Name: _____ Date: _____

Study Guide #15 The Crisis of Greek Civilization

The Crisis of Greek Politics. After the Peloponnesian War the balance of power among the Greek city-states was destroyed. Although Sparta had defeated Athens in the war, it could not gain full control of the region, and the Greek city-states continued to fight among themselves.
Sparta made an uneasy alliance with Persia, giving it control over the Greek cities of Ionia, and then later went to war with Persia over the very same cities. The Greek city-states finally accepted a Persian settlement which called for peace among the poleis and gave control of the Ionian cities to the Persian king. The Athenian orator Isocrates, who feared the Persian threat, advocated **Pan-Hellenism**, the unification of the Greek city-states against the powerful Persia. However, no city-state was able to forge this unity.

The Crisis in Greek Society and Culture. The political crisis in the Greek world resulted in the eventual breakdown of the polis. As the polis eroded, traditional values began to decline. A group of philosophers called the **Sophists** emerged in the 400s B.C. They argued that there was no such thing as absolute truth and that instead people should solve the problems of politics and society through the use of reason and **rhetoric**, or making public speeches.

Fearful that the Sophists would lead people to disregard city laws, conservatives acted against the Sophists. **Demagogues**—people who made impassioned speeches to sway crowds to their side—whipped up resentment against the Sophists. When the Spartans defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War, they encouraged a system of **oligarchy**, or rule by a few powerful individuals. Although the Athenians eventually overthrew this tyrannical government, they came to blame the Sophists for Sparta's conquest of Athens and for causing social and moral chaos.

Unlike the Sophists, the philosopher Socrates believed that the search for real knowledge and truth was all-important. He taught by using a method of questions and answers that guided his students to deeply consider a particular problem. This became known as the **Socratic method**. Many conservatives believed that Socrates was corrupting the Athenian youth. They put him on trial, convicted him, and executed him with poison.

Toward a New Greek Identity. Socrates' ideas lived on in his pupil, Plato, who also differed with the Sophists. Plato believed that every visible thing was an expression of a universal "Form," or idea, that existed beyond the senses. Plato argued that the true philosopher must study the nature of this Form, which he believed was created by the "divine worker," or God. Plato's idea became known as the **theory of Forms**.

In his book, *The Republic,* Plato applied the theory of Forms to politics, arguing that the perfect political system would emphasize the polis as the center of a person's identity. In his ideal society, everyone would use their natural skills to fulfill their role in society. Plato's political ideas were never put into practice, however. Plato's star pupil, Aristotle, also became a noted philosopher. Unlike Plato, he argued that each visible thing consisted of two parts: the actual matter of a thing and the form or structure from which the matter was molded. Furthermore, Aristotle believed that the matter and the form existed together. Regarding politics, Aristotle hated tyranny of any kind and concluded that the best government would be run by people from the middle levels of society, who were neither rich enough nor poor enough to want to tyrannize others.

Answer the questions below in your own words and in complete sentence. Highlight your evidence.

1. What was the political situation among the Greek poleis after the Peloponnesian War?

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2. Why were the Sophists' ideas so controversial?

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3. What is an oligarchy?

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4. What was the Socratic method of teaching? Why did Socrates use this method?

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5. What were Plato's ideas concerning the existence of things?

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6. What was Aristotle's philosophy regarding the nature of existence?

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