

Background Notes on THE CORINTHIAN GIRL

by Christina Balit

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The Corinthian Girl is a fictional story about a girl athlete. But the historical background to her story is authentic and based on research into life in Ancient Greece in the 5th century BCE.

These Notes are designed for use with children to help them understand how life was at that time and to think about some of the differences between then and now.



TITLE PAGE



This picture shows the girl at work in the kitchen. Food, oil and other liquids were kept in jars of different sizes. On the right a big clay cooking pot hangs from chains above a fireplace. There is no water supply – no taps.

How do you think they got their water for cooking and washing?

Why do you think some jars are plain and some are painted?


Here the girl is still at work, cleaning the front steps.
The house is in the city of Athens, nowadays the capital of Greece.



 **Word hunt 1:** **Acropolis** means 'city on the top'.

Can you find the name of one or more of the buildings in the Acropolis?
They are still there today, but as ruins.

 Why has the girl not got a name?

 **Word Hunt 2:** **Nymphs**. They were thought of as female spirits, who lived in woods and watery places.

This spread takes us back to when the girl was a tiny baby.
It shows the city of Corinth, where she was born (see the map on page 34).
Why do you think people are carrying jars or baskets to the temple?



In Ancient Greece a father was in total control of his wife and family.
Only he could make decisions.

 Topic for discussion: Do you think this is fair?

PAGES 7-8

The market place was where people came to buy, sell or exchange things, or just to see what was going on.



What the girl's father does seems very strange and cruel to us. The Ancient Greeks thought differently. If a family was too poor to feed and look after a new baby, the infant was simply left outside. Anyone could take it. If no-one took it, it would die. This was especially likely to happen with girl babies. A father was expected to provide a dowry (money gift) to his daughter's husband when she married. If he could not do this, she would probably never marry.

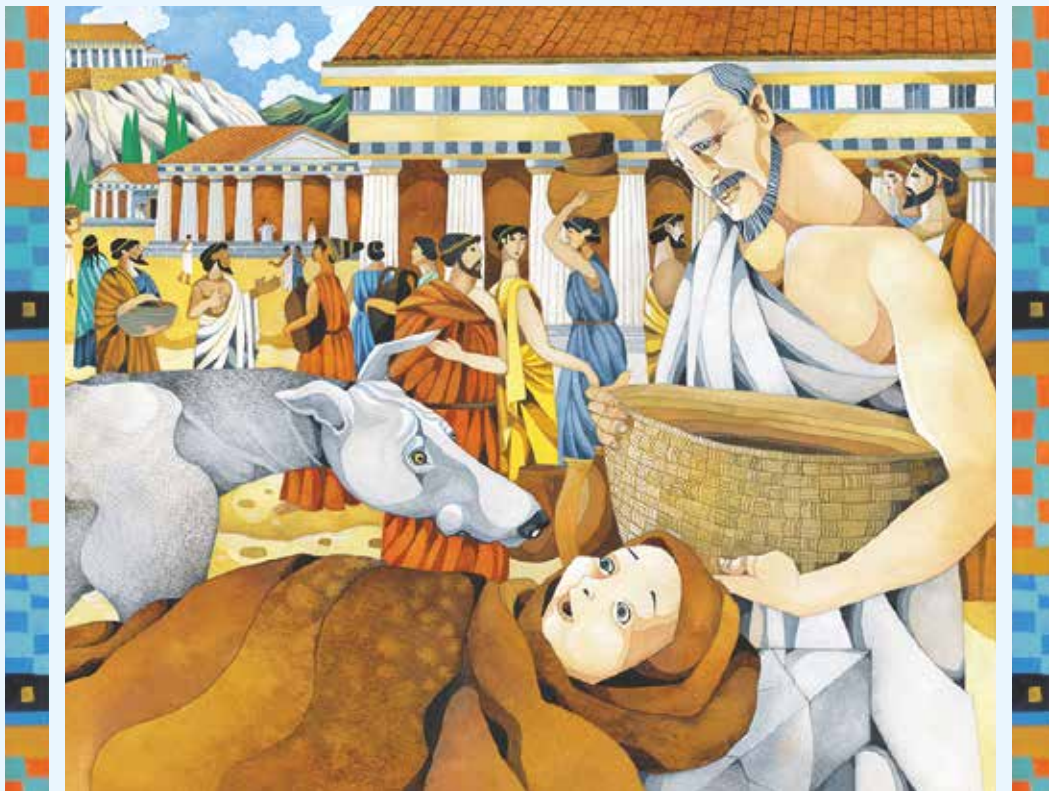
Nearly a hundred years ago, archaeologists discovered the skeletons of hundreds of babies at the bottom of a well close to the Agora (the market-place) in the city of Athens. A scientist who examined the skeletons thought that midwives (women who help mothers to have their babies) disposed of the small bodies down this disused well because it was hidden down an alley near the agora.

