

Ancient Greece - Olympic Games

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Do you like sports? Or maybe you like watching sport games on TV or in a stadium? Probably, you know that every four years the best athletes from all over the world get together to compete in the Olympic Games. Perhaps you also know where this important event takes place, or where the games came from, and why they are called the Olympics?



² The home country of the Olympic Games is Greece. Ancient Greeks loved sport and most cities in Ancient Greece had public gymnasiums where people gathered to train and relax. One Greek city was known to be a very important center of athletics. The city was called Olympia and the games, held there every four years, were so important in Greek life that they were used as the basis for the Greek calendar.

³ In the Greek system of telling time, the period between two Olympic Games was called Olympiad. All events were dated from 776 BC--the beginning of the first known Olympiad. Can you figure out how to correspond this Greek system of telling time with the European calendar, the one that we use now? The first year of the 195th Olympiad is the first year of Christ--the first year AD!

⁴ All sport games in Ancient Greece, including those in Olympia, were part of religious festivals. They were usually held to honor the gods. The games in Olympia honored Zeus--the king of gods and all men. On the first day of the Olympics, sacrifices of grain, wine, and lambs were made to Zeus. The events of the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece included races, the long jump, throwing the discus and javelin, boxing, wrestling, chariot races, and horse races, as well as poetry and drama competitions.

⁵ The Olympic Games were so important that all the wars between the cities would stop. Special people--heralds--would travel all over Greece and pronounce the beginning of the Olympics. All the military actions had to be stopped so that people could journey safely to the Games. Unfortunately, people of the 20th century did not have that much respect for the Games. Instead of stopping wars, the Games themselves were stopped by both World Wars.

⁶ All athletes competing in the ancient Olympic Games were naked. The word "naked" in Greek is "gymnos," and this is where such words as gymnasium, gymnastics, and gymnast came from. In Ancient Greece, to be naked was not anything to be ashamed of. It was a way for the athletes to show how hard they were training and practicing.

⁷ All Greek men who were free citizens and had not committed murder or heresy had the right to take part in the Olympic Games. Women were banned not only from competing but even watching the games! If a woman was found in a stadium she had to be killed by being thrown off a cliff.

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<p>1. The home country of the Olympic Games is _____.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Greece</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B France</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Egypt</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Italy</p>	<p>2. In Ancient Greece, sport games were popular only in Olympia.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>
<p>3. In Ancient Greece, Olympiad was _____.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A A period of time between two Olympic Games</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B A kind of a foot race</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C The god of athletics</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D A mountain</p>	<p>4. Which Greek god did the games in Olympia honor?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>5. The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece often started wars.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>	<p>6. The word "gymnos" in Greek means _____.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Athlete</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Sport</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Naked</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Game</p>
<p>7. All citizens of Ancient Greece--men and women--were allowed to compete in the Olympic Games.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>	<p>8. In Ancient Greece, the prize for the Olympic Games winner was _____.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A A gold crown</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Cash</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C A gold medal</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D A garland of olive leaves</p>

There were no cash prizes at the Olympics. The winners of the games received only garlands of olive leaves, but to be crowned meant life-long fame. However, because the winners brought such honor to their cities, they were sometimes given money when they came back home, or even free meals for life! Poets wrote poems honoring the winners and sculptors created their images in stone to put in the main squares of the cities.

The Olympic Games were stopped in 394--the 293rd Olympiad--by the Theodosius I because he viewed the games as pagan rites. The history of the modern Olympic Games begins in the late 19th century thanks to the efforts of the French Baron Pierre De Coubertin and the Greek Dimitrios Vikelas. The first modern Olympic Games took place in Athens, Greece in 1896. Different countries have hosted the games since then. In 2004, after almost 2,800 years since their beginning, the Olympic Games will be hosted by the city of Athens, back to their home country.