

Biography

Socrates

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Source: Jiy at English Wikipedia

- **Occupation:** Philosopher
- **Born:** 469 BC in Athens, Greece
- **Died:** 399 BC in Athens, Greece
- **Best known for:** Greek philosopher who helped form the foundation of Western philosophy.

Biography:

How do we know about Socrates?

Unlike some other famous Greek philosophers, Socrates didn't write down his thoughts and ideas. He preferred to just speak to his followers. Fortunately, two of Socrates' students, Plato and Xenophon, wrote about Socrates in their works. We learn about Socrates' philosophies in many of Plato's dialogues where Socrates is a major character taking part in philosophical discussions. Xenophon was a historian who wrote about the events in Socrates' life. We also learn about Socrates from the plays of the Greek playwright Aristophanes.

Early Life

Not much is known about Socrates' early life. His father was a stonemason named Sophroniscus and his mother was a midwife. His family was not wealthy, so he likely didn't have much of a formal education. Early on in his career, Socrates took up his father's profession and worked as a stonemason.

A Soldier

Socrates lived during the time of the Peloponnesian War between the city-states of Athens and Sparta. As a male citizen of Athens, Socrates was required to fight. He served as a foot soldier called a "hoplite." He would have fought using a large shield and spear. Socrates fought in several battles and was noted for his courage and valor.

Philosopher and Teacher

As Socrates grew older, he began to explore philosophy. Unlike many philosophers of his time, Socrates focused on ethics and how people should

behave rather than on the physical world. He said that happiness came from leading a moral life rather than material possessions. He encouraged people to pursue justice and goodness rather than wealth and power. His ideas were quite radical for the time.

Young men and scholars in Athens began to gather around Socrates to have philosophical discussions. They would discuss ethics and current political issues in Athens. Socrates chose not to give answers to questions, but instead posed questions and discussed possible answers. Rather than claim he had all the answers, Socrates would say "I know that I know nothing."

The Socratic Method

Socrates had a unique way of teaching and exploring subjects. He would ask questions and then discuss possible answers. The answers would lead to more questions and eventually lead to more understanding of a subject. This logical process of using questions and answers to explore a subject is known today as the Socratic Method.

Trial and Death

After Athens lost to Sparta in the Peloponnesian War, a group of men called the Thirty Tyrants were put into power. One of the leading members of the Thirty Tyrants was a student of Socrates named Critias. The men of Athens soon rose up and replaced the Thirty Tyrants with a democracy.

Because Socrates had spoken out against democracy and one of his students was a leader in the Thirty Tyrants, he was branded a traitor. He went on trial for "corrupting the youth" and "failing to acknowledge the gods of the city." He was convicted by a jury and was sentenced to death by drinking poison.

Legacy

Socrates is considered one of the founders of modern Western philosophy. His teachings influenced future Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. His philosophies are still studied today and the Socratic Method is used in modern-day universities and law schools.

Interesting Facts About Socrates

- Unlike many other teachers of his day, Socrates didn't charge his students fees.
- Socrates was married to Xanthippe and had three sons.
- He could have likely escaped from Athens and avoided the death sentence, but instead chose to stay and face his accusers.

- He once said that "the unexamined life is not worth living."
- At his trial Socrates suggested that, instead of being given the death sentence, the city should pay him a wage and honor him for his contributions.