

**CLASSICAL GREECE
(4TH-5TH CENTURIES
BCE): ALEXANDER THE
GREAT**



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Description

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the legacy behind Alexander the Great, what his links were to Aristotle and Classical Greek culture, how he was able to conquer such a vast empire in short few years and why that empire fell apart so quickly after his death.

Subjects

World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Alexander Statue, Skopje, Macedonia
- Alexandria, Egypt
- Alexander Sarcophagus, Istanbul
- Archeological Museum, Naples
- Alexander Artifacts in Various Museums

Essential Questions

- Who was Alexander of Macedon? What do we know of Alexander's early life and education? What role did Aristotle play in Alexander's life?
- How did Alexander rise to power in the Greek world?
- How was Alexander able to carve out such a large empire in a short period of time?
- What happened to Alexander and his empire?
- What legacy did Alexander leave on world history?

Academic Summary

Excerpts from Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans (also known as Parallel Lives): Alexander

By Plutarch (Lucius Mestrius Plutarchs), approx. 120 CE

It is agreed on by all hands, that on the father's side, Alexander descended from Hercules by Caranus, and from Aeacus by Neoptolemus on the mother's side. His father Philip, being in Samothrace, when he was quite young, fell in love there with Olympias, in company with whom he was initiated in the religious ceremonies of the country, and her father and mother being both dead, soon after, with the consent of her brother, Arymbas, he married her. The night before the consummation of their marriage, she dreamed that a thunderbolt fell upon her body, which kindled a great fire, whose divided flames dispersed themselves all about, and then were extinguished. And Philip, sometime after he was married, dreamt that he sealed up his wife's body with a seal, whose impression, as he fancied, was the figure of a lion. Some of the diviners interpreted this as a warning to Philip to look narrowly to his wife; but Aristander of Telmessus, considering how unusual it was to seal up anything that was empty, assured him the meaning of his dream was that the queen was with child of a boy, who would one day prove as stout and courageous as a lion.

Alexander was born the sixth of Hecatombaeon, which month the Macedonians call Lous, the same day that the temple of Diana at Ephesus was burnt; which Hegesias of Magnesia makes the occasion of a conceit, frigid enough to have stopped the conflagration. The temple, he says, took fire and was burnt while its mistress was absent, assisting at the birth of Alexander. And all the Eastern soothsayers who happened to be then at Ephesus, looking upon the ruin of this temple to be the forerunner of some other calamity, ran about the town, beating their faces, and crying that this day had brought forth something that would prove fatal and destructive to all Asia.

... Philonicus the Thessalian brought the horse Bucephalus to Philip, offering to sell him for thirteen talents; but when they went into the field to try him, they found him so very vicious and unmanageable, that he reared up when they endeavored to mount him, and would not so much as endure the voice of any of Philip's attendants. Upon which, as they were leading him away as wholly useless and intractable, Alexander, who stood by, said, "What an excellent horse do they lose for want of address and boldness to manage him!" Philip at first took no notice of what he said; but when he heard him repeat the same thing several times, and saw he was much vexed to see the horse sent away, "Do you reproach," said he to him, "those who are older than yourself, as if you knew more, and were better able to manage him than they?" "I could manage this horse," replied he, "better than others do." "And if you do not," said Philip, "what will you forfeit for your rashness?" "I will pay," answered Alexander, "the whole price of the horse." At this the whole company fell a-laughing; and as soon as the wager was settled amongst them, he immediately ran to

the horse, and taking hold of the bridle, turned him directly towards the sun, having, it seems, observed that he was disturbed at and afraid of the motion of his own shadow; then letting him go forward a little, still keeping the reins in his hands, and stroking him gently when he found him begin to grow eager and fiery, he let fall his upper garment softly, and with one nimble leap securely mounted him, and when he was seated, by little and little drew in the bridle, and curbed him without either striking or spurring him. Presently, when he found him free from all rebelliousness, and only impatient for the course, he let him go at full speed, inciting him now with a commanding voice, and urging him also with his heel. Philip and his friends looked on at first in silence and anxiety for the result, till seeing him turn at the end of his career, and come back rejoicing and triumphing for what he had performed, they all burst out into acclamations of applause; and his father shedding tears, it is said, for joy, kissed him as he came down from his horse, and in his transport said, "O my son, look thee out a kingdom equal to and worthy of thyself, for Macedonia is too little for thee."

... and now looking upon the instruction and tuition of his youth to be of greater difficulty and importance than to be wholly trusted to the ordinary masters in music and poetry, and the common school subjects, and to require, as Sophocles says- "The bridle and the rudder too," he sent for Aristotle, the most learned and most celebrated philosopher of his time, and rewarded him with a munificence proportional to and becoming the care he took to instruct his son ...

