

Entertainment

The ancient Greeks worked hard, but they also had plenty of time to enjoy themselves. Some of their entertainments, such as the theater, were also held to give pleasure to the gods. Other events, such as the Olympic games, reflected their competitive nature and their desire to demonstrate their strength.

Fun and games

Wealthy Greeks, especially those living in cities, had plenty of time for fun. Music was particularly important. Evidence of games has survived mainly in sculpture, paintings, and writings.



Bronze cymbals

Key facts

- Greeks sang at births, weddings, and funerals. They wrote love songs, battle songs, and songs of thanksgiving to the gods to celebrate the harvest.
- Greek instruments were similar to the ones we use today. They had stringed instruments, such as the harp and the lyre, as well as wind instruments, such as pan pipes.
- Along with music came dancing. It seems from wall paintings that Greek women danced for their men at celebrations and drinking parties.
- Some vases show warriors playing board games, and gaming pieces made from bone, clay, and stone have been found.

Olympics

The Greeks valued sports as training for warfare and as a way of honoring the gods. There were many local sports competitions, but the biggest was the Olympic games, held every four years at Olympia.

Key facts

- Wars were suspended during the Olympics to allow people to travel to the games safely.
- Success in the games brought honor to the athlete's family and hometown. Some victors were given almost mythical status.
- Discipline in sports was strict. Breaking the rules was severely punished.



Victors were crowned with a laurel wreath

- The games went on into Roman times, coming to an end in the late fourth century CE.

Theater

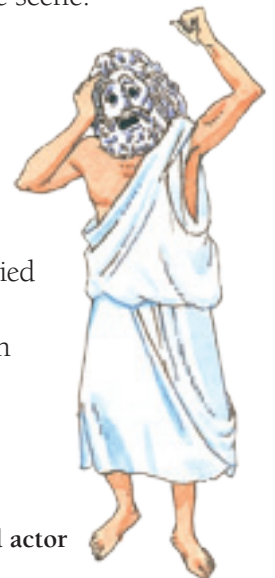
Greek theaters are among the most spectacular buildings that survive from ancient times. They have huge semicircles of tiered seating around a central stage. Some theaters could hold over 14,000 people.



The ruins of a Greek theater

Key facts

- From the middle of the sixth century BCE, drama competitions took place during the spring festival of the Dionysia.
- By the fifth century BCE, both tragedies and comedies were performed.
- The actors were all men and they wore masks on stage. Only three could talk to one another on the stage during one scene.
- A larger group of actors, called the chorus, commented on the action of the play.
- Music accompanied the plays, which were acted out on a flat area called the orchestra.



A masked actor