PELOPONNESIAN STRANGERS!
MEET CLASSICAL GREECE’S MOST ARGUMENTATIVE NEIGHBORS!

Draco Hails from the Southern Greek City-State of Sparta, while Cylon Makes His Home in the Coastal City-State of Athens.

And like their respective homelands, these two guys couldn’t be more different. Just how different, exactly? Well, let’s check in with them for an example or two...

Fact: The era in Greek history circa 500-336 B.C. is commonly known as the Classical Period, or the “Golden Age” of Greek culture.
DOGS, CYLON. OF COURSE THEY MAKE BETTER PETS. THEY'RE STRONG, OBEDIENT, TRAINABLE. THEY CAN FIGHT, TOO.

NO NO NO, DRACO. WRONG AS ALWAYS.

CATS MAKE THE PERFECT PETS, PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT OBEDIENT OR TRAINABLE, LIKE SOME OX.

CATS ARE INDEPENDENT, GRACEFUL, BEAUTIFUL...

YOU TALK ABOUT THOSE THINGS AS IF THEY ARE IMPORTANT, CYLON.

THIS ALMOST SOUNDS LIKE A LIST OF DISTINCT ATHENIAN QUALITIES, DOESN'T IT?

SHOW ME A CAT THAT CAN GUARD YOUR HOME!

HAHA! REMEMBER THAT OLD DOG YOU HAD A FEW YEARS BACK? WHAT WAS HIS NAME? HE COULDN'T GUARD HIMSELF AGAINST MY CAT APOLLO!

HIS NAME WAS ARES, CYLON.

APOLLO WAS THE GREEK GOD OF LIGHT, TRUTH AND THE ARTS.

ARES WAS THE GREEK GOD OF WAR.
BUT YES, I DO REMEMBER MY FIRST DAY MOVING INTO THIS APARTMENT TWO YEARS AGO. I COULDN'T BELIEVE THE AMOUNT OF BELONGINGS YOU HAD TO DRAG ALONG WHEN I SAW YOU MOVING INTO YOUR PLACE.

YES, YES. ALL MY FURNITURE, SCROLLS, TAPESTRIES, AND INSTRUMENTS. YOU, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAD ONLY A BAG OF CLOTHES AND YOUR WEAPONS.

THAT IS ALL A MAN NEEDS, CYLON! IN SPARTA WE LIVE PRACTICALLY. CONSIDER MY ROOM: A SLEEPING MAT, A PILLOW, AND MY WEAPONS ON THE WALL. WHAT MORE WOULD YOU NEED?

WELL, HOW ABOUT ART, LITERATURE, MUSIC, AND SCULPTURE? THESE ARE THINGS THAT MAKE LIFE MEANINGFUL! IT'S THE ATHENIAN WAY OF LIFE. I MEAN, WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH ALL YOUR SPARE TIME?

WE PREPARE FOR BATTLE. LIFE IS NOT AS EASY OR AS SAFE AS YOU MAY THINK. HOW CAN YOU WASTE YOUR TIME WITH SUCH DIVERSIONS WHEN YOU HAVE ENEMIES EVERYWHERE PLOTTING TO CONQUER YOU?

AND YES, EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE I'LL REWARD MYSELF WITH A SNACK OF GRAPES. SO I DO ENJOY MYSELF A LITTLE.

SO WHAT DO I DO WITH MY "FREE TIME" YOU ASK? I TRAIN.

I PRACTICE MY SWORD FIGHTING, MY MARCHING, MY DEFENSIVE MANEUVERS...
Athenians know how to fight too, Draco. But there's more to life than war. You were never as interested in broadening your cultural horizons as I was...

Enjoying art and music...

Attending the theater...

Admiring architecture...

Wait, you went to the theater once, didn't you? What did you think of that? Wasn't it interesting?

It was a Theban tragedy. And I found it to be mostly frustrating.

It started out interestingly enough, but I soon found myself getting increasingly annoyed at all the talking.

And these—I suppose you would call them “characters”—showed so much weakness, which would always lead to their downfall. After the 3rd act I lost all respect for them, as well as the play itself.

Draconian, Draconian. That's the point of a tragedy. These characters are flawed, like real human beings. All of us have weaknesses. I think you Spartans put too much emphasis on “strength.”

Spartans have to be strong, Cyron. Remember when I spoke to you of my childhood?
ABOUT HOW EVERY SPARTAN BABY IS TAKEN FROM HIS OR HER PARENTS BY THE GOVERNMENT AND EXAMINED TO SEE WHETHER HE OR SHE IS STRONG OR WEAK...

