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Opening extract from

Tony Robinson's Weird World of Wonders! Greeks

Written by

Tony Robinson

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TONY ROBINSON'S

WEIRD WORLD OF WONDERS

GREEKS



Illustrated by
Del Thorpe

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Jessica Cobb did the research for this book. She's a bit like Jojo in the Curiosity Crew, although she's older, cleverer and much bigger (Jojo's only 2cm* tall). Apart from that they're identical, except that Jess has two heads to store all her brains in. Thanks once again for all your hard work.



The real Nits wishes to dedicate this book to **Louise Robinson**, because Louise feeds her when she's hungry, takes her for walks, cuddles her when they watch telly and tells her off when she gets silly. Actually she does the same to me too, so I'll dedicate the book to her as well.

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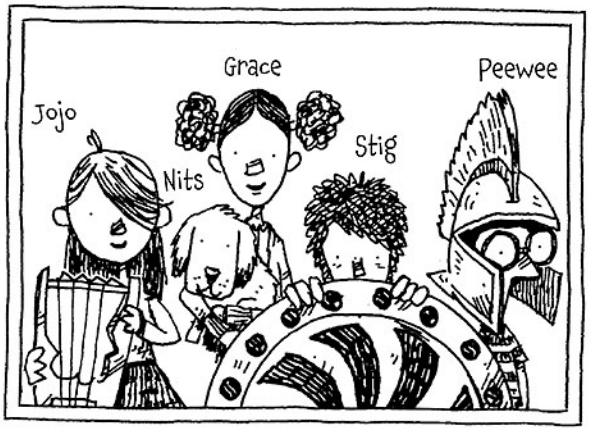
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Hi! We're the Curiosity Crew. You'll probably spot us hanging around in this book checking stuff out.

It's about ancient Greece, lands full of myth and legend, olive oil and nude athletics.

It was also the birthplace of big brainboxes, mad scientists and war-crazy Spartans.

Read on to find out . . .



SWIMMING IN SOUP

Congratulations! You saved up your pocket money for five whole weeks and have now finally bought the book of your dreams – *Tony Robinson's Ancient Greeks*.

Am I right?

No?

OK. You wrote a long list of all the fabulous presents you wanted for your birthday and top of that list was this book.

Wrong again?

Did you find it in a wheelie bin?

Did it drop into your hands from a passing spacecraft?

Well, however you got hold of it – you're really, really curious to turn the page and find out what it's all about, aren't you?

Aren't you?



Brilliant! You did it!

You've just followed in the footsteps of the ancient Greeks.



How?

Because just like you, the Greeks wanted to find out about things. They spent tons of time asking questions, arguing, poking stuff with sticks and testing things till they broke.

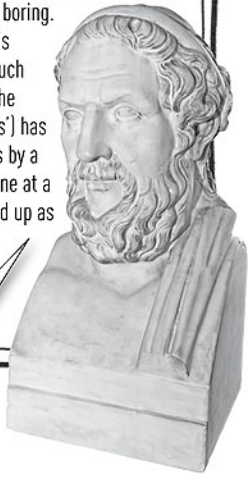
And by doing this, they came up with all sorts of inventions and discoveries – from an early computer to a laser death ray! (I'm not joking).





STIG'S BRILLIANT GREEKS NO. 1: THE GREEK WHO WAS BRILLIANT AT TELLING STORIES

Homer was a blind poet who told really exciting tales. His story about the war between the Greeks and the Trojans is probably the oldest to have been written down anywhere in Europe. There are older stories in other parts of the world, but most of them are pretty boring. The great thing about Homer is that all his characters seem so real, and they have such scary adventures. There is one in which the hero Odysseus (pronounced 'Odd-iss-yuss') has been trapped in a cave with all his sailors by a one-eyed giant, who starts eating them one at a time. Will Odysseus escape, or will he end up as a spoonful of mincemeat in the mouth of a foul-breathed giant . . . ?



You'll just have to read the story and find out, won't you!

They were among the first people in the world to use money, study history, work out complicated sums and write music.

Loads of things that we do today are because of the ancient Greeks.

FROGS ON A POND

OK! So you're probably wondering who these Greeks were.

Look at this map. →

It's full of dots, isn't it? Lots of little islands and cities dotted around the Mediterranean Sea.

Ancient Greece wasn't really a country. It was a collection of island-states and city-states. Some of them were famous like Athens, Sparta, and Knossos, but there were lots of others too.

Each state was its own little country with its own way of doing things. They united in times of crisis but they also spent a lot of time squabbling with each other!

The main bit of Greece is very rocky and difficult to farm, so most Greeks lived on the coast or on islands, where they could make money from the sea by trading or fishing.

One Greek writer said the Greeks were like *'frogs sitting around a pond'.*

Which seems a pretty good description to me – that is, if frogs wore cute little tunics and were good at philosophy and maths.





So how did ancient Greece start?

Well, in order to answer that, we'll have to dive in a bit deeper.

GREEK SOUP

People started living in Greece more than 8,000 years ago, but annoyingly they didn't begin writing anything down for another 4,000 years.

So all we're left with from the earliest days of the Greeks are little bits of stories, legends and archaeology.





Looking back into ancient Greek history is like peering into a big bowl of thick soup – bits of food float to the surface but you can't see the bottom of the bowl.

Imagine if you were swimming around in a bowl of Greek soup, with lots of ancient stories and bits of information bobbing up around you.

MYTH: Once upon a time a powerful king called Minos ruled the city-state of Knossos. In his huge palace was a giant maze, and at its heart lived a terrible monster.

FACT: In the rubble where Knossos once stood, archaeologists have found the remains of a gigantic palace that would have been home to a powerful Greek ruler around 1500 BC. It's got more than 13,000 interconnecting rooms, passages and staircases.

Sounds a bit maze-like to me! Maybe that's where the idea of the giant maze came from.

So, sounds like these ancient cities really were rich.

MYTH: The son of the King of Troy stole the wife of the King of Sparta. The Spartan king was very angry and asked his brother, the mighty King of Mycenae, to help him get his wife back.

FACT: In the nineteenth century some incredible golden masks were found buried on a hillside in Mycenae. They were more than 3,000 years old.

MYTH: The Greeks launched a thousand ships which sailed to Troy and laid siege to it. The two armies fought for ten long years before Troy was finally burned to the ground, and the Greeks took back their queen.

Troy – where's Troy?

MYTH: One day the Prince of Athens went to a friend's wedding. A gang of creatures called centaurs who were half-man and half-horse burst in, drank all the wine and tried to kidnap the bride. But the prince drew his sword and defeated them.

Maybe this tale comes from the time when the Greeks first came into contact with horse-riding nomads. Imagine if you'd never seen one before. He'd look like a man and a horse glued together, wouldn't he?

Hmmm! So if Mycenae was real and Troy was real – does that mean the whole story's real?

FACT: We're pretty sure it's in Turkey. The remains of a city have been discovered that was inhabited for thousands of years. It was destroyed several times, and fits the description of the legendary city.

Maybe bits of it are true. But maybe we can never know for sure about the details.