

FOCUS ON **Reading Strategies**



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Lesson 3

Ancient School Days

• Magazine Article



Heads Up

You are about to read a magazine article from *Archaeology's Dig* about schools in ancient societies, as far back as 400 B.C. The schools in the article are in Mexico, Europe, and Sparta in Greece. Before you begin reading, think about your school. Make a list of four things that are difficult about your school and four things that are enjoyable.

my school

Difficult

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Enjoyable

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

continued

Heads Up *continued*

As you read, think about how ancient schools were like our schools today and how they were different from our schools. This thinking skill is called *compare and contrast*. *Compare* means to show how things are similar. *Contrast* means to show how things are different.

While reading “Ancient School Days,” ask yourself questions. Think about the life of students in ancient times as you read. Respond to the Think-Along Questions. They will help you read actively. Also, as you read, circle or highlight any words you don’t know.

Ancient School Days

by Nancy Prince-Cohen

- 1 Have you ever thought about what going to school was like for children who lived hundreds or thousands of years ago? So have **archaeologists**. They've studied the pictures on pottery. They've read the symbols cut into stone or inscribed on clay. They've examined the text written on papyrus or **parchment**. They've done all that to figure out whether, like you, ancient kids learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. Turns out they learned all that and a lot more.
- 2 Here's a look at what school life was like for the kids of three past cultures—the Spartans of southern Greece in about 400 B.C., the Aztecs of Mexico in about A.D. 600, and the Europeans of the late 15th to early 16th century. What would it be like if you went to school during those times? What would happen if you made a mistake on a test or didn't study? How much homework would you get? Was there such a thing as recess? Would you have to take gym?

What happens when you make a mistake on a test?

Sparta Schooling

- 3 In Sparta you start school when you're seven years old. You better have a well-stocked backpack because you aren't going back home for 23 years! You learn to be a soldier, live in a barracks, call every man "father," and become brave, cunning, strong, and very tough!

continued

Ancient School Days continued

- 4 You have to do everything yourself, even make your own bed. Sound easy? No way! In Sparta, you make your bed from the fresh reeds you pull from the banks of the Eurotas River and weave them together. If your bed is jagged or you aren't strong enough to pull long reeds, it's too bad. Are you feeling tougher yet?
- 5 On your 12th birthday, everything you own is taken away except for one *chiton*, which is like a Roman toga. For a whole year that chiton will be your only piece of clothing. Every year until you're 20, you get only one chiton. No underwear.

What would be good about wearing a chiton?

- 6 And you can't just sit around thinking about how to keep your chiton clean. Boys are encouraged to fight as long as it isn't done in anger. When ordered to stop, the fight must end instantly. If you don't obey, you get beaten.
- 7 At least you aren't alone in your training. The rest of the boys at school make up your new family. Your first task is to join an eating group (called a *sussition*)—15 males who eat together, fight together, sleep together, and survive together. Since no one gets enough food, you have to steal it and if you don't bring back enough to feed your hungry "gang," you're kicked out of the group. That means no friends, no food, and no place to live. That'll make you tough!



- 8 If you're a schoolgirl, you're put through the same hard physical training as the boys so that you can have strong children. You don't have to steal food, but you still get beatings if you make a mistake. After all, girls are expected to be as tough as boys.

Do you think this is fair? Why or why not?

Aztec Teachings

- 9 If you're an Aztec boy a thousand or so years later, things are a little better, but not much. If your dad is rich or important you go to the city to attend a *calmecac*, where you are trained to be a priest or a leader. Training isn't easy. If you are lazy or don't pay attention, you get jabbed with long cactus spines. You learn math, astronomy, history, reading, picture writing, and war.

What would be taught in a class called *war*?

