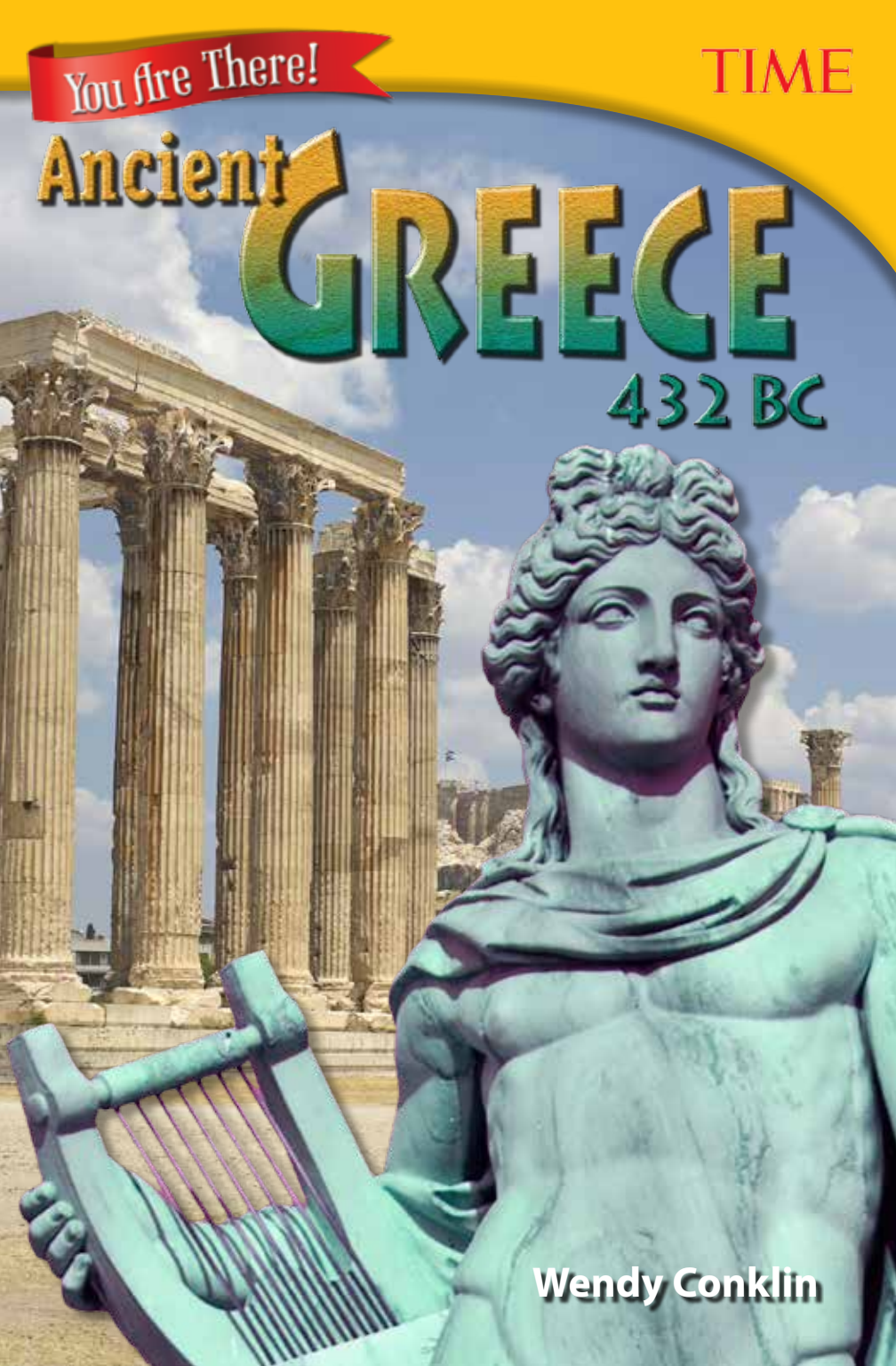
You Are There!

