Lesson 4  Classical Greek Culture

I.A. Ancient Greeks developed festivals to honor their gods and goddesses. The festivals, which included events such as athletic games, were held at sacred locations such as Olympia and Delphi and were dedicated to the gods.

I.B. The Greeks consulted oracles to attempt to discover the will of the gods. They posed questions to priestesses who then offered responses that were often puzzling and open to interpretation.

II.A. Western art has been dominated by standards of reason, moderation, balance, and harmony developed in classical Greece.

II.B. Polyclitus, a fifth-century sculptor, developed a theory that the use of ideal proportions, based on mathematical ratios found in nature, could produce an ideal human form.

II.C. Greek tragedies by writers such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides examined such problems as the nature of good and evil, the rights of the individual, the nature of divine forces, and the nature of human beings.

II.D. The Greeks used historical analysis that is still used in the Western world. Herodotus, the first historian, was a master storyteller. He traveled widely and questioned people to obtain information about historical events. Thucydides emphasized accuracy and saw the study of history as a method for understanding the present.

III.A. The term philosophy comes from Greek root words that mean “love of wisdom.”

III.B. The Sophists were traveling teachers in ancient Greece who rejected speculation and stressed the importance of rhetoric and debate.

III.C. The Socratic method, which uses a question-and-answer format to lead pupils to see things for themselves, encouraged people to question authority at a time when Athenians no longer trusted open debate.

III.D. Plato was concerned with questions about the nature of reality and how to create a just and ideal state.

III.E. Aristotle was most interested in analyzing and classifying things based on observation and investigation.

Summary and Reflection
A complete answer should include: Plato was fascinated by the question of reality; he believed in a higher world of eternal, unchanging Forms, of which actual objects were a mere shadow; this belief in ideals influenced Plato’s search for a just state; Plato advocated an ideal state led by a philosopher-king who was guided by wisdom, protected by courageous warriors, and included artisans, tradespeople, and farmers; Aristotle rejected Plato’s theory of ideal Forms—he believed in analyzing and classifying things based on observation and investigation and defined entire categories of study, such as logic, biology, and physics, ethics, politics, poetry, and the sciences; like Plato, Aristotle was concerned with effective government; Aristotle believed that monarchy, aristocracy, and constitutional government could each be effective, but he favored constitutional government as the best form for most states.