The Persian Battles

The Persian Wars were a series of wars fought between the Persians and the Greeks from 492 BC to 449 BC.

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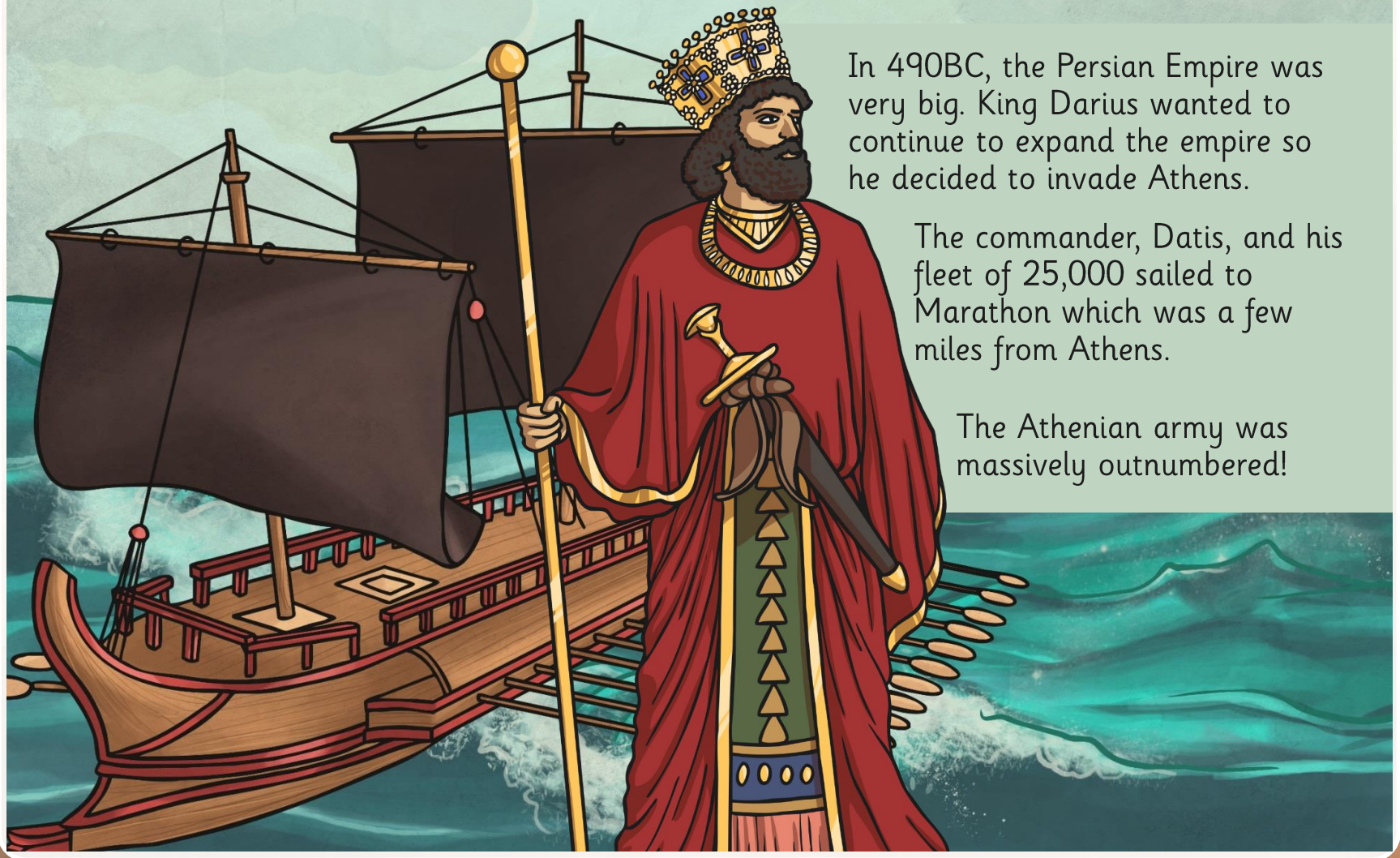

The Battle of Marathon
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The Greek and Persian Empires



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The Battle of Marathon



In 490BC, the Persian Empire was very big. King Darius wanted to continue to expand the empire so he decided to invade Athens.

The commander, Datis, and his fleet of 25,000 sailed to Marathon which was a few miles from Athens.

The Athenian army was massively outnumbered!

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Help!

The Athenians needed to ask for help! So they decided to ask the Spartans. Although they often fought against each other, when faced with an outside enemy the Greek city states usually joined forces. The Spartan army was very famous and would have been very useful to the Athenians. They sent a runner, Pheidippides, to Sparta to ask. He ran for 2 days and nights from Athens to Sparta, running 240km in total.

The Spartans were celebrating a festival and so said they would help, only once the festival was over. Pheidippides then ran back to Athens with the news that they would need to wait!