- 10 War? This is your chance to lose your schoolboy lock of hair and become a grownup. Until you capture an enemy in battle, your hair is cut close to your head except for a long lock at the base of your neck. Capture a prisoner and you can cut off your lock of hair. You are now a man! No more school! If you don't capture a prisoner? You leave school at 15 but you aren't respected. You spend your life doing servant-type jobs. No second chance!

continued

Ancient School Days continued

- 11 But war isn't the only thing you have to learn in Aztec school. You learn to farm, fish, dance, and play a musical instrument. You also learn about citizenship and religion. You sweep the temples, keep the sacred fires burning, dig canals and roadbeds, and perform other manual labor in the neighborhood. If you make a mistake those cactus needles will have your name on them.
- 12 What if you're an Aztec girl? For you, school isn't very important. You learn to weave, cook, and care for children, all the skills you need to make a good homemaker.

Europe Education

- 13 If you're a boy in England, Italy, or Spain during the 15th and 16th centuries, your school is probably part of the church. If your dad is rich you can go to school where all students of all ages sit together and learn to read, write, and speak Latin. You read Latin in the morning, learn Latin grammar in the afternoon, and discuss Latin philosophy at night.
- 14 The teacher or "master" stands in front of the class. He listens to you read and watches while you write. Don't make a mistake or the teacher will whack your body with a birch rod while the entire class watches. (If you're a girl you won't get beaten because girls aren't allowed to go to school. You stay home and learn from your mom.)

What would European girls learn from their mothers?

15 When class is finished you eat a small meal and then settle down to listen to the older boys hold long discussions in Latin (what else?). Silence is golden. You never speak unless you are given permission or asked a question. You must do exactly as you are told or the birch rod makes a visit to your body.

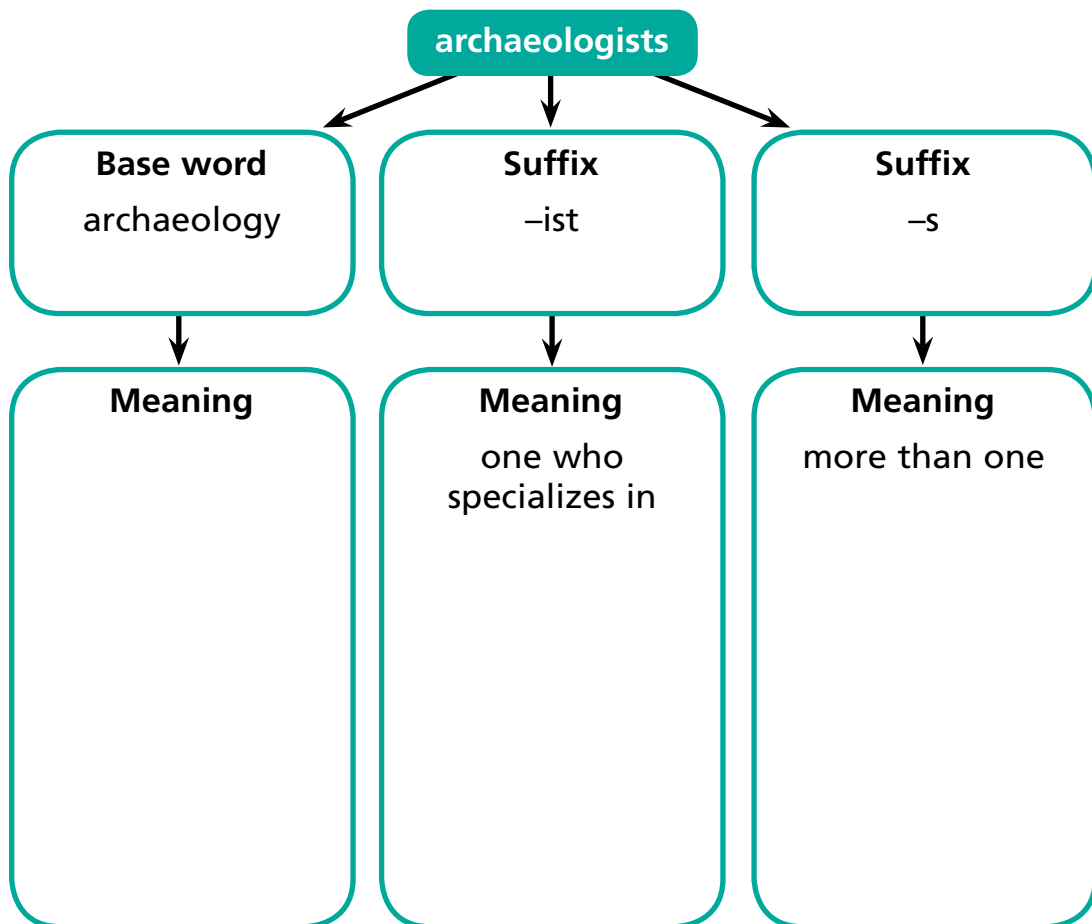
16 Going to school in Ancient Greece, Aztec Mexico, and medieval Europe was a hard and painful experience. The only thing kids didn't have to worry about was learning a lot of history—it hadn't happened yet!



