

Growing up in Sparta The goal of education in Sparta, an authoritarian, military city-state, was to produce soldier-citizens. Nearly all the other city-states, including Athens, had a grudging admiration for the Spartans. Other pets included ducks, quail, birds, goats, tortoises, mice, weasels, and grasshoppers. (The perioikos, or the middle class, were allowed to own property, have business dealings, but had no political rights and were not citizens.) A surviving poem, written by Tyrtæus in approximately 630 BCE, tells us that Spartan soldiers were expected to be disciplined. An excerpt from the poem reads: 'Our man should be disciplined in the work of the heavy fighter, and not stand out from the missiles when he carries a shield, but go right up and fight at close quarters and, with long spear or short sword, thrust home and strike his enemy down. These old calloused and scarred veterans would look at the naked infant carefully for any birth defects or the slightest sign of weakness or sickness. If they judged the crying baby to be unworthy of carrying a Spartan shield it would be taken immediately to a nearby cliff off Mt. Taygetos and thrown over the edge. However, at the age of 7, the boys of Sparta were obliged to leave home to join sternly disciplined groups under the supervision of a hierarchy of officers. The children played with balls, miniature chariots, rattles, yo-yos, rocking horses, and dolls and animals made from clay. Lie, cheat, steal, and get away with it, or else (you would be in big trouble!) They walked barefoot, slept on hard beds, and worked at gymnastics and other physical activities such as running, jumping, javelin and discus throwing, swimming, and hunting. At the festival of the goddess Artemis Ortheia, the older boys had to take part in a contest in which they snatched as many cheeses as possible from the steps of the altar to the goddess. No marvellous works of art or architecture came out of Sparta, but Spartan military force was regarded as terrifying.

BOYS When babies were born in Sparta, Spartan soldiers would come by the house to examine them and take it to be inspected by the Council of Elders. Spartan boys were educated but only enough to count soldiers in a formation, read war sagas and sing and recite war poetry. They were taught to endure pain and hardship, hunger, thirst, cold, fatigue and lack of sleep. In ancient Sparta, they wanted to produce a well-drilled, well-disciplined marching army. They slept in wicker baskets or wooden cradles. They were subjected to strict discipline and harsh physical punishment; indeed, they were taught to take pride in the amount of pain they could endure. Somewhere between the age of 18–20, Spartan males had to pass a difficult test of fitness, military ability, and leadership skills.

GIRLS Unlike the other Greek city-states, Sparta provided training for girls that went beyond the domestic arts. Spartans believed in a life of discipline, self-denial, and simplicity. From age 7 to 18, they underwent an increasingly severe course of training. The boys endured harsh physical discipline and deprivation to make them strong. The older boys willingly participated in beating the younger boys to toughen them. They slept in their military groups, on reeds they plucked out of the river with their own hands. If they got caught, they got a severe whipping -- not for the moral wrong of stealing, but for the military sin of being careless enough to get caught. They believed that starvation made them grow taller, because too much food weighs down the spirit of a boy and makes him short and fat. Legend says ... A young Sparta boy once stole a live fox, planning to kill it and eat it. He noticed some Spartan soldiers approaching. At age twelve the lean and hungry boy was taken from the barracks and made to eat, live and sleep in one garment with no shoes under the open sky for one year, exposed to the beasts and the weather. They had to run the gauntlet of guards, with whips, who

were instructed to use them as hard as they could. Thus, the Spartans achieved their goal.