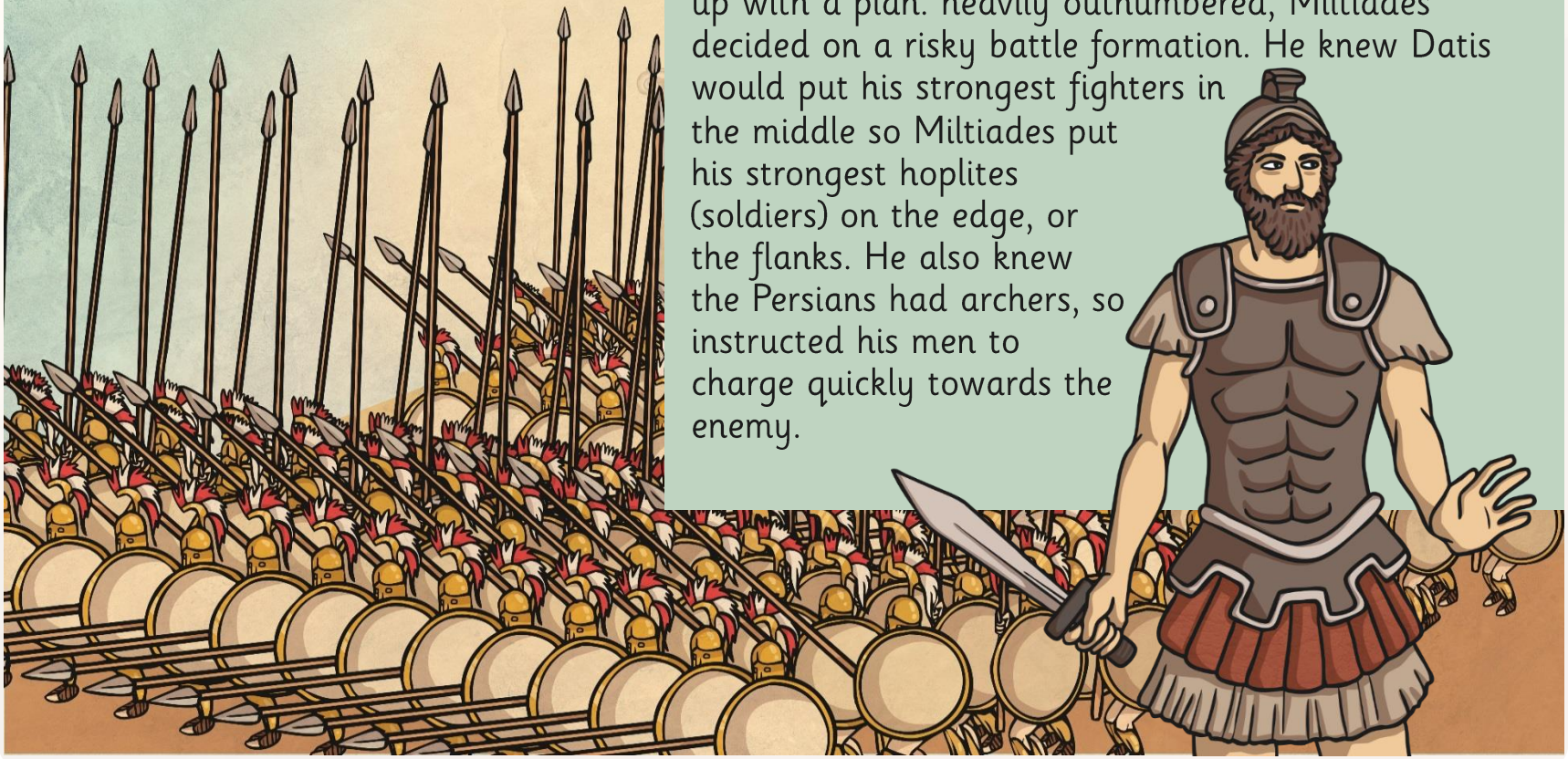


In pairs, role play the conversation between the Athenians and the Spartans. Why didn't the Spartans help? How do the Athenians feel about the Spartans' reason for not helping?

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Let Battle Commence!

The Athenian army, led by General Miltiades, tried to wait for the Spartan army but they knew they would have to fight on their own. He had to come up with a plan. heavily outnumbered, Miltiades decided on a risky battle formation. He knew Datis would put his strongest fighters in the middle so Miltiades put his strongest hoplites (soldiers) on the edge, or the flanks. He also knew the Persians had archers, so instructed his men to charge quickly towards the enemy.



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Surprise!

The Persians were shocked at this strategy and Athenian hoplites quickly ran past the line of arrows flying towards them. They charged straight at the Persians! The stronger fighters on the flanks quickly attacked the much weaker Persian soldiers on their flanks. This left the Athenians free to close in and trap the rest of the Persian army.

The remaining Persians then ran away to their ships!

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The Persian army lost over 6,000 soldiers compared to only 192 Athenians!

Pheidippides then ran 26 miles to Athens to tell of their victory, and also to warn them of a possible second Persian attack.

He shouted out:

'Joy to you, we've won!'

As he said these words, he died.



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The Battle of Thermopylae 480 BC

10 years after the disastrous defeat at Marathon, the Persians were back, this time with even more men.

They met a combined force of Greeks at Thermopylae, a small mountain pass that controlled access to most of the rest of Greece. A group of 7,000 soldiers easily held off the Persians for two days. But a Greek traitor showed the Persians a secret passageway that allowed them to strike the Greek army from the rear. Seeing this, most of the defenders retreated.

A group of 300 Spartans stayed on the battlefield, fighting to the death and covering their fellow Greeks' retreat. This heroic act allowed the rest of the Greek army, which was made up of soldiers from all over Greece, to escape capture or certain death.

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Battle of Salamis 480 BC

The Persian army continued to march on Greece. When they arrived at the city of Athens, they found it deserted.

The people of Athens had fled. The Athenian fleet, however, was waiting off the coast by the island of Salamis.

The much larger Persian fleet attacked the small Athenian ships.

They were sure of victory. However, the Athenian ships, called triremes, were fast and manoeuvrable. They rammed into the sides of the large Persian ships and sunk them. They soundly defeated the Persians causing Xerxes to retreat back to Persia.

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