

Gates of Fire
Discussion Questions

1. The book is filled with details about how Spartan warriors were selected and trained from birth. Give specific examples of these training techniques and explain what they were meant to accomplish.
2. Xeo's early life serves as the backdrop for the story. What people and events during this time period influenced him the rest of his life?
3. The Battle of Antirhion was a precursor to the Battle of Thermopylae. How did Alexandros and Xeo end up there? What did they observe about how the Spartans fight? What punishment did they receive when they returned to Sparta?
4. The Spartans, and all Greeks, believed deeply in their gods. What evidence did you see of this in the book? Can you draw any contrasts or comparisons with the mono-theistic (one God) culture of today—especially when it comes to war?
5. Although they played a seemingly subservient role to the men, the Spartan women had their own power in that culture. How was this demonstrated?
6. Polynikes, Dienekes, and Alexandros were all leaders in their own ways. How would you characterize their differing strengths?
7. Xeo, Suicide, and Rooster were all helots. Each had a distinct personality that determined how they served their masters. Describe. How were helots crucial to the Spartan culture?
8. Leonidas was the consummate leader. What qualities did he exhibit that made his men so loyal to him?
9. The Spartans lived in a world in which community defined the individual. Contrast that with our culture today, in which the individual rights often trump community well being. What are the plusses and minuses of this?
10. The book addresses one of the central mysteries of war: how warriors stand their ground to fight against all natural instincts to retreat to safety. Why do warriors fight and what do they fight for? Consider also the psychology behind the social bonding that develops in small, competitive groups, (perhaps best exemplified by the military and sports, but evident elsewhere as well).