

# The Olympic Games

## Pre-reading

Questions: What do you know about the Olympic Games?  
What would you like to learn about them?

Definitions: Contradict – to say or mean the opposite of; untrue or wrong  
Encourage – to help bring about or make happen



## Reading\*

17 The first Olympic Games took place over 3,000 years ago in Greece. The Greeks believed that they  
34 **honored** the gods by using and displaying their athletic abilities. Every four years a month-long festival  
53 was held in a large city. These celebrations were so important that during the month of the festival all  
fighting among the people stopped.

58 The festival that our modern Olympic Games are patterned after was held at the foot of Mount  
75 Olympus, the peak that was believed to be the home of the gods. This festival was one of the largest and  
96 most important to the Greeks because of its location and religious purpose. To show further honor to the  
114 gods, the Greeks built a temple and very large stadium in which to hold the Games.

130 During the early Games, the events included only a few foot races. As time went on, more were  
148 added. This growth continued in events as well as participants. At first, only male Greek citizens could  
165 compete. Later it was opened to women and foreigners as well. Pageants, parades, feasts, and religious  
181 rituals were added to the Games.

187 The Roman Empire conquered Greece around 100 B.C. As a result, there was an Olympic decline  
203 for several years. The festival lost its religious significance as money became the center of the Games. In  
221 393 A.D. the Roman emperor declared an end to the Olympics because of its contradiction with Christianity.

238 In 1889 the idea of the Olympic Games returned. A French educator named Baron Pierre de  
254 Coubertin felt that by encouraging athletics for the youth, people of the world would come to have a better  
273 understanding of one another. This in turn would promote peace. In June of 1894 a group of  
290 representatives from 12 countries met and formed the International Olympic Committee (the IOC).

303 The IOC decided to organize an international sports competition, much like those Games of ancient  
318 Greece. It would take place every four years in different cities around the world. The first modern Olympic  
336 Games were held in Athens, Greece, in 1896. Two hundred eighty-five people from thirteen countries  
351 participated. Since then the games have been held every four years with the exception of the years during  
369 the World Wars (1916, 1940, and 1944).

376 These first Games consisted of only summer sports. Winter sports were not included until 1908  
391 when ice skating was a first time event. Both ice skating and hockey were part of the 1920 Games.  
410 People enjoyed these winter events so much that it was deemed worthy to organize a separate Olympics for  
428 winter sports. In 1924 the first Winter Games were held in France where three hundred athletes were  
445 represented from sixteen nations.

449 The modern Olympics represent an international sporting friendship. This is seen in the symbolic  
463 element of the five interlocking circles that represent the five continents. The colors used on the flag are  
481 found at least once in all nations' flags. The heart of the Olympic Games is the uniting of countries in  
501 friendship to celebrate and honor the finest Olympians from each country.

512 \*Revised selection – original text authored by Ressa Budge. Reprinted with permission by Deborah Byrnes, Ph.D., Utah State University.

## Understanding

1. Why do you think someone chose to call the Games the “Olympics”? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Where and when were the first modern Olympic Games? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What does the word **honor** mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. Why is it (the word honor) used in this reading about the Olympics? \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. In what years were the modern Olympics not held? Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Compare and contrast the first Olympic Games to the modern ones. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_
7. Where were the first Winter Games? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Do you prefer the Summer or Winter Games? Why? What are some of your favorite sports to watch during the Olympics?

Option C: What do you think of our current Olympic Games? Do they really promote peace and a greater understanding among people?

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