

Directions: Read through the overview of the Persian War below! Periodically, you will be asked questions at "check-in" points. Be sure to reread if you need to! Finally, once finished, you will compile a news report about the Persian War to please your boss, Herodotus.

The Persian Wars were a defining moment in Greek history. The Athenians, who would dominate Greece culturally and politically through the fifth century BCE., regarded the wars against Persia as their greatest and most defining moment.



A stone depiction of Darius the Great, ruler of the Persian Empire when the Persian Wars began in the 490s BCE.

The Persian Wars began when Athens agreed to come to the aid of the Greek-speaking city-states on the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). These city-states were in rebellion against the Persian empire. Their participation in the insurrection turned Persian attention to Athens. Then, in 490 BCE, Darius the Great launched an attack against the Greek mainland. The Athenian forces were under the command of Miltiades, a general who had previous military experience against the Persians. At the Battle of Marathon he urged the Athenians to attack immediately without waiting for reinforcement, even though their army was only a fraction of the size of the Persians. The Battle of Marathon is perhaps the single most important battle in Greek history. Had the Athenians lost, Greece would have eventually come under the control of the Persians, and all the subsequent culture and accomplishments of the Greeks may have been lost to posterity.

ARE YOU FOLLOWING THE STORY SO FAR?

1.) What did the Greeks call their greatest and most defining moment? _____

2.) What caused the Persian Wars to begin? _____

3.) Why is the Battle of Marathon known as the single most important battle in Greek history? _____

CONTINUE YOUR QUEST ON THE NEXT PAGE. . .

The Persians did not attack Greece again for ten years, but when Darius's son Xerxes (ZURK-seas) became king, the Persians launched another expedition against Athens. This time they were determined to use overwhelming force! In 481 BCE., Xerxes gathered together an army of several hundred thousand and a navy of six hundred ships. He demanded that the Greek city-states submit to him without resistance, and many did, including Thebes. The Athenians and Spartans, however, insulted the Persians and vowed resistance to the end. Fortunately for all of Greece, the Athenian politician Themistocles had foreseen trouble many years ahead of time and had convinced the Athenians to begin a navy-building project. Because of him, Athens had a navy of over two hundred ships by the time of the great Persian invasion.

ARE YOU STILL WITH ME?

4.) What can you infer about the relationship between Darius and Greece after the Battle of Marathon? _____

5.) Based on this short selection of text, how would you describe Darius' son Xerxes? _____

6.) Why might Themistocles be considered one of the most important figures in Greek history? _____

While Xerxes gathered his army, the 31 Greek city states that had decided to resist the Persians were uniting under the leadership of Sparta. Many of the smaller cities had already conceded defeat and refused to send armies! The first great battle of the united Greeks against Xerxes' army was at Thermopylae (THERM-ah-POE-lee), a narrow pass to the north of Thessaly. It was there that the Spartan King Leonidas, with 300 Spartans, held out for three days against the entire Persian army. After a lopsided battle in which thousands of Persians were slaughtered, the resolute Spartans were eventually surrounded and slaughtered, and Xerxes' army passed unopposed to Athens.

STILL HERE?

7.) What reasons can you think of as to why some of the smaller Greek city-states already had "conceded defeat"? _____

8.) Which of the following words most nearly means "resolute"?

a.) weak

b.) determined

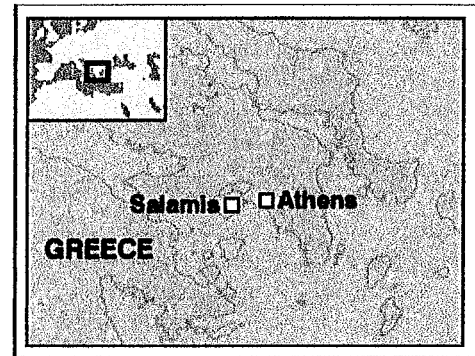
c.) unlawful

d.) cowardly

CONTINUE YOUR QUEST ON THE NEXT PAGE. . .

As soon as the Battle of Thermopylae was lost, the Greek fleet worked full-time to evacuate Athens and its surrounding communities to nearby islands. Most Athenians were stationed on the island of Salamis. It was here (after much debate) where the decision was made to give battle to the Persians at once. The famous naval Battle of Salamis ensued, during which the Greek fleet won a dramatic and decisive victory over the much larger Persian navy. The Persian fleet was destroyed, and Xerxes returned to Persia, leaving Mardonius (Xerxes' brother-in-law) in charge of the conquered region.

Most of the citizens in Athens retired to the Peloponnesian Peninsula (the Peloponnesus), which the Spartans had fortified in anticipation of a Persian attack. It was not until the following spring that Spartan leadership realized the Persians had no intention of meeting them at their fortified location, and that in order to drive the Persians from Greek soil, they would have to meet them in open battle. After considerable hesitation and delay, a terrific battle was fought at Plataea. Here, the Persians were defeated to end the Persian War.



CHECK-IN TIME!

9.) The battle that destroys the Persian navy is known as the Battle of _____.

a.) Marathon

b.) Thermopylae

c.) Plataea

d.) Salamis

10.) The battle that ends the Persian War is known as the Battle of _____.

a.) Marathon

b.) Thermopylae

c.) Plataea

d.) Salamis

The Persian War was remarkable not only for its ferocious battles, which showcased the superiority of Greek military methods, but also because the fractious Greeks were able to drop their strong divisions and unite behind a single cause. One popular outcome of the Persian War was the introduction of a new military method known as the Greek phalanx. The phalanx is a rectangular military formation composed entirely of heavy infantry, armed with heavy spears and pikes. This tactic allowed the unit to move together while still being heavily protected.

A second major result of the Persian War was the creation of the Delian League. This was an alliance of Greek city-states, led by Athens, to protect Greece from another Persian attack in the future. League members donated funds to pay for a navy that protected all of Greece. This league, however, would lead to Athens abusing its power and using the navy primarily for its own purposes.

Lastly, the defeat of the Persian Empire allowed Greek culture to continue to thrive and spread throughout the world. Had the Persians won at Plataea, the history of the ancient Greeks would not be what it is today. Too, the history of Europe would be far different from what we know today!