Apology (the text)

*Apology* purports to be an accurate account by Plato of Socrates' trial before an Athenian jury in 399 BCE. The text consists of three speeches that were given by Socrates during this trial.

Trials began with the prosecutors presenting their case against the accused before the Athenian jury. In this trial Meletus argued that Socrates was guilty of corrupting the youth of Athens and committing acts of impiety. It is possible that Anytus spoke as well. We have no actual record of what was said during this speech. Speeches were timed by water clocks similar to the ones on the right.

**Speech 1: Defense** After the prosecution finished presenting its side, the defense had a chance to respond to the charges. The *Apology* begins with the defense speech by Socrates. He began by noting that he was unfamiliar with the law court since he spent most of the time in the agora (17a-18a). He observed that he really had two sets of accusers (old and new) and that he feared the old accusers more (18b-20c) so he would deal with them first. He responded to the charges of the old accusers by telling a story about the oracle of Delphi (20d-24b). He then turned to Meletus' charge of corrupting the youth (24c-25e) and impiety (26a-28a). Socrates described his important mission to Athens (28b-30d) and compared himself to a gadfly (30e-31c). He concluded his defense by discussing his integrity (32d-33b), his followers (33c-34b), and his family (34c-35d).

After Socrates finished his defense, the jury then voted whether he was guilty of corrupting the youth and committing acts of impiety. The jury found him guilty, so the trial moved to the second stage for sentencing. At the right are ballots used by jurors - open centers meant guilty and closed acquittal. Again, the prosecutor went first, so Meletus argued that Socrates should be given the death sentence. We have no actual record of this speech.

**Speech 2: Penalty:** Socrates had to respond by proposing an alternate penalty, and the jury had to choose between the two. Socrates facetiously argued that since his philosophical activity actually benefitted the state, justice required that he be given some good thing such as being treated like an Olympic hero (35e-37a). He then proposed that he, with the help of his wealthy friends, pay a fine (37b-38c).

**Speech 3: After the Trial:** After hearing both sentencing proposals the jury sided in favor with Meletus. The trial was officially over. However, Socrates, knowing that he was about to die soon, had some final words for the jurors. He told those who voted to kill him that they were doing a great injustice (38d-39e). To those who would have acquitted him, he said that he was not afraid of dying but looked forward to continuing his philosophical questioning with the heroes in Hades (40a-42a).
The title of the *Apology* can be confusing to students. The initial impression some have is that Socrates is being apologetic about his beliefs or that he is apologizing to the Athenians for what he did. Nothing could be further from the truth. The word *apology* refers to a defense of a person (or institution) against charges brought against that person. In this work, Socrates has been charged with corruption of the youth and impiety. The *Apology* is Socrates' response why he should be vindicated of these charges.