

Title: 6th Grade History Lesson: The Persian Wars – The Clash of Empire and Polis (Block 8) Materials Needed World Map or large laminated map focusing on the Mediterranean, Aegean Sea, Greece, and the extent of the massive Persian Empire (Achaemenid). Printouts/Digital images contrasting the scale of the Persian army/navy with the Greek forces (e.g., Athenian triremes vs. Persian ships; Greek hoplite phalanx). INSPECT Civilization Tracker (specifically columns for the previous empires, Athens, Sparta, and a new column for Persia). Small group activity materials: Whiteboard or paper to draw a "power scale" or spectrum. Reference materials on previous empires (Egypt, Assyria, to establish the political lineage of centralized empire). Learning Objectives (Success Criteria) Building on the comparison of the two *poleis* (Lesson 3), by the end of this lesson, the learner will be able to: Political Progression (P): Define the Persian Empire and analyze its political structure (centralized monarchy, professional army) as the logical successor to the River Valley empires (Assyria, Babylon), contrasting it sharply with the political fragmentation of Greece. Economic Influence (E/I): Evaluate the primary motivations (economic control of trade routes, territorial expansion) that drove the Persian Empire to attack the Greek *poleis* and how geography (the narrow straits, mountain passes) impacted the outcomes. Synthesis & Consequence (P/C): Explain how the successful defense against Persia reinforced the value of the independent *polis* model and identify how Athenian dominance following the wars led to the transformation of Athens into a maritime empire (setting the stage for internal conflict). Block 8: The Clash of Empire and Polis (50 Minutes) Introduction (5 min) Review & Reinforcement (Connecting to Previous Lessons) Educator Prompt: Last time, we explored the radical differences between Athens (democracy, trade) and Sparta (militarism, land control). Despite their deep political differences, what major characteristic made them both fundamentally different from the vast, centralized empires we studied first (Egypt, Assyria)? (Answer Focus: They are independent *poleis*, focused on self-governance, not ruled by a divine emperor/king far away.) Hook: The Ancient Juggernaut Educator Prompt: Imagine the largest, most powerful, most centrally organized army the world had ever seen—the Persian Empire. This empire stretched from Egypt to India. What do you think happens when this enormous, centralized power decides to crush the tiny, decentralized, arguing city-states of Greece? Objectives Review Today, we will use our INSPECT framework to examine the massive Persian Empire (P, E) as an external threat, understand how the Greeks (Athens and Sparta) temporarily set aside their differences to fight (S, P), and analyze the long-term consequence of this unexpected victory. Body: The Giant and the Guardians (40 min) I Do: Defining the Persian Threat (15 min) Content Delivery: P/E (Political/Economic): Locate the vast Persian Empire on the map. Explicitly connect its political structure (centralized king, satraps/governors, vast taxes) to the successful centralization models developed in Mesopotamia (Assyria/Babylon). Bridge Language: "Persia represents the final, most successful version of the centralized River Valley political system, designed for efficiency and command. They saw the fragmented Greeks as disorganized targets." I/E (Interactions with Environment): Explain the motivation: Persia controlled the major land routes and wanted control of the Aegean Sea trade (E). Discuss key battles (Marathon: successful hoplite defense; Salamis: successful naval defense). Emphasize how geography—narrow mountain passes (Thermopylae) and narrow sea channels (Salamis)—nullified the Persian advantage of overwhelming numbers. Technology (T): Contrast the sheer scale of the Persian army (T: engineering bridges, supply lines) with the specialized Greek *Trireme* (T: specialized, fast warship) and the Phalanx (T: tactical military structure). We Do: The Cooperation and the Shift (15 min) Activity: Analyzing the Delian League (P, E, S) Interactive Comparison: Discuss how Athens and Sparta, fierce rivals, decided to cooperate temporarily. Athens supplied the navy; Sparta supplied the army. The Consequence: After the victory, Athens used its naval strength to establish the Delian League—an alliance where other *poleis* paid Athens money (E) for protection against future threats. Educator Prompt: Was the Delian League truly an alliance of equals, or did Athens slowly turn it into its own maritime empire? (Discussion focus: Athens dictated policy, used the League's treasury for Athenian projects like the Parthenon, and forced membership.) Formative Assessment (Think-Pair-Share): Ask the learner (or small groups): How did Athens' use of the Delian League funds demonstrate a shift from the ideal of the independent *polis* (from Lesson 3) back towards the political behavior of an empire (like Assyria/Persia)? (Answer Focus: Controlling other states' economies and using their resources for the

benefit of the central power.) You Do: Synthesis of Political Systems (10 min) Application: The Political Continuum Revisited Explicit Connection: Pull out the full INSPECT Tracker. Compare the Political (P) column for Persia (Centralized Monarchy) and Athens/Sparta (Decentralized/Citizen-focused). Activity: The Success Factor. Ask the learner to analyze why the decentralized system temporarily defeated the monolithic empire. (Possible answers: better tactical knowledge of local geography, motivation of fighting for freedom/citizenship versus fighting for a distant king, naval superiority/technology.) Educator Prompt: Considering the success of the Greeks against the powerful Persian Empire, do you think the independent **polis** model (P) is sustainable, or is it inevitable that one **polis** (like Athens) will try to become the next centralized empire? (Focus: Predicting the internal conflict/Peloponnesian War based on Athenian imperial behavior after the Persian Wars.) Conclusion & Summative Assessment (5 min) Recap the Journey We have seen the political clash between the massive, centralized River Valley successor (Persia) and the fragmented, citizen-driven **poleis** of Greece. The Greek victory secured their cultural and political independence (C), but Athenian dominance (P, E) immediately undermined the concept of Greek unity. We moved from external threat to internal decay. Fill in the INSPECT Tracker for Persia (P: Centralized Empire; E: Trade/Expansion) and update the Athens/Sparta columns regarding their temporary cooperation. Summative Assessment: Progressive Political Evaluation Educator Prompt: Based on what we know about the Assyrian and Persian Empires, what is the greatest danger the rest of the Greek world now faces—a future attack from Persia, or the rising, imperial power of Athens? Justify your answer using evidence of political (P) and economic (E) control methods we have previously discussed. (Success: Learner argues for Athens, recognizing that the methods of control used by the Delian League mirror the exploitative, top-down power structures of the centralized empires previously studied.) Next Steps (Bridge to Next Lesson) The aggressive dominance of Athens immediately following the Persian Wars led to direct confrontation with the only other powerful **polis**—Sparta. Next time, we will study the devastating Peloponnesian War, the cultural and political breakdown that resulted, and how the weakness created by this internal conflict paved the way for the rise of a new, centralized power from the north—Macedonia—bringing the era of the independent **polis** to a tragic end.