Greece’s Dark Ages were not completely bleak, however. During that time, families gradually resettled in places where they could grow crops and raise animals. Some of these family farms may have developed into villages. When families chose where to build their farms, they favored places near rocky, protected hills. There they built fortifications and other structures to protect themselves from attack. The name for the fortified hill of an ancient Greek city is acropolis, meaning “upper city.”

**Roots and Suffixes**

If *fortify* means “strengthen,” what is a *fortification*?

**Reading Check**

What happened during Greece’s Dark Ages?

## Governing Ancient Greece

Historians believe that sometime around 750 B.C., villages throughout Greece began joining to form cities. Each city formed near an acropolis. As these cities developed, they became city-states. Hundreds of Greek city-states formed, each one more or less independent.

### The Rule of the Aristocrats

The earliest rulers of city-states were probably chieftains or kings who were military leaders. By the end of Greece’s Dark Ages, most city-states were ruled by *aristocrats*, members of rich and powerful families. Aristocrats controlled most of the good land. They owned horses, chariots, and the best weapons, which made them stronger than others.

### A New Type of Ruler

As the Greeks sailed to foreign ports, trading olive oil, marble, and other products, the city-states became richer. A middle class of merchants and artisans developed. They, too, wanted a say in the government of their cities. These people could not afford to equip themselves with horses and chariots for war. However, they could afford armor, swords, and spears. With these weapons, large groups of soldiers could fight effectively on foot. Gradually, military strength in the cities shifted from the aristocrats to the merchants and artisans.

As a result of these changes, aristocratic governments were often overthrown and replaced by rulers called tyrants. A *tyrant* was a ruler who took power by force. Tyrants were usually supported by the middle and working classes. Today, we think of tyrants as being cruel and violent. That was true of some Greek tyrants, but others ruled wisely and well.
Democracy: Rule by the People  Eventually, the people of many city-states overthrew tyrants who were too harsh. Some of the cities adopted a form of government that would have a lasting effect around the world for years to come. It was called democracy, a form of government in which citizens govern themselves. The city-state in which democracy was most fully developed was Athens.

In the 500s B.C., a leader named Solon reformed Athen’s laws. One law canceled all debts, or money owed to other people, and freed citizens who had been enslaved for having debts. Another law allowed any male citizen of Athens aged 18 or older to debate important laws. These laws and others made Athens the leading democracy of the ancient world.

Citizens of Athens might be rich or poor. However, not everyone living in ancient Athens benefited from democracy. Only about one in five Athenians was a citizen.

In Athens, only men could be citizens. A citizen had to have two parents who came from families with citizenship. Some of the people living in Athens were enslaved. These people could not take part in democracy, nor could women or men with non-citizen parents. But the men who were citizens of Athens were free and self-governing.

✓ Reading Check  Who could be granted citizenship in ancient Athens?

Tools of Democracy
Athenians used a machine to help select jurors. A colored ball (top) dropped into a kleroterion, or allotment machine (bottom), would fall at random next to the slots containing names of potential jurors. In the middle is a voting tablet used in ancient Athens. Infer How do you think voting helped strengthen Athenian democracy?

Section 1 Assessment

Key Terms
Review the key terms at the beginning of this section. Use each term in a sentence that explains its meaning.

Target Reading Skill
Find the word location on page 171 in the Links to Science column. If locate means “find,” what does location mean?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking
1. (a) Recall  Describe the geographic setting and major landforms of ancient Greece.

(b) Predict  What effect do you think the geography of Greece had on the kind of communities that developed there?
2. (a) Recall  Describe two important early Greek civilizations.
(b) Make Generalizations  Why were poems and myths important to the ancient Greeks?
3. (a) Identify  What were the three kinds of governments that developed in the Greek city-states after Greece’s Dark Ages?
(b) Cause and Effect  How did the rise of the middle class help the government of ancient Greece become more democratic?

Writing Activity
Write a description of the conditions in Greece during the period between the 1100s B.C. and the 700s B.C. Why are these years referred to as Greece’s Dark Ages?

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