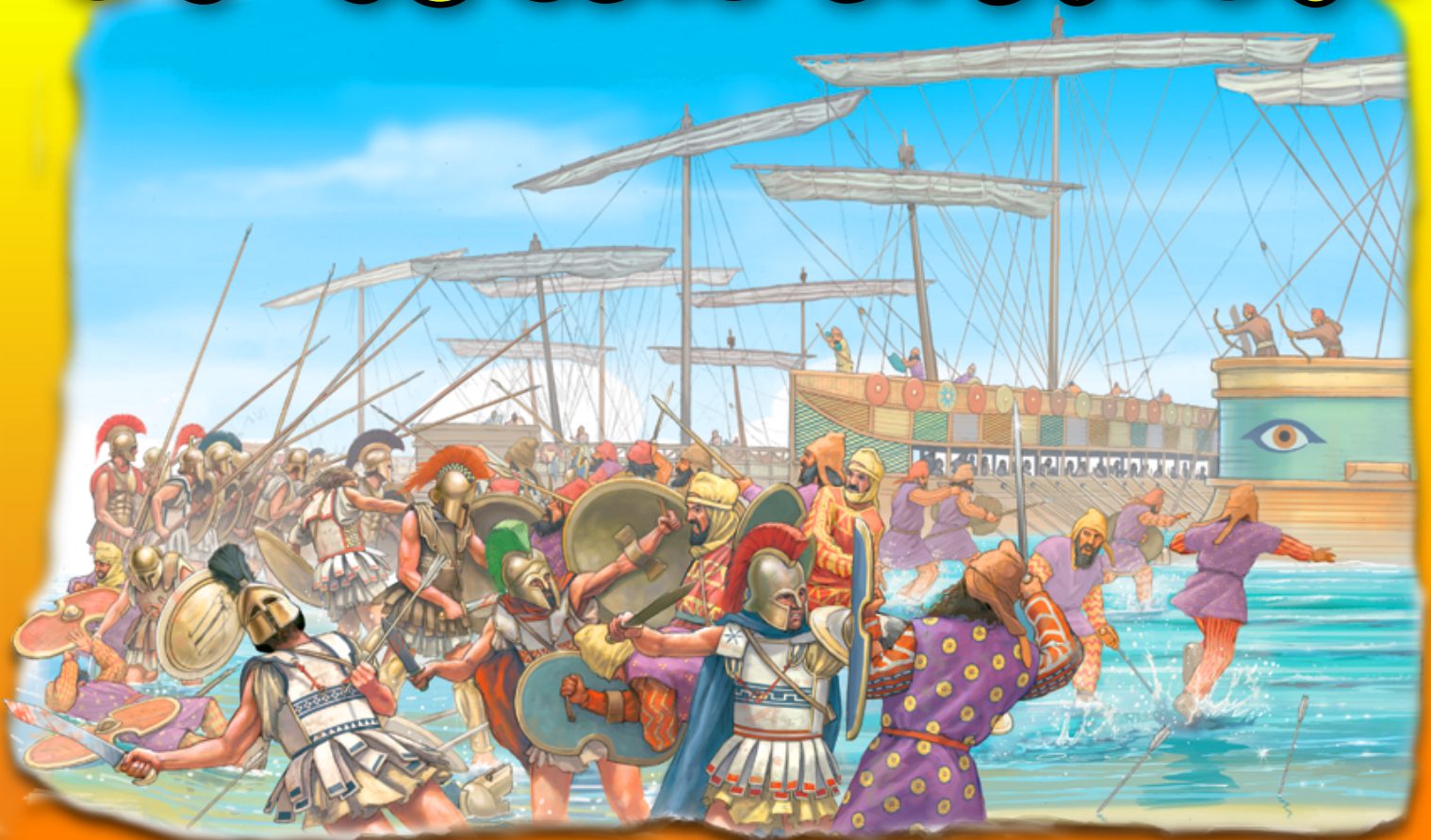


The Battle of Marathon



Comprehension

The Battle of Marathon

In the 5th century BC, the Greeks were at war with their neighbours, the Persians. One year, the Persians sailed to Greece and landed their ships at the Bay of Marathon, just north of Athens. A Greek army from Athens quickly marched there to defend the area. The Greeks blocked the pass from the plain to stop the Persians from going inland. You see, the Greeks knew the Persian army was stronger, and they could not risk an outright attack on the Persians.

So the Greeks stood their ground at the pass, and there was a stalemate. This gave the people of Athens time to ask for help from Greeks in other city states. The general Miltiades sent a messenger to the city of Sparta, but it was a long way away. When the messenger finally got there, he found the Spartans celebrating a religious festival, and so they would not come to help until it had ended. And that was in ten days time.

Meanwhile, at Marathon, it was soon obvious that no army from Sparta was going to turn up in time to help. Eventually, Miltiades thought he could not stand waiting around any longer, and so he prepared an attack on the Persians on his own. Normally, the Greek infantry attacked by locking shields and marching slowly forwards in a tight group. But Miltiades did not want to do this, for the Persians outnumbered them. He feared the Persians would simply surround them and kill them.

So Miltiades tried a daring tactic. He lined up his infantry in a long line instead of a tight group. This meant that their front line was the same length as the Persian front line. Then Miltiades ordered the infantry to attack. They marched slowly at first, and then broke into a run as they got closer to the Persian soldiers. The Persians fired arrows at the infantry, but it was not enough to stop them.

The Greeks clashed with the Persians for a while. Then the Greeks seemed to retreat. The Persians followed them because they thought they were winning. But this was all part of the plan. For the soldiers at each end of the Greek line then surrounded the Persians in the middle. Finally, the Greeks killed the Persians or chased them back to their ships. Such a great victory gave the Greeks hope of winning the war overall. And it was all done before the Spartans arrived.

Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'stalemate'.

b From that sentence, suggest what 'stalemate' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'stalemate'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'stalemate'.

e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'stalemate' means.

Try this for other words, too. 

Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: outright	direct

Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

The Greeks attacked the Persians at a run, and the two armies fought.

In the 5th century BC, the Greeks and the Persians were at war.

Finally, the Greeks surrounded the Persians and defeated them.

A Greek army marched to Marathon and stood their ground against the Persians.

One year, the Persians landed at the Bay of Marathon.

Miltiades, a Greek general, decided to try a bold tactic.

The Greeks sent for help from Sparta, but the Spartans could not come straight away.

Get to the facts

1 When were the Greeks and the Persians at war?

2 Where did the Persians land?

3 Where did Miltiades send a messenger to get help?

4 What did the Persians fire at the Greek infantry?

5 Who won the battle?

Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.

Into battle

Imagine you are a Persian soldier at the Battle of Marathon. You have been waiting for something to happen for eight days now. Then you see the Greeks line up and charge towards you... (now complete the story)

Below is a plain text version for printing:

Understanding words:

- a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'stalemate'.
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Finding key words:

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym).

For example:

Key word – outright Synonym – direct

Sequencing:

Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense:

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