

Name _____ **Ancient Greece**

The Origins of Democracy

A democracy is a system of government in which the people have a direct say in what is going on. The word democracy comes from the Greek words *dēmos* (people) and *kratos* (rule), and means "rule by the people." The concept of democracy originated in ancient Greece. Many ancient Greek city-states had systems of democracy, but the democracy in Athens is generally considered to have been the most developed.



In Athens in the 4th and 5th centuries BCE, there were between 30 and 60 thousand male citizens who each enjoyed the right to be directly involved in the political decisions which influenced their daily lives. They did this by participating in the assembly (*ekklesia*), the city-state's main democratic body. The assembly met at least once a month in a space which could hold up to 6,000 people. Every citizen had the right to speak to the assembly. They voted by raising their hands for those proposals that they favored. Motions passed by majority rule.

In addition to voting, citizens also took turns working directly in service of their governing institutions. For example, they took turns acting as one of the assembly's nine presidents (*proedroi*). These presidents were selected by lot, and a man could only serve as president one time. The presidents organized the proceedings and kept track of the voting. The assembly decided financial and military matters, issues regarding food supply, the creation of laws, holding trials, and political matters with other city-states. They enforced legal decisions, and oversaw the conduct of those carrying out political duties. They could also vote to cast out an Athenian citizen who became too powerful or dangerous.

Although Athenian democracy in this form only survived for several hundred years, it was one of ancient Greece's most important contributions to the world, and it laid the foundation for democracy as it exists today.