



## The Athenian Assembly: Lesson Plan

Topic	
<p>The Athenian Assembly, or <i>Ekklesia</i>, was the sovereign governing body of democratic Athens that was open to all male Athenian citizens. At meetings of the <i>Ekklesia</i>, citizens had the opportunity to address the assembly, hear fellow citizens speak on various matters, and vote on proposed decrees. The wide range of topics discussed at meetings of the <i>Ekklesia</i> included war, public festivals, religion, foreign policy, and more.</p>	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• Politics</li> <li>• Philosophy</li> </ul>	45-60 minutes
Video link:	
<a href="https://academy4sc.org/video/the-athenian-assembly-power-to-the-people/">https://academy4sc.org/video/the-athenian-assembly-power-to-the-people/</a>	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the aspects of the <i>Ekklesia</i> that made it democratic.</li> <li>• Explain the function of the Athenian Assembly as well as how citizens participated in it.</li> <li>• Identify key flaws in the <i>Ekklesia</i>.</li> </ul>	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Direct democracy, representative democracy, self-government, tyranny	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet, computers	
Before you watch	
<p><b>Turn &amp; Talk:</b> Have the students discuss the following questions in small groups</p>	

(3-5 students). Is majority rule the most fair way to make decisions in a group? Why or why not? Is a decision made by the majority necessarily beneficial to *all* in the group? Can some people get left behind in this system?

### While you watch

Complete the Worksheet questions.

### After you watch/discussion questions

1. Is direct democracy the best form of government? Are there any potential dangers of direct democracy?
2. Compare and contrast direct democracy with representative democracy. Is one form of government better than the other? Why?
3. Why is direct democracy necessarily grounded in equality?

### Activity Ideas

- **Debate:** Divide the class into two groups. Have one group argue in favor of democracy as the best form of government while the other group argues against democracy. Give students time for research and planning. Instruct students to prepare rebuttals to potential counterarguments that the other side might use.
- **Critical Response Paper:** Have students respond in writing to the following prompt: Critics of the direct democracy at Athens have referred to it as a "tyranny of the majority" because whatever the Assembly decided was law with no protections for the rights of individuals. Do you think this label is accurate? Is ostracism an example of tyranny of the majority? Is there a way to ensure that a democracy does not become a tyranny of the majority?

### Sources/places to learn more

1. Aeschines. *Against Timarchus*. Translated by Charles Darwin Adams, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1919, [www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Aeschin.+1.27&redirect=true](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Aeschin.+1.27&redirect=true).
2. "Ancient Greek Democracy." *history.com*, A&E Television Networks, LLC, 19 Aug. 2019, [www.history.com/topics/ancient-greece/ancient-greece-democracy](http://www.history.com/topics/ancient-greece/ancient-greece-democracy).
3. Aristotle. *Constitution of the Athenians*. Translated by H. Rackman, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1952,



[www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0046%3Achapter%3D25%3Asection%3D2](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0046%3Achapter%3D25%3Asection%3D2).

4. Blackwell, Christopher W. "An Introduction to Classical Athenian Democracy - Overview." *Center for Hellenic Studies*, Harvard University, Oct. 2002, [chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/1184](http://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/1184).
5. Martin, Thomas R. *An Overview of Classical Greek History from Mycenae to Alexander*.  
[www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0009](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0009).