**Excerpt from a Funeral Oration by Pericles**

Throughout history, leaders have given speeches to communicate news and ideas and to persuade people. Studying speeches helps us understand the government, politics, and events of another period. The following excerpt from a speech by the Athenian leader Pericles was intended to honor citizens who had died defending Athens.

**Background**

Pericles led Athens from 460 to 429 BC. He was a strong, patriotic leader with a reputation for honesty. He was also a gifted public speaker. Some people said that when he spoke, his words were like thunder and lightning. In the winter of 431 to 430 BC., Pericles made a funeral oration. In his speech, in addition to praising the soldiers who had died, he praised Athens and expressed his views on democracy. Part of his speech is shown above. At that time, the idea that all citizens could have an equal say in laws and government was a radical one

**Primary Source**

“Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses….

Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well…we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all….”

Please answer the following questions after you do the reading:

1. How did Pericles define democracy?

2. What did he say about the rights and responsibilities of all the citizens of Athens?