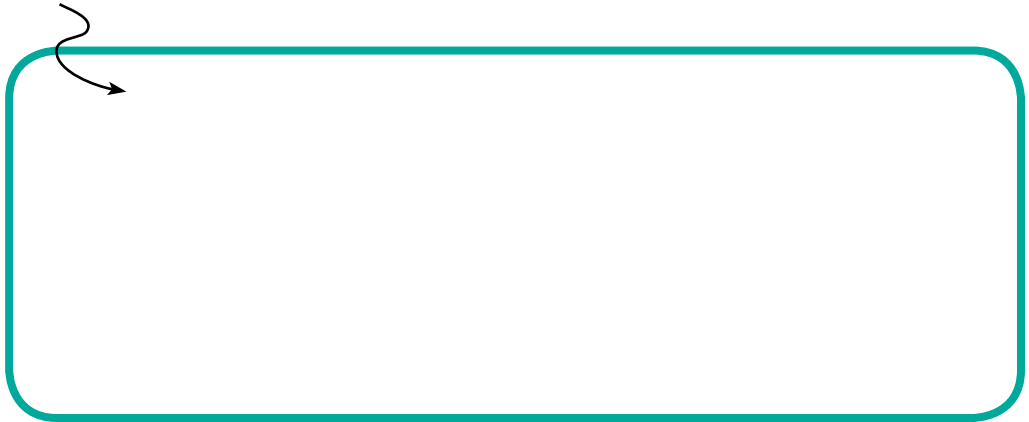
Make Sense of Words

When you come across an unknown word, you can try to understand the meaning by:

- a. rereading the sentence and using the context clues. This means paying attention to the other words in the sentence and paragraph.
 - b. breaking the word into parts. A *base word* is the main part of a word. A *prefix* is added to the beginning of a base word to change its meaning. A *suffix* is added to the end of a base word.
 - c. using the dictionary or asking an adult.
1. a. The word **archaeologists** (paragraph 1) contains suffixes. Use the chart below to discover the meaning of **archaeologists**.



- b. Combine the base word and the suffixes to write the meaning of **archaeologists**.



- c. What would be interesting about being an **archaeologist**?

2. Find the word **parchment** in paragraph 1 of “Ancient School Days.”

- a. Look up the definition in the dictionary. Which of the following nursery rhymes best relates to the definition of **parchment**?

- ① “Hickory Dickory Dock”
- ② “Baa Baa Black Sheep”
- ③ “Little Miss Muffet”
- ④ “Humpty Dumpty”

- b. Why?

Now look back at any words that you circled in the story. Could you use any of these techniques to figure out what those words mean?

Read With Understanding

Look back at the Heads Up section and review the four things that you felt were difficult about your school. Do you find those four things so difficult now after reading about ancient schools?

