

Pericles' Funeral Oration

Pericles, the great Athenian politician, delivered a rousing speech at a ceremony commemorating the deaths of the Athenian soldiers who had fallen in battle during the Peloponnesian War. Throughout his speech, he extolled the virtues of Athenian life, highlighting all that was good about Athens. As you read the following excerpt, consider the purpose of and intended audience for the speech.

Many of those who have spoken here in the past have praised the institution of this speech at the close of our ceremony. It seemed to them a mark of honour to our soldiers who have fallen in war that a speech should be made over them....

What I want to do is, in the first place, to discuss the spirit in which we faced our trials and also our constitution and the way of life which has made us great....

Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbours. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else. Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of a whole people....

We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break....

And here is another point. When our work is over we are in a position to enjoy all kinds of recreation for our spirits. There are various kinds of contests and sacrifices regularly throughout the year; in our own homes we find a beauty and a good taste which delight us every day and which drive away our cares. Then the greatness of our city brings it about that all the good things from all over the world flow into us, so

that to us it seems just as natural to enjoy foreign goods as our own local products.

Then there is a great difference between us and our opponents, in our attitude towards military security. Here are some examples: Our city is open to the world, and we have no periodical deportations in order to prevent people observing or finding out secrets which might be of military advantage to the enemy. This is because we rely, not on secret weapons, but on our own real courage and loyalty....

Our love of what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance; our love of the things of the mind does not make us soft. We regard wealth as something to be properly used, rather than as something to boast about. As for poverty, no one need be ashamed to admit it; the real shame is in not taking practical measures to escape from it. Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs, but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well informed on general politics....

Again, in questions of general good feeling there is a great contrast between us and most other people. We make friends by doing good to others, not by receiving good from them.... Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece.

Primary Documents Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Primary documents are records made at the time of the event, generally by someone who witnessed the event. Information that is recorded years later and is based on second-hand knowledge is referred to as a secondary source. Examples of primary documents are a newspaper account, a diary, an official's records, and a ship's log.

One must always be careful with both primary and secondary documents because they often reflect the authors' bias. One must always reflect on the purpose of the document, the intended audience, and the person who wrote the document. Not all documents can be taken completely at face value.

Read Blackline Master 2-7, Pericles' Funeral Oration, an excerpt of a speech given by the great Athenian politician Pericles. Pericles was speaking at a ceremony in 430 BCE commemorating those who had fallen in battle during the Peloponnesian War. Then, answer the following questions:

1. Who was Pericles' intended audience?

2. How would the intended audience have biased his speech?

3. Despite the biased nature of the speech, what can we learn about life in ancient Athens? Prepare a list of five to seven clearly explained points related to life in Athens. You could touch on:

- a) government
- b) leisure time
- c) arts and culture
- d) the role of women
- e) any other areas of your choice