While Philip went on his expedition against the Byzantines, he left Alexander, then sixteen years old, his lieutenant in Macedonia, committing the charge of his seal to him; who, not to sit idle, reduced the rebellious Maedi, and having taken their chief town by storm, drove out the barbarous inhabitants, and planting a colony of several nations in their room, called the place after his own name, Alexandropolis. At the battle of Chaeronea, which his father fought against the Grecians, he is said to have been the first man that charged the Thebans' sacred band. And even in my remembrance, there stood an old oak near the river Cephisus, which people called Alexander's oak, because his tent was pitched under it. And not far off are to be seen the graves of the Macedonians who fell in that battle. This early bravery made Philip so fond of him, that nothing pleased him more than to hear his subjects call himself their general and Alexander their king.

But the disorders of his family, chiefly caused by his new marriages and attachments (the troubles that began in the women's chambers spreading, so to say, to the whole kingdom), raised various complaints and differences between them, which the violence of Olympias, a woman of a jealous and implacable temper, made wider, by exasperating Alexander against his father. Among the rest, this accident contributed most to their falling out. At the wedding of Cleopatra, whom Philip fell in love with and married, she being much too young for him, her uncle Attalus in his drink desired the Macedonians would implore the gods to give them a lawful successor to

the kingdom by his niece. This so irritated Alexander, that throwing one of the cups at his head, "You villain," said he, "what, am I then a bastard?" Then Philip, taking Attalus's part, rose up and would have run his son through; but by good fortune for them both, either his over-hasty rage, or the wine he had drunk, made his foot slip, so that he fell down on the floor. At which Alexander reproachfully insulted over him: "See there," said he, "the man who makes preparations to pass out of Europe into Asia, overturned in passing from one seat to another." After this debauch, he and his mother Olympias withdrew from Philip's company, and when he had placed her in Epirus, he himself retired into Illyria.

Not long after this, Pausanias, having had an outrage done to him at the instance of Attalus and Cleopatra, when he found he could get no reparation for his disgrace at Philip's hands, watched his opportunity and murdered him. The guilt of which fact was laid for the most part upon Olympias, who was said to have encouraged and exasperated the enraged youth to revenge; and some sort of suspicion attached even to Alexander himself, who, it was said, when Pausanias came and complained to him of the injury he had received...

Alexander was but twenty years old when his father was murdered, and succeeded to a kingdom, beset on all sides with great dangers and rancorous enemies. For not only the barbarous nations that bordered on Macedonia were impatient of being governed by any but their own native princes, but Philip likewise, though he had been victorious over the Grecians, yet, as the time had not been sufficient for him to complete his conquest and accustom them to his sway, had simply left all things in a general disorder and confusion. It seemed to the Macedonians a very critical time; and some would have persuaded Alexander to give up all thought of retaining the Grecians in subjection by force of arms, and rather to apply himself to win back by gentle means the allegiance of the tribes who were designing revolt, and try the effect of indulgence in arresting the first motions towards revolution. Soon after, the Grecians, being assembled at the Isthmus, declared their resolution of joining with Alexander in the war against the Persians, and proclaimed him their general ... Then he went to Delphi, to consult Apollo concerning the success of the war he had undertaken, and happening to come on one of the forbidden days, when it was esteemed improper to give any answer from the oracle, he sent messengers to desire the priestess to do her office; and when she refused, on the plea of a law to the contrary, he went up himself, and began to draw her by force into the temple, until tired and overcome with his importunity, "My son," said she, "thou art invincible." Alexander taking hold of what she spoke, declared he had received such an answer as he wished for, and that it was needless to consult the god any further. Among other prodigies that attended the departure of his army, the image of Orpheus at Libethra, made of cypress-wood, was seen to sweat in great abundance, to the discouragement of many. But Aristander told him that,

far from presaging any ill to him, it signified he should perform acts so important and glorious as would make the poets and musicians of future ages labor and sweat to describe and celebrate them.

He and his army rode out of Greece and across Anatolia, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Persia like an unstoppable desert wind, subduing everything in their path. Within a few short years, the young king and his seasoned warriors carved out the largest empire the world had ever seen. He never lost a battle. He was finally stopped on the verge of invading the Indian subcontinent, not by a superior force levied against him, but rather by the very homesick soldiers that were under his command. A short time after that decision, the 33-year-old Macedonian king and world conqueror was dead. Thirteen years after his reign began, Alexander the Great was gone, condemned to the pages of history.

Alexander's conquests, studied and restudied by historians and military strategists since the days of Ancient Rome, continue to be analyzed by students and professors at such places as the US Military Academy at West Point and the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (UK). Unfortunately for his successors, with Alexander's death, the great empire he had forged died with him. It fractured into three separate entities under his subordinates, men who ultimately failed to duplicate Alexander's leadership. Greek philosophy, culture and science, the foundations of western civilization and perhaps Alexander the Great's real legacy would live on in those Hellenistic kingdoms.

