

Who was Plato?

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Word Bank

Political - relating to politics or how a city, country or community is run
Solon - Athenian statesman, lawmaker, political philosopher, and poet.
Distinguished - very successful, in charge and respected
Mentor - an experienced and trusted adviser, someone who teaches someone younger
Socrates - a famous Athenian philosopher who questioned everyone and everything
Discourse - to write or speak about something, to have a debate
Considered - thought of
Sparta - another important city-state in ancient Greece
Dictatorship - a type of leader or leaders who hold all the power
Academy - a university or place of higher learning
Republic - An important book written by Plato about politics
Society - how people live together
Imparted - to make known

As a child, Plato probably would not have guessed what he was going to be when he grew up!

He was born in 427 BC in Athens to a very rich and powerful political family. He was related to many kings and wise leaders, such as Solon, the Athenian lawgiver and one of the Seven Sages of Greece. Plato was supposed to go into politics like his family.

Considering his background, it is not surprising that Plato received the best education, with the most distinguished teachers at the time. His most important mentor, however, was Socrates, who he met when he was young.

Socrates was considered an ugly man who did not have much wealth or power. However, the old man had an amazing power of discourse, or ability to talk well, and was very respected by those who loved wisdom. Socrates became Plato's teacher and the main character of his stories.

Two very important things happened to Plato when he was still young that made him not like the politics in Athens. First, Socrates was sentenced to death in 399 in a very unfair trial. Plato did not think this was just.

Next, Athens was beaten by the city-state of Sparta after a long war. This resulted in a dictatorship, meaning the people did not vote for their leader.

Perhaps it's no wonder then that the quick thinking Plato chose philosophy over politics.



Plato was a very successful philosopher. He wrote many important philosophical dialogues, or conversational plays. In these plays his teacher Socrates would ask questions to try to understand important ideas. His most famous work is called the *Republic*, where he tries to imagine the best society possible.

Plato also set up the very first academy dedicated to thinking and questioning. In his university, students were not taught to copy their teachers, but instead to think for themselves. His most famous student was Aristotle.

He also traveled and even tried to convince a dictator in Syracuse, Italy to become one of the Philosopher kings he described in his *Republic*. Unfortunately, it didn't work, but at least he tried!

Plato died in 347 BC at the ripe old age of 80. He was recognized as a brilliant man, imparting not only wisdom, but a way of trying to understand the world.