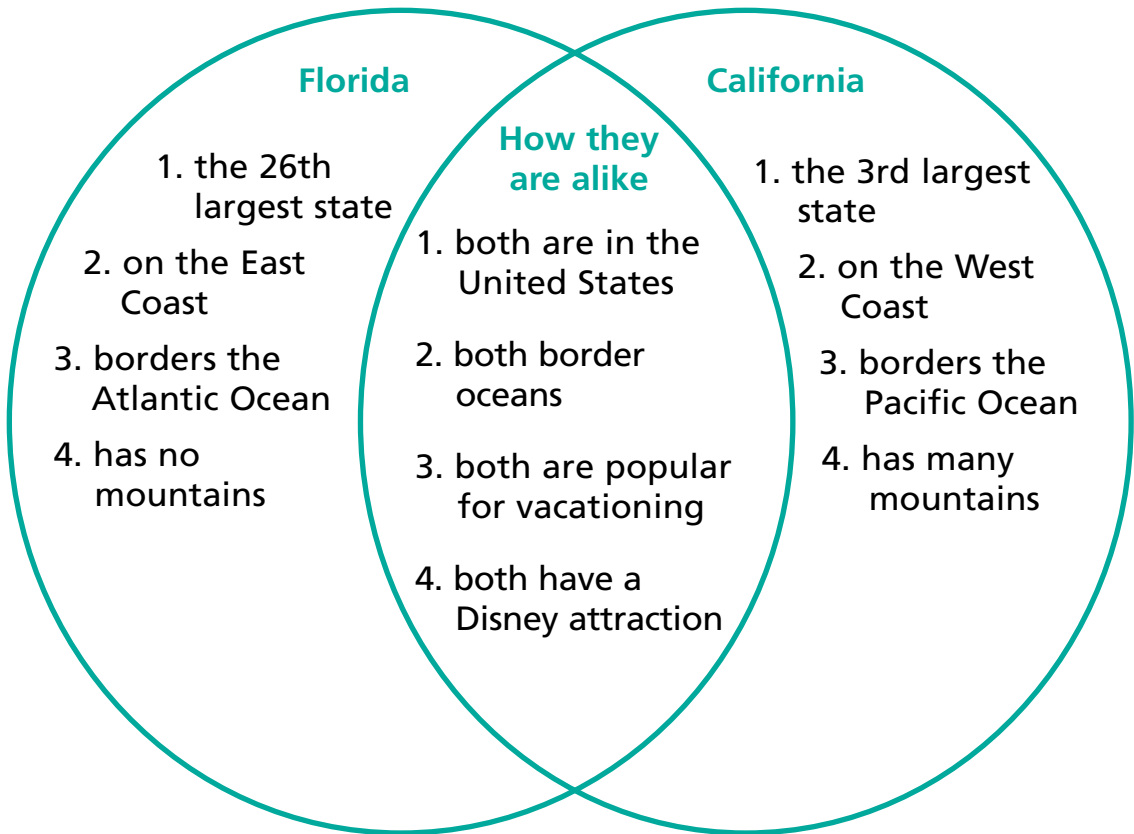
Read the following sentences about “Ancient School Days.” Three of the sentences show how ancient schools and modern schools *contrast*. Select the one that shows how ancient schools *compare* to modern schools.

- ① Aztec schoolboys were proud to have their lock of hair cut off to show they had captured a prisoner.
- ② Spartan students cut reeds to make their own beds.
- ③ The teacher of the ancient schools in Europe stood in front of the class and listened to the students read.
- ④ Everything was taken from a Spartan student at age 12 except a chiton.



Understand by Seeing It

As you read, you were asked to *compare* and *contrast* ancient schools and modern schools. A good technique for showing comparison and contrast is a Venn diagram. Below is an example of a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting Florida and California.



As you can see, the points under “Florida” are facts that are unique to Florida. The points under “California” are facts that are unique to California. This would be the *contrast* part of the diagram showing how Florida and California are different. The middle part of the Venn diagram *compares* because it shows how the two states are similar.

continued

Understand by Seeing It *continued*

Now fill in the Venn diagram below for Spartan schools and Aztec schools.

