

Genre: Athens

Name _____ Date _____

Ancient Athens and the Gods

The capital city of Greece is Athens. Today it is a busy city of about 2.7 million people, but during ancient Greece's Golden Age there were about 200,000 people living there. Athens is named after the goddess Athena. Greek mythology tells of a contest, long before the Golden Age, between the god of the sea, Poseidon, and the goddess Athena for the city. Both Athena and Poseidon wanted to be patron to the city and have it named after them. They argued and fought for a long time, and asked the other gods on Mount Olympus for advice on what to do. The gods suggested a contest: both Athena and Poseidon should give the people of the city a gift, and then let them decide. Athena and Poseidon agreed and began to think of what gift they should give to the people. They thought for many days and many nights, and when they had both come to a conclusion they went down to the city and stood on the Acropolis. The Acropolis is a large hill in the city of Athens.

Poseidon was the first to give his gift. He slammed the end of his trident into the ground. The trident was a scepter with three points that Poseidon always carried. From the point where his trident touched the ground, a stream began to flow, and it flowed all the way down the Acropolis. But Poseidon was the god of the sea, and not the god of all water, and so his stream was salt water. A stream of salt water was not good to drink out of, and so not very useful to the people of the city.

They turned to Athena to see what gift she would give them. Athena stood on the Acropolis next to Poseidon's flowing stream, and she stamped her foot. From the place where she had stamped, an olive tree grew up. It was the first olive tree in Greece. The people decided that an olive tree was a better gift than a stream of salt water. Athena was the patron goddess of the city, and the people of Athens were happy with this, and he caused a great flood. Athens and the surrounding area of Attica were completely under water. The people of Athens decided that they would honor Poseidon as well as Athena. Although the patron goddess was still Athena, they also built temples to Poseidon. Poseidon was happy with this arrangement, and stopped the flood.

The greatest of the temples built in honor of Athena was the Parthenon, on the highest point of the Acropolis. The temple to Athena-Nike, the goddess of Victory, was built slightly farther down the Acropolis. Another temple built on the Acropolis was the Erechtheion. The Erechtheion was built in honor of both Athena and Poseidon. One of the busiest places in ancient Athens was the Agora at the base of the Acropolis. The Agora was the market place of ancient Athens. Spices, honey, olives, oil, and even slaves were traded in the Agora, and people came here to talk to each other, too. There were many temples, courts, the council house and other public buildings in the Agora. It was the center of Ancient Athenian life. It is from the Agora that we get the word agoraphobia. Agoraphobia means 'fear of crowds'. When somebody is very frightened of crowds, or many people in one place, they have agoraphobia. It was also in the

Agora that Socrates, a famous ancient Greek philosopher, spent many hours and days talking to his fellow Athenians. A roman market was built in Athens during the time that Greece was part of the Roman Empire. It was started by Julius Caesar, but was finished by the Emperors Adrianus and Trajanus. One of Athena's symbols was the owl, and on many decorations in ancient Athens, the owl and the olive branch were often seen. Both of these symbols appear on one side of the coins used in ancient Athens.

