Name _____ Date _____

Greek Democracy and Its Limits

Directions: Read the passage about democracy in ancient Athens. Then use the table to compare Athens with most democracies today.

Democracy Then and Now

Rule by the Citizens

In about 508 BCE, a leader named Cleisthenes reorganized the government of Athens. Many historians see his reforms as the start of Athenian democracy. The word democracy comes from two Greek words meaning "people" and "rule."

Athens had a direct democracy. Citizens did not elect lawmakers to decide for them. Instead, they met in the Assembly, on a hillside called the Pnyx, at least once a month. Any citizen could speak, and they voted by raising their hands.

By the 400s BCE, many officials were chosen by lottery instead of by election. Each year, names were drawn to fill the Council of 500, which planned what the Assembly would discuss. Jurors for the courts were chosen by lot too. Choosing by lottery made it hard for a few powerful men to control the government. Athens still elected its generals, who led the army.

Only adult male citizens, rich or poor, could take part. Women could not vote, even in families of citizens. Enslaved people were left out, and so were foreigners who lived and worked in Athens. Most people living in Athens had no vote at all.

Athens was a single city-state, and its citizens could gather together on the Pnyx. Countries today are far larger, and many have millions of citizens. Most democracies today are representative democracies: citizens elect leaders, who make most of the laws.

Democracy in ancient Athens and in most democracies today

Question	Athens in the 400s BCE	Most democracies today
Who votes on laws?	Citizens voted on laws themselves in the Assembly.	Elected representatives vote on most laws. Some places also let citizens vote directly on certain questions.
How are officials chosen?	Many by lottery. Generals were elected.	Lawmakers and many leaders are elected. Many other officials are appointed or hired.
Who can vote?	Only adult male citizens.	Most adult citizens, women and men alike.

1. Complete the sentence about where the citizens of Athens met.

Word bank

Forum • Senate • Pnyx • Assembly

Citizens met in the _____ on a hillside called the _____.

2. What happened in Athens in about 508 BCE?

A. The Assembly chose a king to rule for life.

B. Cleisthenes reorganized the government, starting what many historians see as Athenian democracy.

C. Athens and Sparta began the Peloponnesian War.

D. Athens became a representative democracy with elected lawmakers.

3. According to the table, how were many officials chosen in Athens?

A. By order of a king

B. By the votes of women

C. By lottery

D. By birth into a noble family

4. Why did Athens choose many of its officials by lottery?

A. A lottery made it hard for a few powerful men to control the government.

B. Athenians did not know how to count votes.

C. The law said every general must be chosen by luck.

D. Only enslaved people could be chosen by lottery.

5. Which Athenian officials were elected instead of chosen by lottery?

A. The members of the Council of 500

B. The jurors in the courts

C. The generals who led the army

D. Every official in the city

6. Which three groups could NOT take part in the democracy of Athens?

☐ A. Poor adult male citizens

☐ B. Adult male citizens who were farmers

☐ C. Enslaved people

☐ D. Foreigners who lived and worked in Athens

☐ E. Women

7. According to the table, how is voting in most democracies today different from voting in ancient Athens?

A. Today most adult citizens, women and men alike, can vote, but in Athens only adult male citizens could.

B. Women voted in Athens but cannot vote today.

C. No one votes in democracies today.

D. Today only men can vote, just as in Athens.

8. In most democracies today, who votes on most laws?

A. All citizens meeting on a hillside

B. The army's generals

C. Elected representatives

D. Jurors chosen by lot

9. Based on the passage, why would a direct democracy like the one in Athens be hard to run in a large country today?

A. Millions of citizens could not easily gather in one place to vote on every law.

B. Citizens today are not allowed to speak in public.

C. Lotteries cannot be held in large countries.

D. Large countries do not have any hillsides.

10. Why might some people today say that Athens was not a full democracy?

A. Athens had no Assembly.

B. Most people living in Athens had no vote.

C. Citizens were not allowed to speak in the Assembly.

D. Every official in Athens was elected.