TIME

Ancient GREECE

432 BC



Wendy Conklin

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Welcome to the Year 432 BC!

Sweet and spicy smells fill the air as I run down the stone path. The pavement is hard but smooth under my leather sandals. The vibrant sunlight makes the moist air heavy around me, and I start to sweat. I'm sprinting like our great Olympic athletes. Although I am not yet old enough to vote, one day I, Pericles, a son of Athens who is named for the great Greek statesman, will have my say in our Greek **democracy**. Until then, I want to learn and see all I can in trendsetting Greece.

Politics Is a Greek Thing

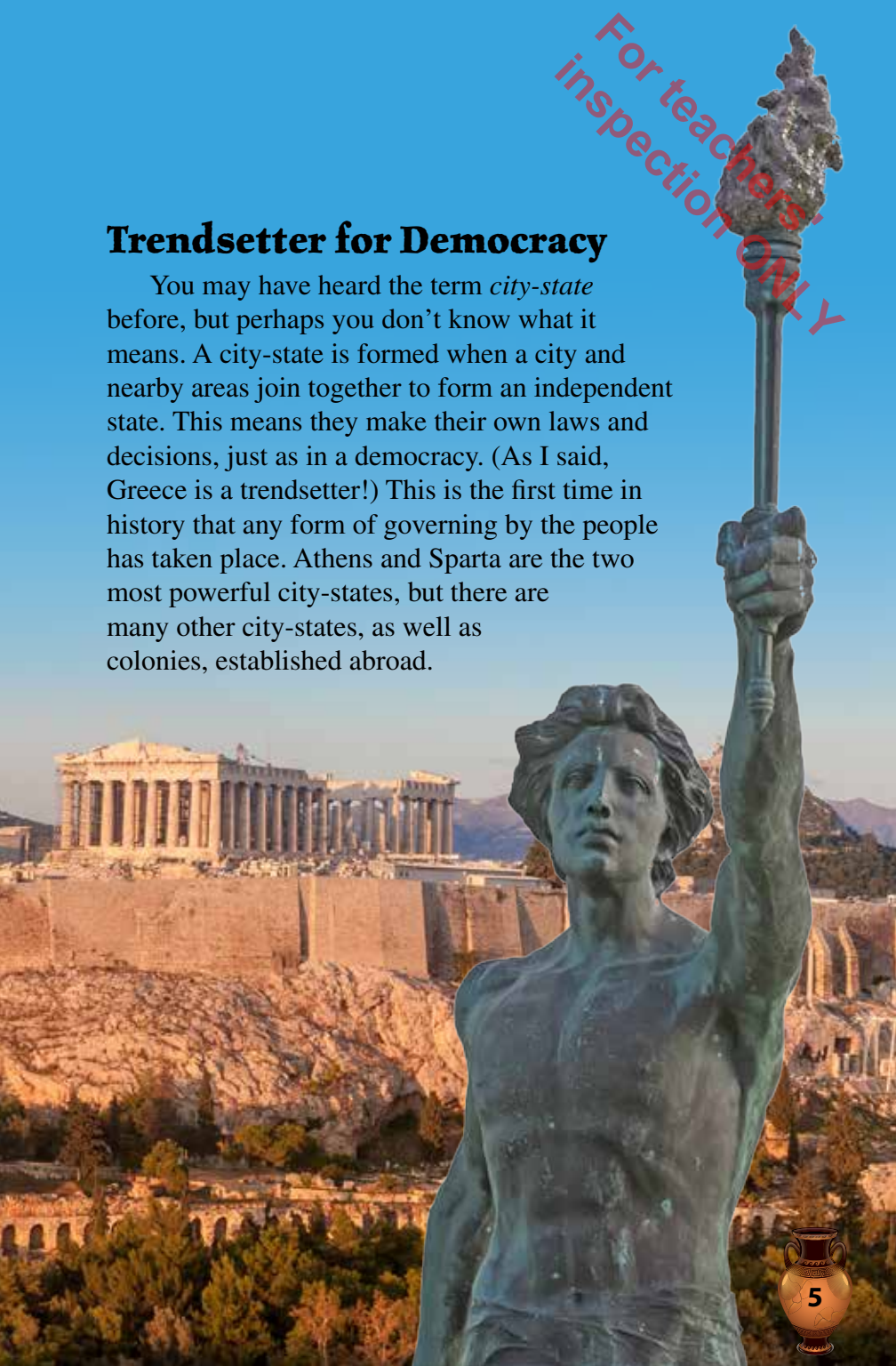
The Greek term for **city-state** is ***polis***. The modern-day word *politics* comes from *polis*.



