these star patterns were given names from mythological stories. There are 48 traditional Greek constellations that were listed by the Greek astronomer Ptolemy in the 2nd century AD but they have changed over time. You might recognise the names of some of the constellations: Pegasus, Hydra, Aquila, Cassiopeia, Aries, Hercules, Lyra, and lots more.

Ask your group to choose a constellation and find it in the night sky at home. They might enjoy finding the constellations associated with the signs of the zodiac as there are ancient Greek myths behind each of these.

- Do you think the shape of the stars matches the shape of what it is supposed to represent?
- Encourage the group to research the mythology behind that constellation.
- Ask them to write their own versions of that myth and tell them aloud as if they were ancient Greek rhapsodes.



Write a play

When The Histronauts are first transported back to ancient Greece they arrive in a theatre and learn about the importance of plays in religious festivals. A handful of ancient Greek plays still exist today and they are performed all over the world.

Encourage the group to write a short comedy play for three characters and to make masks for their characters. It could be about anything from a day at school to a trip to the shops to a meal in a restaurant. Expand the play to include a script for a chorus of performers that observe and comment in unison on the action.

- What do they think about the experience of both performing and watching the chorus?
- Do they find it difficult to perform the same lines together as a group? How does it enhance the play?
- Do they think it is confusing to watch or does it make it funnier?



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