

HOW DID BELIEFS SHAPE

“When one’s heart is glad, he gives away gifts. [The potlatch] was given to us by our Creator, to be our way of doing things, to be our way of rejoicing, we who are [Kwakwaka’wakw].

The potlatch was given to us to be our way of expressing joy. Everyone on Earth is given something.”

– Agnes Alfred,
*Kwakwaka’wakw Elder
and artist*

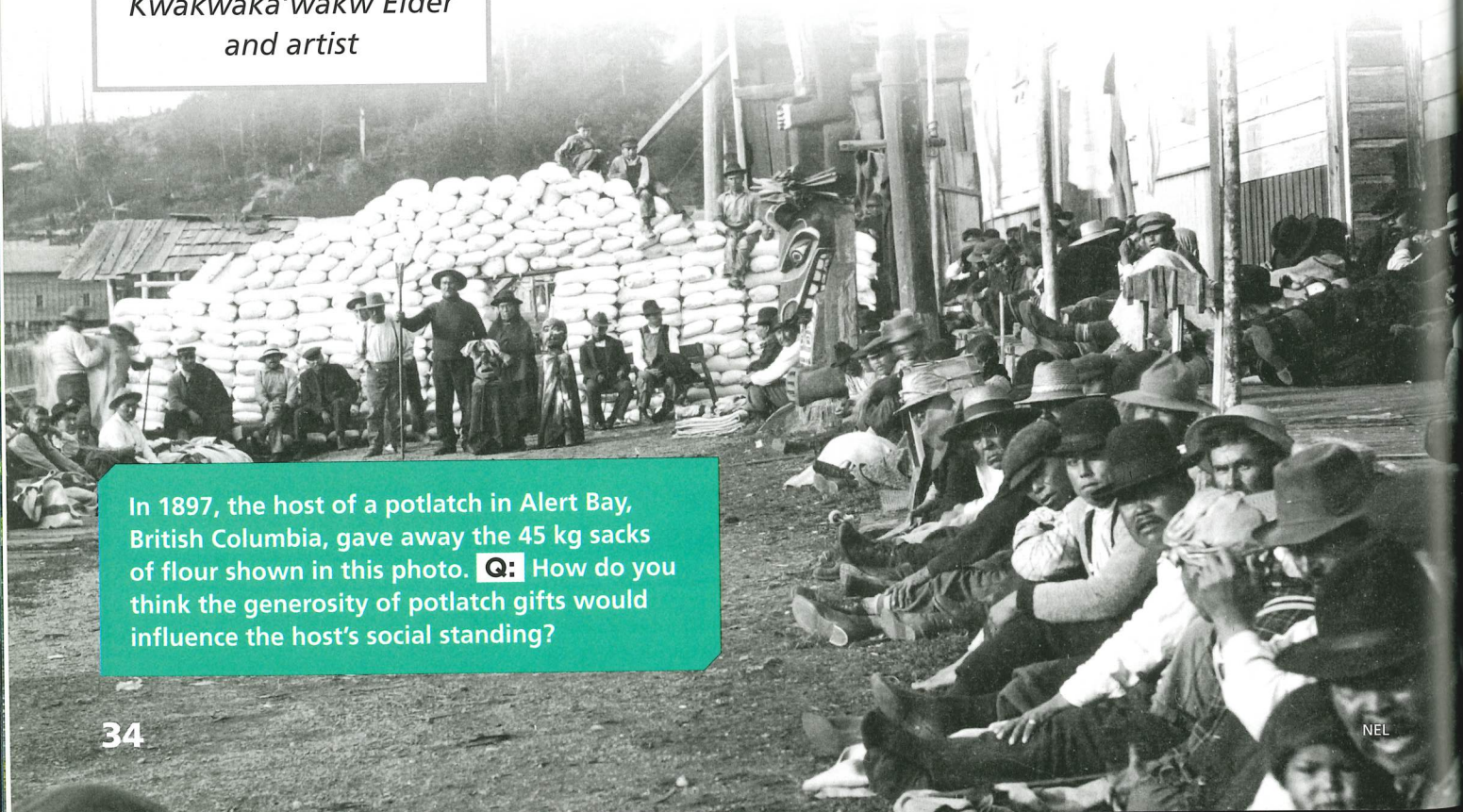
The Indigenous peoples of Canada’s Pacific region often used celebrations as a way of marking special occasions and passing along values, beliefs, knowledge, customs, and culture to future generations.