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Trendsetter for Democracy

You may have heard the term *city-state* before, but perhaps you don't know what it means. A city-state is formed when a city and nearby areas join together to form an independent state. This means they make their own laws and decisions, just as in a democracy. (As I said, Greece is a trendsetter!) This is the first time in history that any form of governing by the people has taken place. Athens and Sparta are the two most powerful city-states, but there are many other city-states, as well as colonies, established abroad.



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Luckily for me, I live in the city-state of Athens. Citizens here have a right to stand up and voice opinions about the government. It doesn't matter if I grow up to become a farmer, an aristocrat, or a lowly laborer—all citizens' voices are equal. And we are wary of anyone who has too much power! We don't want a single person trying to sway others to his side because then he will have more **clout** than the rest of us. Recently, I witnessed leaders scratching the names of people with too much power on some ***ostraka***, old pieces of pottery. Anyone reaching 600 votes must leave Athens for 10 years.

Who Exactly Was a Citizen of Athens?

To be considered a citizen in Athens, a person had to be a male over 18 years of age and born in Athens. Earlier in the city-state's history, a person also had to own land to be a citizen.



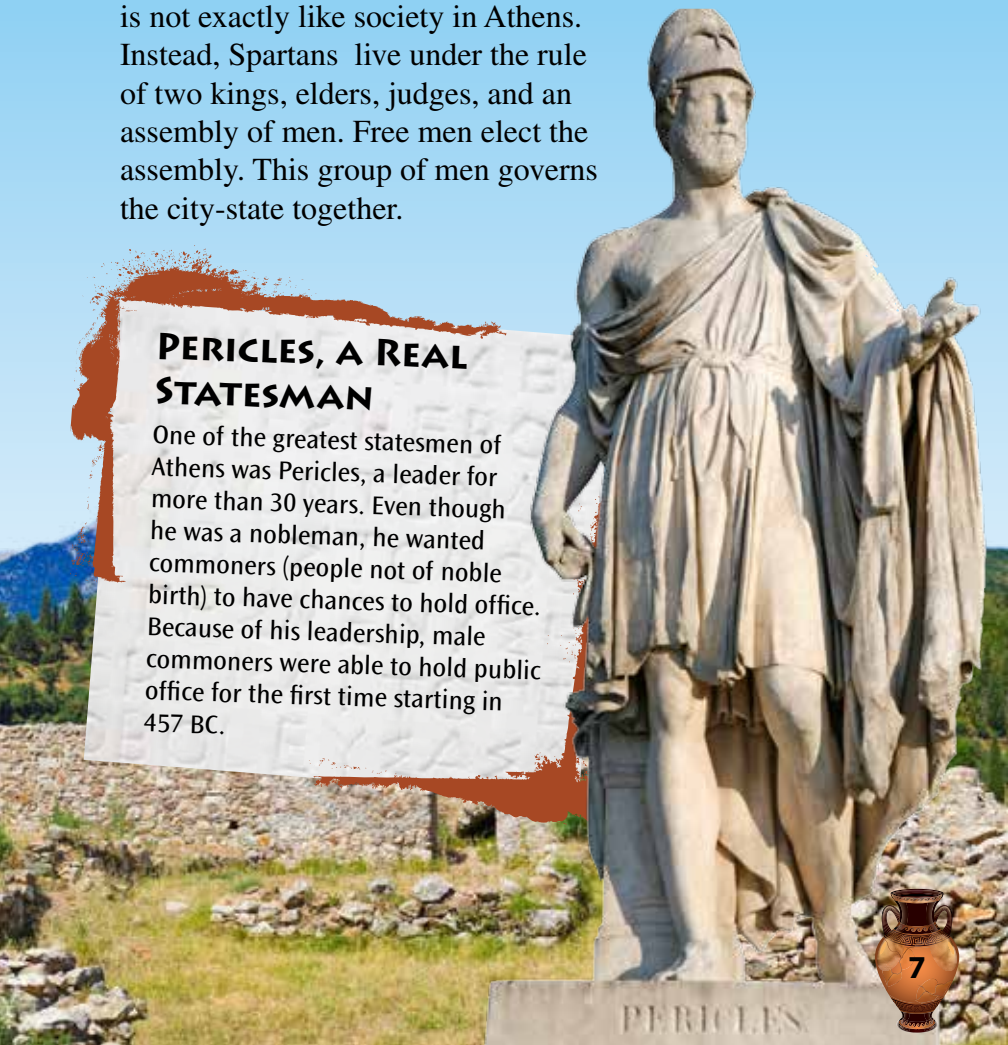
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At its core, *democracy* means that the people rule themselves. But in actuality, we elect people to rule for us. While this is a good way to govern overall, Athens does not have a perfect system. There are still injustices. For example, the rich Athenians have more advantages than the poor people do. Politicians do their best to sway the voters to their points of view, even if they are not right. If you are a woman, a slave, or from another city-state, you can't vote in Athens.

