A [Spartan] father had no right to decide whether to rear his newly born son or not. He was obliged to take the baby to the elders of his tribe for inspection. If they were satisfied that he was strong and healthy, they gave it back to the father to be brought up; if not, they ordered it to be exposed [left outside to die]. A Spartiate’s son was nurtured by his parents only until he was seven years old. At that age he was removed from his family and, from his eighth to his twenty-first year, he was educated by the state according to a rigorous [military-like] discipline. This state-controlled education, or agoge, [“a-go-gee”] occupied a central place in the Spartan system.  

An important magistrate [official], the Warden of the Boys, was appointed to take charge of the agoge. His authority over the boys resembled that of a general over an army. He was assisted in the enforcement of discipline by a number of citizens called Whip-bearers.  

Immediately on his beginning the agoge, the seven-year old boy was enrolled in one of the ‘troops’. Each troop was captained by one of the boys, whose orders the rest had to obey. Only the rudiments [basics] of reading and writing were taught; instruction consisted for the most part in … obedience, bodily fitness, and courage to conquer in battle. At the age of twelve a boy’s regimen became even more severe…. Youths in the senior age-class of the agoge behaved like officers, organizing war-games for the boys and in the evening presiding in the mess [outside dining area]. Boys were encouraged to go out and steal food for the mess, but if caught stealing they were whipped. Athletic contests formed a large part of training in the agoge.  

Document Analysis  
1. How many years did a Spartan boy spend in the agoge?  

2. Is there evidence in this document to suggest that Spartan boys developed stronger attachments to their agoge troops than to their families? Explain.  

3. What Spartan values are suggested by this document?  

4. Judging from this document, what were the strengths of Spartan education?  

5. Judging from this document, what were the weaknesses of Spartan education?
Document E

Source: Xenophon, *Constitution of Sparta*, 5th century BCE.

[Lycurgus] believed motherhood to be the most important function of freeborn women. Therefore, in the first place, he insisted on physical training for the female no less than for the male sex: moreover, he instilled races and trials of strength for women competitors as for men, believing that if both parents are strong they produce more vigorous offspring.

Source: Plutarch *Lycurgus*, circa 75 CE.

In order to [encourage] the good education of their youth, [Lycurgus] went so far back as to take into consideration their very conception at birth, by regulating their marriages…. He ordered the maidens to exercise themselves with wrestling, running, throwing the quoit*, and casting the dart, to the end that the fruit they conceived might, in strong and healthy bodies, take firmer root and find better growth… and might be the more able to undergo the pains of child-bearing.

*A quoit is an iron ring tossed like a horseshoe. A dart is a javelin.*

A bronze statue from the 5th century BCE depicting a female Spartan dancer.

Document Analysis

1. How would you describe the figure shown in the photograph?

2. According to both Xenophon and Plutarch, what was the purpose for training Spartan girls to wrestle, run, and throw?

3. Judging from this document, what were the strengths of Spartan education?

4. Judging from this document, what were the weaknesses of Spartan education?