Ψ **Word hunt 1: Archaeology** (also spelled archeology) comes from two Greek words meaning 'the study of ancient things'.

Ψ **Word hunt 2: Doric.** The Dorians, at first invaders, became part of the Greek population. 'Doric' here means a style of coins produced in different parts of Greece, including Corinth, around the time of this story.

A slave is a person kept as a servant or worker, who receives no pay, is not allowed to leave, and is considered the property of someone else, like a piece of furniture. Slaves could be bought and sold. In Ancient Greece, it was as normal for a family to have at least one or two slaves as it would be today to have a car. They did not think it was wrong to have slaves.

Most slaves were not Greek. Greek slave-merchants used to raid countries to the north, capture large numbers of inhabitants and sell them as slaves.



Write: Nowadays we consider slavery to be very wrong. Write a letter to the Ancient Greeks telling them what you think about using children as slaves.

All actors, even street performers, wore masks. This was to show that the character being depicted was more important than who was playing it.

Make: Actor masks for Sad, Happy, Angry characters.

Talk about: How acting with a mask on is different, both for the actor and the audience.

Create: Your own very short play for three characters to perform with masks.

PAGES 11-12

Christina shows us how the slave-girl slept in an out-house with the animals. Yet this girl was luckier than many. Nobody cared if slaves were ill-treated or beaten by their masters.




PAGES 13-14

Milos is the girl's owner. What do you think Milos, the great athlete, might be saying to his son Dion, who prefers reading to running?

❧ What kind of fruit might be on the tree? (*see next page*)





❧ Find out about: Homer and his “old songs”. They are still recited and read today.

 **Clothes** – Girls and boys wore the same kind of short tunic with a string or cloth girdle round the waist. Milos (page 18) wears a one-piece garment called a chiton, and sometimes also a cloak, called a himation. It has a patterned edge because he is rich and can pay for an expensive cloak.



Clothes were made of linen for summer and wool for winter.
 The Ancient Greeks didn't wear underclothes, or socks.
 Everyone wore the same kind of clothes, in the same way. That's not like today.

 **Talk about:** The Greeks did not know about fashions in clothes. Do we need them?

 **Games:** Children have been playing the same sort of games for thousands of years. We know that Ancient Greek children played ball games, hide and seek, blind man's buff, marbles, and lots of other games still played today.



Milos's house is built around an inner courtyard. Did it have an upstairs?

Did Greek houses have doors?

They did not have glass windows, but windows on the sides facing the sun would have shutters.


What else is going on in the courtyard?


Christina keeps us guessing here, just like the girl. Is she going to be punished for playing with the Master's son?

Why does he look at her teeth and ask her to do cartwheels?

Where is he going to take them tomorrow?




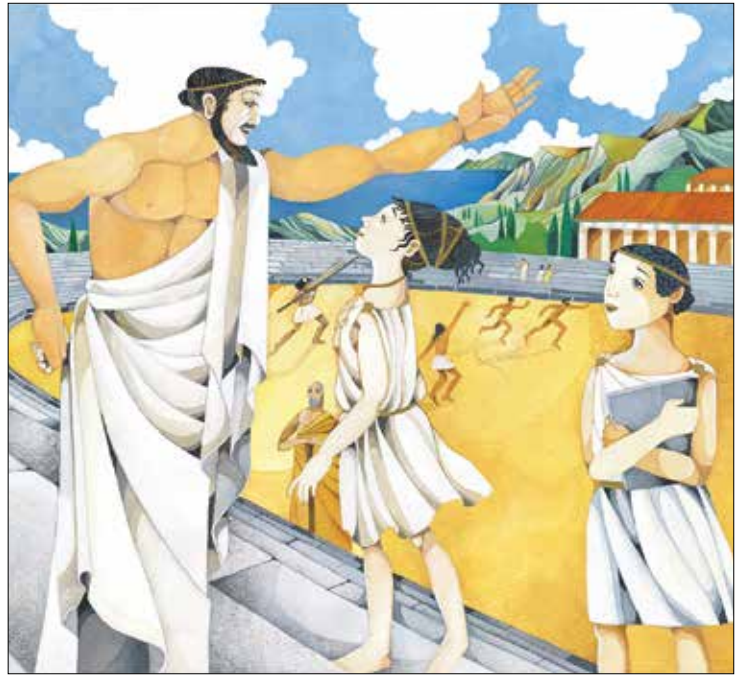
 **Word hunt 1:** Tablets. Writing was done on wooden boards covered in wax, which could be written on with a sharp wooden or bone stick. A flat scraper was used to smooth the wax for new writing.

