

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Design Par Excellence

By Lena Lambrinou

*Ancient Greece was a civilization that existed from the 8th to 5th centuries B.C. One of the accomplishments that the ancient Greeks are remembered for are their impressive temples. As you read, take notes on the appearance of these ancient temples.*

- [1] To honor their gods, the ancient Greeks built temples. Some were dedicated to only one god, while others were dedicated to several. The temple was considered a deity's<sup>1</sup> house, a place in which he or she was believed to be present, as shown by his or her statue standing or sitting inside. The building also served as a shelter to protect the statue. Only priests were allowed to enter the sacred temple, but common people could catch a glimpse of the statue through the open door.



*"The Parthenon In Athens.jpg" by Steve Swayne is licensed under CC BY 2.0*

Greek temples were usually built with their entrance facing east. In front stood an altar (vomos), a small rectangular structure around which people gathered to worship. The priests would make a fire on the altar and then sacrifice animals, such as cows, sheep, or goats, as offerings to the deity.

### Is It Doric, or Ionic?

In the fifth century B.C., there were two main types of temples: Doric and Ionic. The Doric traces its roots to mainland Greece, while the Ionic began in Ionia, an area of eastern Greece that included the Aegean Islands and Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Both temples were made of stone, but differed in size, proportions, and styles of decoration. Doric temples were mostly large, plain buildings, while Ionic were mostly small, delicate structures with much floral ornamentation.<sup>2</sup> What especially distinguished the two were their columns and capitals.<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. a god or goddess
  2. decorations
  3. the head of a column that projects from either side on the top

All Doric and many Ionic temples were peripteral — that is, they had a colonnaded<sup>4</sup> walkway (pteron) around a central rectangular room called the naos or cella. The naos was the principle sacred area in a temple, and it was here that the god's statue resided. A peaked roof covered the entire building. In front of the cella was the pronaos, an entryway with columns. Many temples also had a back porch with columns, called the opisthodomos or opisthonaos. The Parthenon in Athens was unusual because, in addition to the porch behind the naos, it had a second back room. This area served as a treasury and had a separate entrance on the west side. Inside the cella, two rows of columns created a corridor that led to the statue at the far end of the room. As little daylight could enter through the temple door, many torches were needed to illuminate the sculpture.

- [5] Around the outside of the building, Doric temples had a frieze<sup>5</sup> above the colonnade. Along this section were stone panels, called metopes, that sometimes were carved with scenes from mythology and legend. The simply decorated large blocks between the metopes are the triglyphs. Temples also had sculptures in their pediments, the triangular areas at each end of the building, just below the roof.

## Color Has It!

The Greeks loved to use bright colors to paint all the carved areas on their temples. The sculptures adorning<sup>6</sup> the pediments were painted in vivid hues against a blue background. Those in the metopes were similarly painted, but against a red background. The triglyphs were all blue.

In the 480s B.C., the Athenians wanted to build a great new temple on the Acropolis, a steep-sided hill in the middle of Athens. It was to be dedicated to Athena, because they believed it was she who had helped them defeat the Persian army at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. Construction began on the new temple, but in 480 B.C., the Persians returned, determined that this time they would be the victors. Although they advanced into Greece and burned all of Athens, including the unfinished temple of Athena, fortune again was not on their side and they were forced to retreat.

## Only the Best

Ever grateful to Athena, the Greeks began constructing a new temple, the one that we know today as the Parthenon. The architects were Iktinos and Kallikrates. It took nine years to build, and another six years to decorate with unique sculptures. The master sculptor, Phidias, and his assistants fashioned all the carved figures, including the enormous gold and ivory statue of Athena that was housed in the cella. To work on the temple, the Athenians invited the most skilled masons<sup>7</sup> and craftsmen from all over Greece. Each was paid a daily wage of one silver drachma<sup>8</sup> and worked from dawn until dusk to help finish the huge task as quickly as possible. The result was, and is, the best, most elaborate<sup>9</sup> dedication ever made to the goddess Athena. The accuracy of every detail illustrates the artistic skill available in Greece at the time.

- 
4. consisting of a series of columns
  5. a horizontal band of sculpted or painted decoration
  6. **Adorn (verb):** to decorate or make more beautiful
  7. a person who builds or works with stone
  8. an ancient Greek silver coin
  9. **Elaborate (adjective):** detailed and complicated in design

The Parthenon, although a peripteral Doric temple, also had Ionic decorations. It was made of white marble brought from Mount Penteli, about 12.5 miles away from the Acropolis. The temple had 48 columns surrounding its cella and a unique roof of marble tiles.

- [10] Among the many Ionic features in the decorations, the most prominent was the continuous frieze surrounding the top of the walls outside the cella. These sculpted panels, known as zoforos, depicted people and animals walking in the Great Panathenaic Procession, the Athenian festival in honor of their patron goddess that took place every four years. Research has shown that the figures were brightly colored against a blue background. One can only imagine how imposing the building must have been to the ancient Athenian walking up to the Acropolis.

*"Design Par Excellence" from Calliope by Lena Lambrinou. Copyright © 2010 by Carus Publishing Company. Reproduced by permission. All Cricket Media material is copyrighted by Carus Publishing Company, d/b/a Cricket Media, and/or various authors and illustrators. Any commercial use or distribution of material without permission is strictly prohibited. Please visit <http://cricketmedia.com/info/licensing2> for licensing and <http://www.cricketmedia.com> for subscriptions.*

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best expresses the central idea of the text?
  - A. Temples were an important part of daily life in ancient Greece, as many people spent time inside the temples praying.
  - B. The ancient Greeks built temples to honor their gods, but the Parthenon built for Athena is particularly detailed.
  - C. Temples were only ever constructed by the ancient Greeks when they were victorious in a war.
  - D. The ancient Greeks were more concerned with making their temples sturdy, rather than pleasing to look at.
  
2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "The priests would make a fire on the altar and then sacrifice animals, such as cows, sheep, or goats, as offerings to the deity." (Paragraph 2)
  - B. "In the fifth century B.C., there were two main types of temples: Doric and Ionic. The Doric traces its roots to mainland Greece, while the Ionic began in Ionia, an area of eastern Greece that included the Aegean Islands and Asia Minor (present-day Turkey)." (Paragraph 3)
  - C. "Although they advanced into Greece and burned all of Athens, including the unfinished temple of Athena, fortune again was not on their side and they were forced to retreat." (Paragraph 7)
  - D. "The result was, and is, the best, most elaborate dedication ever made to the goddess Athena. The accuracy of every detail illustrates the artistic skill available in Greece at the time." (Paragraph 8)
  
3. What is the author's main purpose in the text?
  - A. to emphasize how much the goddess Athena meant to the people of ancient Greece
  - B. to show how important the temples in ancient Greece continue to be to people today
  - C. to describe different types of temples in ancient Greece, specifically the Parthenon
  - D. to explain how different types of temples held different meaning for the ancient Greeks
  
4. How does paragraph 8 contribute to the development of ideas in the text?
  - A. It suggests that the people who built the Parthenon were underpaid.
  - B. It explains why the Parthenon still stands strong today in Greece.
  - C. It emphasizes how much work and skill went into constructing the Parthenon.
  - D. It shows how many resources were wasted on building the Parthenon.

5. What is the relationship between the elaborate appearance of the ancient Greeks' temples and their purpose? Use details from the text to support your response.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