Sparta's democratic society, though, is not exactly like society in Athens. Instead, Spartans live under the rule of two kings, elders, judges, and an assembly of men. Free men elect the assembly. This group of men governs the city-state together.

Pericles, a Real Statesman

One of the greatest statesmen of Athens was Pericles, a leader for more than 30 years. Even though he was a nobleman, he wanted commoners (people not of noble birth) to have chances to hold office. Because of his leadership, male commoners were able to hold public office for the first time starting in 457 BC.



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Only the Strong Live in Sparta

Spartans think that living a simple life is best. Above all things, they value courage, strength, and loyalty to their city-state. Spartans would rather die in battle than live after being defeated. Mothers even send their sons to battle saying, "Return with your shield or on it," which means either win or die trying.

If I lived in Sparta, I would have left my home at seven years old to train for the army—and it would have been the only job I ever knew. Spartan boys my age lie, steal, and cheat—but they'd better not get caught or they will be punished harshly! And they always have to be brave. As part of the training for the military, boys have to bathe in freezing rivers and walk barefoot for long distances in efforts to toughen them up.



The Woman's Place

For the most part, Greek women were supposed to stay out of the public eye. They could only go out to fetch water and tend to the family graves. But in Sparta, women could own property. They could also wear shorter skirts there, which allowed for freer movement.

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THINK LINK

- Why was it better for women to live in Sparta than in other city-states?
- Why might Spartans have reasons to be proud?
- For what reasons would it be difficult to be a Spartan?

Spartan girls also have to be strong. When they grow up, they single-handedly run their homes. Their husbands live in the army barracks until they are 30, and sometimes the men are away at war. It is important to educate Spartan women because they make important decisions every day. Spartans treat their women well (which is quite uncommon in other city-states). So, if you are a girl, you might want to think about living in Sparta.



statue of a Spartan soldier

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Reader's Guide

1. People often contrast the citizens of Athens to the citizens of Sparta. Use details from the book to describe which city-state is better.
2. Create a poster of the first Olympic Games in ancient Greece. Include some of the major events that occurred.
3. Reread the sidebar on page 15 titled "Do You Want to Be a Hero?" Develop a story about a demigod of your own. Which god would be your hero's parent? What trials would he or she face?
4. Look at the Greek thinkers described on pages 20–21. What are the most intriguing aspects of these deep thinkers from long ago?