

Name _____

Date _____

Marcus Aurelius

Marcus Aurelius was a Roman Emperor who lived in the 2nd century CE. He died when he was 58 years old, and his rule as emperor of Rome was one in which many wars were fought and Rome suffered plagues and illnesses. As a youth, he was tutored by the best teachers. One of them, Fronto, became his best friend, and Marcus Aurelius often wrote many letters to Fronto. Marcus Aurelius became emperor in 161 CE and worked to reform Roman laws and government. He is known for his book *Meditations*, which he wrote some time in the 170's.

The *Meditations* is a short book that Aurelius wrote down ideas in regarding ethics, government, war, and philosophy. Aurelius wrote the book in Greek, and it is a famous book that many students study even in the present day. It has been translated into English and many other languages. The ideas that Aurelius presented had concepts that he shared with a group of thinkers called the Stoics. The Stoics believed that self-control was the most important aspect of happiness. They argued that freedom and good behavior would promote happiness for people. They also believed that living in accord with nature was the best way to have self-control. By this is meant that they thought everything was controlled by fate and humans were happiest when they did not try to behave in a way that goes against fate.

In his book, Aurelius says that when a person wakes up in the morning, they should remind themselves that throughout the day they will meet people who are kind and pleasant and also people who are mean and liars. He thought people would not be surprised when they met different people and would not get upset and keep a calm mind if they understood this concept. It would show people how to have self-control. By having self-control, they would live in accord with nature.

Aurelius believed that freedom and justice were very important in a government. He argued that laws were important, but they should be fair and equal for all people. He argued that slaves and servants should be treated justly. Rome was a state that was ruled by the emperor and the senate, but Aurelius recognized that the best idea of government was one that, above all, respected the rights of the people that it governed. These ideas of fairness and justice were very common to all of the Stoic thinkers.

Aurelius' son was named Commodus. Even though Commodus spent a lot of time with his father during the various wars, he was very different than his father. Commodus took his father's place as ruler at the age of nineteen after Marcus Aurelius died. Commodus was a harsh and simple-minded emperor. Aurelius writes of his family in endearing terms, but his tone always showed that he was disappointed.

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Marcus Aurelius (Cont'd)

Most of Aurelius' writings show that he believed that life was a struggle, and that it was a difficult thing to live successfully. He thought that by living a life according to the Stoic thinkers, he would be able to be a good emperor even though Rome was dealing with many difficulties. He had hoped to help Rome prosper by reforming the government and its laws and by teaching his son to be patient and kind. Unfortunately, Rome suffered losses in the wars led by Aurelius, and his son was unable to follow his father's teachings. Aurelius was later viewed by Renaissance thinkers as the last of the good Roman leaders because of his thoughts on justice. Aurelius' thoughts survived in his writings and provided scholars many concepts to consider. Rome did not flourish after his death.

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Marcus Aurelius Questions

True or False:

- ___ 1. Marcus Aurelius was a Roman Emperor who lived in the 2nd century CE.
- ___ 2. Aurelius' son was named Cicero.
- ___ 3. Marcus Aurelius and his son were very much alike.
- ___ 4. Most of Aurelius' writings show that he believed that life was a struggle.
- ___ 5. Aurelius' rule as emperor of Rome was one in which many wars were fought and Rome suffered plagues and illnesses.
- ___ 6. Aurelius had hoped to help Rome prosper by reforming the government and its laws.

Fill Ins:

- 7. Marcus Aurelius believed that self-control was the most important aspect of _____.
- 8. Marcus Aurelius' best friend was named _____.
- 9. _____ is a short book that Aurelius wrote.
- 10. Aurelius believed that freedom and _____ were very important in a government.
- 11. The ideas that Aurelius presented had concepts that he shared with a group of thinkers called the _____.
- 12. Aurelius was the emperor of _____.

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Marcus Aurelius Answers

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