 **Word hunt 2:** Stylus. Our word stylus comes from the Latin word stilus, the pointed stick used to write on the tablet. We don't use it in that way any more. Can you find out what a stylus is used for nowadays?

PAGES 21-22

Sports and games were very important to the Ancient Greeks. They built large stadiums to use for holding competitions. They could also be used for training and practising.

 **Word hunt:** **Stadium** comes from a Greek word *stadion*, meaning a distance of about 100 yards. But we use it for the building around the track.




What four sports will the Corinthian girl train for? Are they the same as ones being practised in the stadium?

PAGES 23-24

Why is Dion surprised?
What is special about the Heraean Games?
How can you tell that the Corinthian girl likes the idea of taking part?

The Ancient Greeks believed that Hera was a female god, wife of Zeus, who was King of the gods. The Heraean Games were held in her honour.



 **Word hunt:** **Sparta**. Sparta was another Greek city (see map on page 34). It was famous for the harsh way its children were brought up, to make them tough and brave.

Can you find out more about Sparta? Would you have liked to be a young Spartan?

The scene here is Olympia.

In the centre is the Temple of Zeus. We are used to seeing ancient ruins as bare stone, but when they were new they were often brightly painted, and so were the decorations and statues.



✈ What can you find out about the famous international games called after Olympia.

✈ Can you name 10 or more of today's Olympic sports?

What is the signal for starting the race?
What do we use for this purpose nowadays?



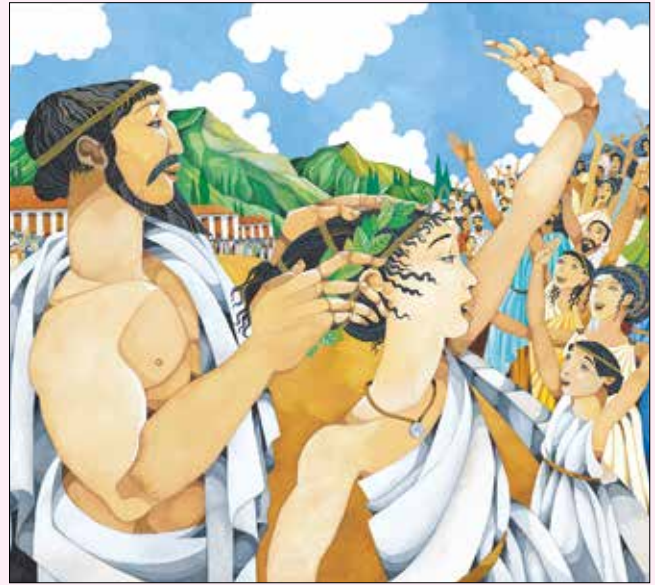
✂ **Do you know:** Christina describes the girl's speed as "like a jackal in flight". Jackals can run very fast, but do you know which is the fastest land animal?

And do you know which is the fastest animal of all?