BELIEFS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

The potlatch is one of the best-known traditions of the Kwakwaka’wakw people and other First Nations of the Pacific coast. The word *potlatch* means “to give.” This public gift-giving and feasting ceremony served—and continues to serve—important social, political, ceremonial, and economic purposes.

Traditionally, during a potlatch, births were announced, marriages were conducted, and names were given. Families also grieved the death of loved ones. Totem poles were sometimes raised at a potlatch. **Q:** Why would a potlatch be a good time to raise a totem pole?

In 1897, the host of a potlatch in Alert Bay, British Columbia, gave away the 45 kg sacks of flour shown in this photo. **Q:** How do you think the generosity of potlatch gifts would influence the host’s social standing?



LIFE IN EARLY SOCIETIES?

The Potlatch and Social Status

Guests were invited to witness a potlatch. The host gave gifts to these witnesses. By accepting the gifts, the guests showed that they agreed with the claims made by the host and the host's family.

Elaborate gift giving and feasting was a way to share riches with the rest of the community, to celebrate family ties, and to offer thanks to ancestral spirits. The host's standing in the community was influenced by the generosity of the gifts shared. **Q:** How do you think potlatches helped communities uphold their laws and maintain relationships with neighbouring villages?

Some of the rights that may be affirmed at a potlatch:

- to inherit or transfer land and other property
- to fish, pick berries, and hunt in certain places
- to sing, dance, tell stories, and display animal crests

At potlatches and other celebrations, Indigenous people sometimes wore transformation masks like the Haida mask shown in these photos. When this mask was closed, it showed a whale with a seagull on the whale's head. As the mask opened, a humanlike face was revealed. Transformation masks helped to illustrate oral histories. They were often considered sacred objects that could be inherited and used only by specific people. **Q:** How might limiting who could inherit and use a transformation mask influence an Indigenous society?