AND IF THEY ARE DEEMED WEAK, THEY ARE LEFT TO DIE ON A DESERTED MOUNTAINSIDE...

THE ONES THAT ARE SPARED ARE TAKEN TO CAMPS WITH OTHER BOYS, WHILE THE GIRLS ARE SENT BACK HOME...

I LIVED IN THESE CAMPS UNTIL MY TEENS, MY HEAD WAS KEPT SHAVED, AND I WAS GIVEN A SINGLE CLOAK TO USE AS BOTH BLANKET AND CLOTHING. WE WERE WHIPPED CONSTANTLY TO TEACH US THAT CRYING OUT FOR MERCY WAS WORSE THAN DEATH.

THIS WAS JUST THE BEGINNING OF A LIFE DEVOTED TO BECOMING THE MOST BRUTAL, EFFICIENT WARRIOR YOU CAN BE.

YOUR CHILDHOOD STORIES NEVER FAIL TO AMAZE ME, DRACO. MY CHILDHOOD, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS PARADISE IN COMPARISON. I HAD TOYS, AND I READ BOOKS.

THEY HOLD AN ANNUAL SPRINGTIME FESTIVAL EVERY YEAR IN ATHENS FOR 3-YEAR-OLD BOYS, WHERE THEY RECEIVE GIFTS. I REMEMBER STARTING SCHOOL WHEN I WAS 7, THOUGH NONE OF MY SISTERS WERE ALLOWED TO ATTEND.
HEARING STORIES ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD OFTEN MAKES ME WONDER WHAT IT MUST BE LIKE TO GROW UP AS AN ATHENIAN...

HEY, THAT REMINDS ME, REMEMBER THAT TIME WE LOST THAT BET WITH OUR OTHER NEIGHBORS?

WE HAD TO SWITCH "HABITS" FOR TWO DAYS! I HAD TO LIVE AS A "WARLIKE" "SERIOUS" SPARTAN AND YOU HAD TO BE AN "INTELLECTUAL" "CULTURED" ATHENIAN!

HEH. THOSE WERE GOOD TIMES. BUT HONESTLY, CYLON, "INTELLECTUAL," "WARLIKE," "CULTURED," "SERIOUS"...DESPITE ALL THESE LABELS AND DIFFERENCES, WERE ALL GREEK, ARE WE NOT?

SO TRUE, SO TRUE. HOW VERY "ATHENIAN" OF YOU TO SAY SO...

THE END
Background Summary

Sparta was not always a military state. Its military lifestyle developed around 700 B.C. after Sparta conquered Messenia. Messenia was located in the southwestern part of the Peloponnesus. It contained rich agricultural lands. Sparta turned the people of Messenia into slaves, or helots, who worked the land for Sparta. The helots had to give half of their agricultural produce to Sparta. These slaves greatly outnumbered the Spartans, and the helots revolted more than once against them. To keep control over the helots, Sparta became a military state. The development of Athens was quite different, and geography influenced it. Mountain ranges protected its territory. Unlike Sparta, Athens had a long coastline, which invited its development as a sea power. The lack of sufficient rich farmland gave Athenians a reason to use the seas. The city included a hill with its own water supply. The Athenians fortified the hill, providing the city with an excellent means of defense.

In this graphic novel, Draco of Sparta and Cylon of Athens discuss their differing outlooks on life. For Draco, physical strength and military skills are most important. He does not respect anyone who is weak. On the other hand, Cylon prizes physical beauty, art, music, and literature. The two men also compare their childhoods. Draco remembers military training and Cylon his toys, reading, and education. At the end, the men agree that they are both Greeks, which is what is most important.

Activities

Creative Writing
Organize students into pairs and ask them to research about daily life in Sparta and Athens. Tell pairs to use graphic organizers to compare and contrast the lives of women and girls in these cities. Using the graphic novel as a model, have each pair write a short conversation in which a Spartan woman and an Athenian woman compare and contrast their lives. Ask volunteers to share their dialogues with the class.

Writing
Ask half the students to write a summary of what they have learned about the Spartans by reading “Peloponnesian Strangers!” Have the remaining students do the same for the Athenians. Next have volunteers share their summaries with the class. Then ask the following questions: What were some ways in which the Spartans and Athenians were different? In your opinion, why did the illustrator name this graphic novel “Peloponnesian Strangers!”? Why does Cylon think that Draco’s last statement is very Athenian?