PAGES 29-30

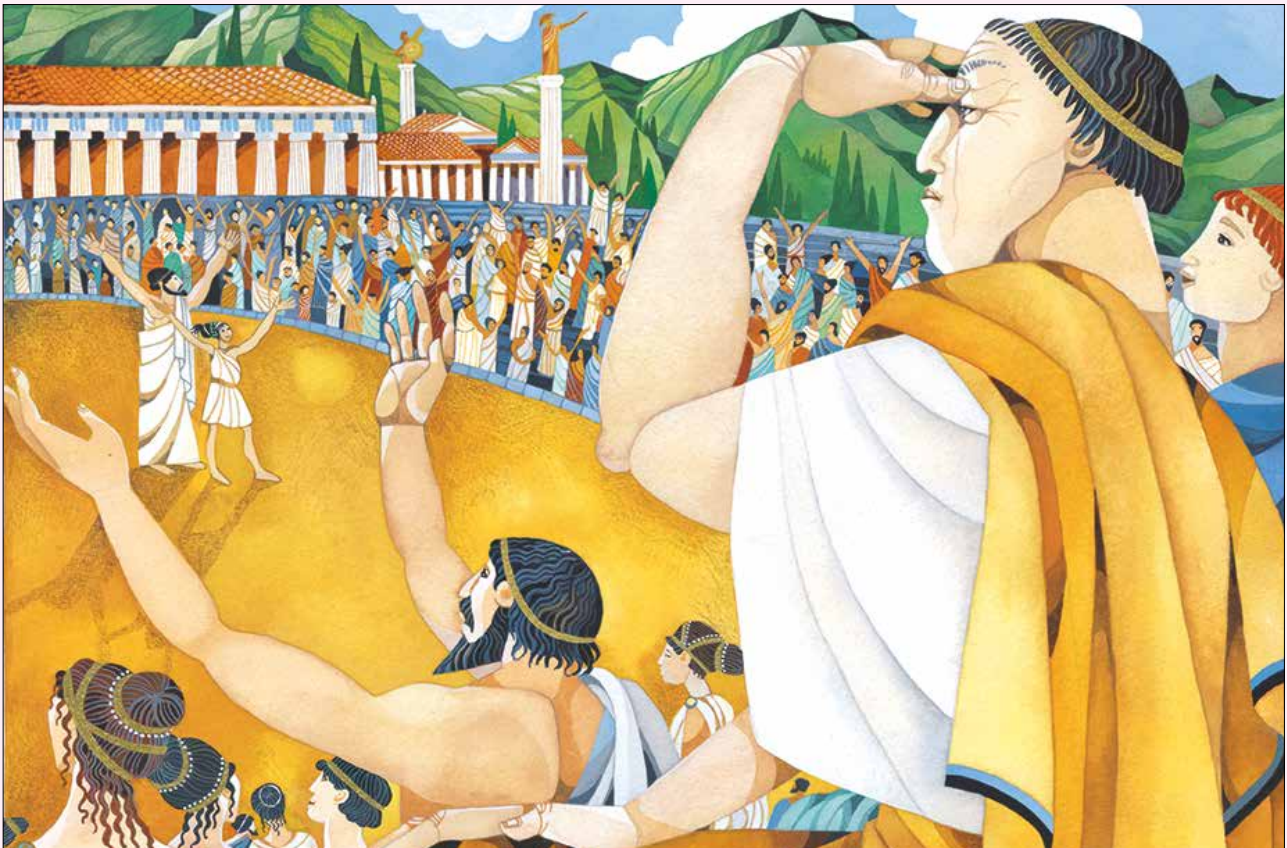
No longer “the Corinthian girl”, no longer a slave, she has a name, Chloris. If a master wished, he could free a slave, who would then have the same rights as other citizens. By adopting Chloris as his daughter, he will also ensure that she has a dowry (see page 6).

What are Chloris’s rewards for being champion?



PAGES 31-32

Christina brings the story to an end by reminding us of its beginning, when her father dumped his baby girl in the market place.




Hera was the Queen of the Greek gods and goddesses.

Can you find the names of any other Greek female gods? (Clue – see page 3)

Some historians believe that the Games also had another use for the Greeks. Girls normally stayed at home, but the presence of girls and unmarried women at the Games gave men the chance to look for possible wives for their sons, or themselves. And Hera's special concerns were marriage and motherhood.



 **Word hunt:** **Archaic** means 'belonging to an early time in history'. The little bronze figure was made sometime between 700 and 500 BCE – three thousand years ago. Perhaps just at the time when the Heraean Games began!

Why do you think Milos chose the name 'Chloris' for the Corinthian girl?

ACTIVITIES

🌀 Storytelling: Have you noticed how nearly every page ends in a way that makes you want to turn over to see what happens next? Look and see – this is one of the arts of the good story-teller.

🌀 Write your own story about a visit to the market-place (see pages 7-10). Write a review of the book, to say if you liked it (or didn't) and what you liked best, or didn't like so much. Don't forget to include the pictures.

Christina has done the illustrations to resemble the style of Ancient Greek art. Draw your own version of a Greek house, or of one of the scenes in the book.

🌀 Talk about what the book has told you about life in Ancient Greece. In some ways it's not so different from our own time – in other ways it's very different.



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