As part of your immersion into ancient Greek civilization, you will be asked to look like you are from a fifth-century Greek city-state. This means creating an authentic-looking costume to wear. You might be required to dress up every day or only for key events. In either case, it is important that you wear something other than contemporary modern clothing to show your unity and earn points for your polis. Your experience will be more meaningful and more fun if you make the effort!

You might make a simple costume using the suggestions in this handout or you might go all out to sew your own elaborate and authentic outfit based on your own research and materials you find at home or at a thrift store.

WHAT THE GREEKS WORE

Over their long history ancient Greeks wore a variety of clothing styles. Those who lived on Crete in 1500 BCE had fashions a bit different than those who followed Socrates around the gymnasion in 405 BCE. To simplify your task, we’ll focus on only a few historically based options.

Females

What Greek women wore was more elaborate than their male counterparts. Although some women bought imported fabric and clothing, most women created their own clothing. They wove the fabric using a loom and then sewed clothing for themselves and their families. A balmy climate made loose fitting, simply cut garments a necessity. The most frequently seen item of clothing—the chiton (KY-ton)—was worn by both sexes. For women the chiton was also called a peplos (PEP-lahs). It was made of a large piece of cloth, about as wide as both arms outstretched, folded over the top, and fastened on each shoulder by a brooch. Very often it was gathered at the waist by a girdle, or belt. It could be ankle-length or hang just below the knees.

It was usually white, but could be dyed various colors. Often it had an embroidery trim, using several popular
Greek geometric designs. In later Greek history, the chiton had pleats and sometimes sleeves. In cooler times of the year, women used wool as a fabric, but most often they chose linen or muslin.

Another popular garment, the himation (hi-MAY-teeon), was worn over the chiton, especially on cool evenings. It served as a cloak or shawl, and it was usually brightly colored. It, too, was simple to construct and resembled the chiton. Often it was made of transparent linen.

Women who wanted to show their elevated station in society often wore very elaborate jewelry made from metal or semiprecious stones. Examples were earrings, bracelets, necklaces, brooches, and rings. On their feet females wore the always-popular sandal or went barefoot, especially in their homes. Hair for both sexes was worn long, but females frequently curled their hair or put it up.

**Males**

Men of ancient Greece often wore clothes similar in cut and fashion to women. The chiton, for example, was worn by both sexes. However, men might drape the fabric of their chiton under their right arm to free that arm. Their chiton would normally be shorter, probably to allow for greater mobility. Men wore a himation less often than women. A chlamys (CLAY-mis) was another kind of cloak typically worn by soldiers. It was made of woolen material, decorated on the edges, and usually worn pinned at the right shoulder. The chlamys could be worn over the chiton, but young soldiers often wore it as their sole item of clothing.

When men of Hellas prepared for and went to war, they added breastplates of leather and metal plates sewn on cloth. Their crested helmets were made of leather or bronze and sometimes covered their entire face. Spears, swords, and shin
protectors (greaves) would complete the army "uniform."

Like women, men wore sandals or went barefoot. Men also grew full beards out of convenience because shaving was difficult with crude instruments. In the Hellenistic Era, however, Alexander the Great popularized a clean-shaven face. Men often had long hair and many wore brightly colored headbands (ribbons). They also wore crowns of wreaths, flowers, or leaves on special occasions like festivals.

**Making Your Own Greek Clothing**

Time and resources may not allow you to create truly authentic Greek clothing. But these tips plus your resourcefulness and creativity should result in some very fashionable attire.

- **A chiton** is usually all that is needed to look Greek. The himation and chlamys are extras you can make if you have the time and energy.

- **Uniforms** allow you to emulate Greek warriors. Use stiff cardboard or plastic from large detergent bottles to make crested helmets and breastplates.

- **Sandals** can usually be found in your closet or at a second-hand store. Feel free to use anything you can find or borrow, but it might be fun to look for a pair that matches the style of the period.

- **Hair and beards** may be hard to replicate. If you have long hair, use braids or ribbons to replicate styles of the period. Or add a headband for ceremonies to accent your look. You may want to try to create a beard or borrow a costume beard.

- Add **personal touches** like costume jewelry or trim to make your clothing truly unique.

**Instructions for making a chiton**

1. Find a fairly decent white bed sheet that would fit a twin-size bed. If you are over 5'3" tall, a double-size sheet might work better.
2. Lay the sheet lengthwise.
3. Fold over the top of the fabric, about a third, so the longer portion creates the desired shoulder-to-length.
4. Fold in half.
5. Find one or two clasps (large safety pins) and fasten the front and back portions of the material so it is full and loose. Boys might choose to fasten the two pieces over just one shoulder.
6. Locate a cord to cinch in the material at the waist, and to tuck in material if the chiton drags on the ground.
7. To finish, decorate with traditional Greek embroidery at the hemline and at the neck and armholes. Here are a few examples of Greek designs that you may use. (Consider researching others.)
8. Choose maroon-colored, vinyl-coated adhesive tape to create trim. Electrical or duct tape is a good alternative. You might also try cutting an embroidery pattern out of colored felt, bias tape, or quilt binding and sewing or gluing it on.