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the legacy behind Alexander the Great, what his links were to Aristotle and Classical Greek culture, how he was able to conquer such a vast empire in a short few years and why that empire fell apart so quickly after his death.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the story and legacy behind Alexander the Great of Macedonia.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain what links Alexander had to Aristotle and Classical Greek culture.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Alexander was able to conquer such a vast empire in a few short years against armies that were far superior in numbers.
4. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain why Alexander the Great's empire fell apart so quickly after his death.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What role do leadership and charisma play in motivating soldiers in battle? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Alexander the Great (20 min)
- Video – Alexander the Great (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on Alexander the Great, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on Alexander the Great and his conquests. (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment / DBQ – Essay: Explain in detail the legacy behind Alexander the Great, what his links were to Aristotle and Classical Greek culture, how he was able to conquer such a vast empire in a short few years against armies that were far superior in numbers to the Macedonian / Greek force, and why that empire fell apart so quickly after his death.

Extension

On tour: National Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy

While on tour in Naples, Italy, students can visit the National Archeological Museum, where they can see for themselves one of the best preserved mosaics depicting Alexander the Great in battle. Originally found in the House of the Faun in Pompeii, the large (9 ft x 17 ft) floor mosaic, thought to be copied from a 3rd century Hellenistic painting, is believed to show Alexander and Persian king Darius at the Battle of Issus (333 BCE in southern Turkey). The mosaic was rediscovered in Pompeii in 1831 and was moved to the museum in 1843. Instead of being laid on the floor, the mosaic was hung on the wall. A modern copy of the mosaic (with the damaged sections filled in) was created in 2003-04. It can be found in the House of the Faun in Pompeii. The museum contains hundreds of original and priceless artifacts from Pompeii and other ancient sites. It is open every day except Tuesdays from 9am to 7:30 pm. Please see the museum's website below for information and an online video tour.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- <http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/alexandr.html>
Alexander the Great by Plutarch (primary source) – full text version from the Internet classics Archive at MIT
- www.biography.com/people/alexander-the-great-9180468#awesm=~oD7FerlIN2kEhw
Alexander the Great (website) – from the Biography Channel, this website also contains a short (3-minute) video on Alexander and his conquests that is appropriate for all students.
- www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/alexander_the_great.shtml
Alexander the Great (website) – from the BBC
- <http://1stmuse.com/frames/>
Alexander the Great (website) – detailed website on Alexander
- www.ancientgreece.com/s/People/Alexander/
Ancient Greece: Alexander the Great (website)
- <https://teacher.ocps.net/gretchen.stopyra/media/howgreatwasalexanderthegreat.pdf>
How Great Was Alexander the Great? (DBQ assignment / worksheet packet) – from Gretchen Stopyra, social studies teacher at Freedom Middle School (FL), this packet is appropriate for all students.
- <http://cir.campania.beniculturali.it/museoarcheologiconazionale>
National Archeological Museum in Naples, Italy (website) – in Italian, but with an English translation button.
- www.historyteacher.net/EuroCiv/Powerpoints/AlextheGreatAndHellenisticGreece.ppt
Alexander the Great and Hellenistic Civilization (PowerPoint) – from Susan Pojer, AP history teacher at Horace Greeley High School (NY)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uHe5qFJCmk
Ultimate Battles: Alexander the Great (video) – from the History Channel, this video details Alexander's victory over the Persians at the decisive Battle of Gaugamela (in modern-day Iraq)
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhNO-dJNhWQ
Alexander the Great – National Geographic (video). This video, at just over 2 hours long, is probably too long for most in-class showings, but is highly recommended for students as part of an out-of-class assignment in preparation for this unit.
- www.learner.org/resources/series58.html?pop=yes&pid=825#
The Western Tradition #7: Alexander the Great (video). This 25-minute video, although perhaps too long for many in-class showings, is well worth watching. It

is part of a much larger (52-part) series produced by WGBH TV in Boston in 1989 and features Dr. Eugen Weber, former history professor at UCLA and one of the foremost experts in Western History before his death in 2007. The series, called “The Western Tradition” consists of 52 lectures of 30 minutes each, and covers subjects from the Dawn of History to the Twentieth Century. Highly recommended for students and teachers.

Background Information

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great
Alexander the Great – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_civilization
Hellenistic Civilization – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/greece/country_profile
On the Road: Greece – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-iliad
Ancient Greece – Homer’s Iliad
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-odyssey
Ancient Greece – Homer’s Odyssey
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-minoan-civilization
Ancient Greece – Minoan Civilization on Crete
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-alexander-the-great
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Alexander the Great
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-sparta
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Sparta
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-athens-democracy
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Athens
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-marathon
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Battle of Marathon 490 BCE
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-thermopylae
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Battle of Thermopylae: Leonidas and the 300
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/plato-allegory-of-the-cave
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Allegory of the Cave
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-plato-euthyphro
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Euthyphro
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/plato-republic-philosopher-kings
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Philosopher Kings and the Republic
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-socrates
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Socrates: Father of Western Philosophy

Key Terms

- Alexander the Great
- Ancient Greece
- Aristotle
- Hellenistic
- Mosaic

