Document C

Source: Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, circa 75 CE.

Note: Plutarch [PLU-tark] was an acclaimed Greek historian who wrote *Parallel Lives*, a series of biographies of famous Greeks and Romans. In this excerpt from his biography of Lycurgus, Plutarch writes about the Spartan kryptea [crip-TEE-a], a kind of secret police or special-operations unit. It was manned by senior members of the agoge, who were 18 to 21 year old. The actions of the kryptea might have served as a training exercise and as a way to keep the helots in line.

At intervals the magistrates [law-enforcement officers] would send out [the kryptea], the most sensible of the young Spartiates into various parts of the country. They carried daggers and as much food as was necessary, but nothing else. By day they scattered into obscure places, where they hid themselves and kept quiet; but at night they descended upon the highways and slaughtered any helots they caught. Often too they made their way across the fields and killed the strongest and best of the helots.... I believe that cruel acts of this sort were first practiced ... after the earthquake when the helots ... rebelled [in 464 BCE], devastated their territory, and threatened the city [Sparta] with considerable danger.

Document Analysis

1. What was the kryptea?

2. Who were the helots? (See Background Essay)

3. According to Plutarch, what was the Spartans' justification for killing helots?

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

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