BELIEFS IN ANCIENT GREECE

Some City States of Ancient Greece



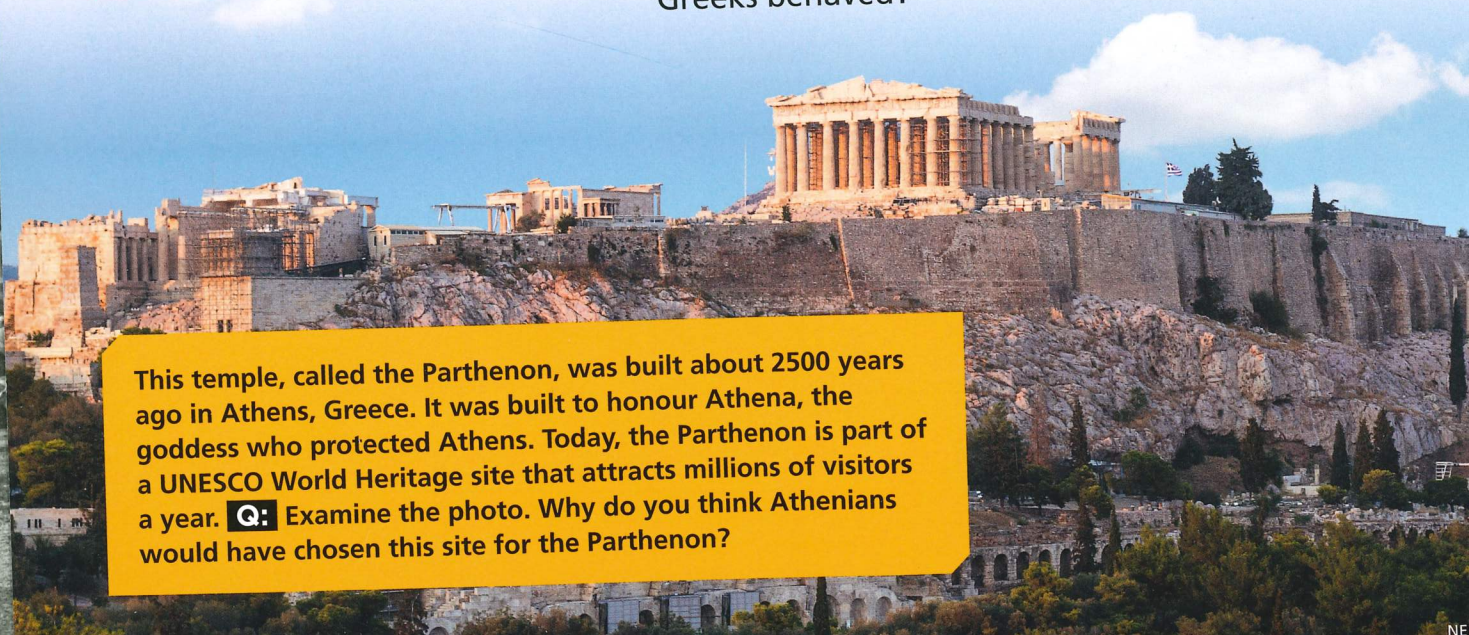
In ancient times, the country known today as Greece was made up of hundreds of independent city states, both large and small. The city states often went to war with each other. **Q:** Examine the map. What do you think contributed to the creation of independent city states? Why?

The ancient Greeks shared a language and believed in the same gods and goddesses, but the people were not united. They lived in **city states** (independent settlements with their own government). The city states were often at war with each other. People believed that each city state was protected by a particular god or goddess.

People also believed that their gods and goddesses were all-powerful and lived forever. These beliefs were passed down through stories about the magical powers, adventures, and quarrels of the gods and goddesses.

According to the stories, the deities lived on Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in the country. Each god or goddess controlled specific areas of human life and represented specific aspects of humanity. People believed that worshipping the deities in the right way would help them. When people faced important decisions, they often consulted an **oracle** (a priest who, people believed, spoke directly to the gods and goddesses). The oracle told them how to please the gods and goddesses.

When something bad happened, the Greeks believed it was punishment for failing to please the deities. **Q:** What consequences do you think this belief would have had on the way ancient Greeks behaved?



This temple, called the Parthenon, was built about 2500 years ago in Athens, Greece. It was built to honour Athena, the goddess who protected Athens. Today, the Parthenon is part of a UNESCO World Heritage site that attracts millions of visitors a year. **Q:** Examine the photo. Why do you think Athenians would have chosen this site for the Parthenon?



HONOURING GODS AND GODDESSES

The ancient Greeks created festivals to honour specific gods and goddesses. The ancient Olympic Games, for example, were part of a festival that honoured Zeus. People believed that Zeus was the king of the gods and the father of many other gods and goddesses. People travelled to Olympia from all over Greece to watch and compete in the games.

Many rituals that are part of the modern Olympics originated in the ancient Olympics. These rituals include the oaths sworn by the athletes, as well as the lighting of the Olympic flame.

If the city states of Greece were at war with each other, fighting stopped so that people could travel to Olympia to watch the games. Traders did business at the games, and political figures made speeches. **Q:** What were some consequences of the ancient Olympic Games for Greek society at the time? What were some long-term consequences?

Before the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, actors gathered in Olympia at the temple of Hera. Hera was the goddess of women and marriages, as well as the wife of Zeus. The actors re-enacted the torch-lighting ceremony that was a tradition at the ancient Olympics. Fire was important to the ancient Greeks. One of their stories relates how the god Prometheus stole fire from Zeus and gave it to humankind. **Q:** How does the story of Prometheus compare to the stories of other early societies?