

Then—The Ancient Games

The idea of the Olympics is a very old one. The first games were held in Greece in 776 BC. That's more than 2500 years ago!

The ancient games were a symbol of peace, just as they are today. But they were also important for religious reasons. In fact, the Olympic Games were held to honor Zeus. He was the most important of all the Greek gods.

The games get their name from Mount Olympus. The people of ancient Greece believed the gods lived on the mountain. They built temples to them near the foot of the mountain. And this is where they held their games.

There was an Olympic competition every four years. Even when the country was at war, the fighting would stop when it was time for the games. Back then there was no e-mail or telephones. There weren't any airplanes or cars. So spreading the word about the upcoming games was hard. Men would run from city to city to tell the people.

Each city got together a team of its finest athletes. But only men were allowed to compete. And they had to be citizens of Greece. The athletes would all make the long trip to Mount Olympus. They would meet in the stadium where the games were to take place.

At first, there was only one Olympic event—the footrace. But more and more sports were added. Before long, there were many events. These included wrestling, boxing, horse racing and the pentathlon, a five-sport event. The sports of the pentathlon were the sprint, long jump, javelin hurl, discus throw, and wrestling.

Winning athletes were crowned with wreaths made from olive branches. They were thought of as heroes by the Greek people. In fact, poets wrote long poems about them!

The Olympic Games went on for hundreds of years. But in 394 AD, Greece was conquered by Rome. The emperor of Rome put an end to the games. It would be a long, long time until the next Olympics.

The Olympics

Then and Now



Now—The Modern Games

If it weren't for one man, we might not have the Olympics today. That man was a French baron named Pierre de Coubertin.

When de Coubertin was young, archaeologists discovered the site of the ancient Olympic Games. De Coubertin was very interested in this discovery. He thought it would be a wonderful thing if the Olympics could start again. But he wanted the athletes to come from many nations, not just one.

The baron thought about his idea for years. Finally, in 1892, he tried to set things up. He gave a talk at a meeting of the French Athletic Sports Union. He told the members of the group about his idea for a modern Olympics. And he told them how such an event could help nations understand one another and get along.

The Sports Union didn't go along with de Coubertin's idea at first. But he kept on working and talking. In 1894, he gave another talk. And this time everyone agreed. The Olympic Games would take place once more.

The first modern Olympic Games were held in 1896. They took place in Athens, Greece, not far from Mount Olympus. There were 285 athletes in the competition. They came from 13 different countries. And about 100,000 people were there to watch.

The Olympic Games have grown steadily since that time. Millions of people will watch the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia. Many more will view the games on television. Thousands of athletes from more than 100 countries will compete.

It's plain to see that Pierre de Coubertin's dream lives on.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class Period: _____

Then The Olympic Games Now

Contrast - Different

1. Who-Gender

2. Why

3. How

4. Where

5. What prize

Same

1. Who

2. Where

3. Prize

Contrast - Different

1. Who-Gender

2. Why

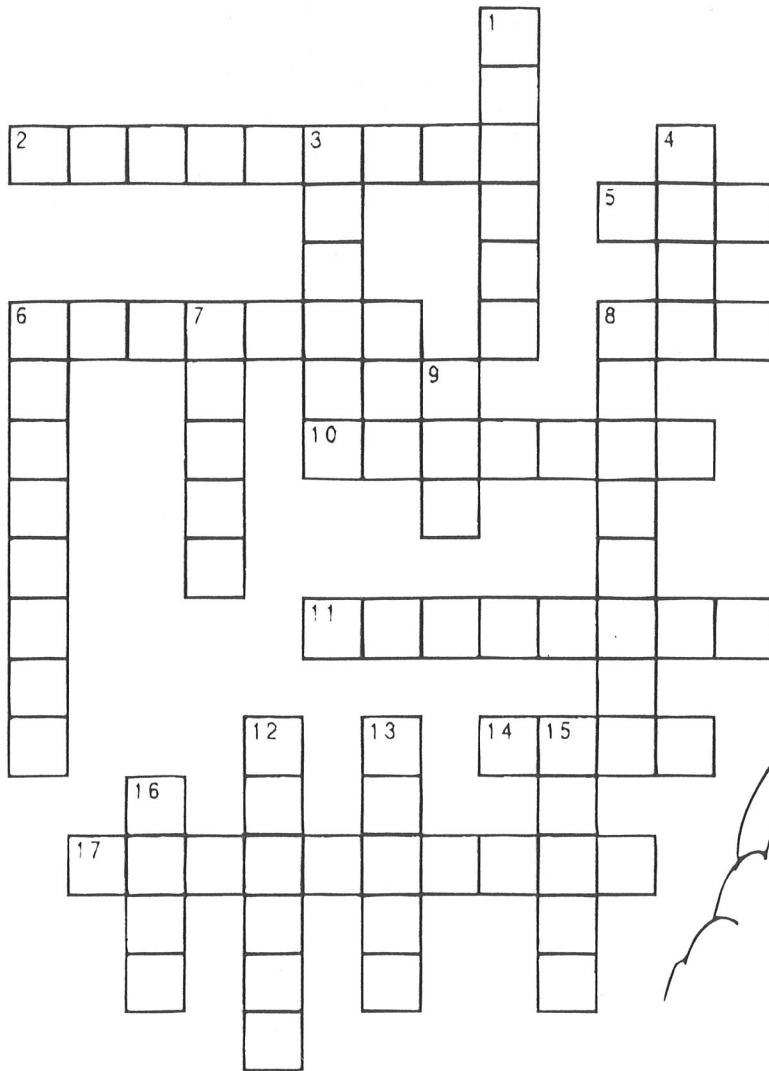
3. How

4. Where

5. What prize

The Olympics

Then and Now



Word Box

along
France
mountain
Rome
thirteen
Athens
Greece
olive
stadium
war
Australia
many
peace
television
Zeus
footrace
men
poems
temples

Look in the word box to find the best word to fit each clue. Then write the words where they belong on the puzzle.

Across

2. The 2000 Olympic Games will be held in _____.
5. Long ago, Olympic champions often had _____ written about them.
6. The ancient Greeks built _____ to honor their gods.
8. Only _____ could compete in the ancient Olympics.
10. Many Olympic events are held in a _____.
11. At first, the _____ was the only Olympic event.
14. Today athletes from _____ nations compete in the Olympics.
17. In 2000, many people will see the Olympics on _____.

Down

1. Baron de Coubertin came from _____.
3. The first games of the modern Olympics were held in _____, Greece.
4. The ancient Olympics ended when Greece was conquered by _____.
6. At the first modern Olympics, the athletes came from _____ different counties.
7. The Olympics have always been a symbol of _____.
8. The ancient Greeks thought the gods lived on a _____.
9. The Greeks held their Olympics every four years, even when they were at _____.
12. The Olympics started in ancient _____.
13. Olympic athletes were once crowned with _____ branches.
15. Baron de Coubertin hoped the Olympics would help countries get _____.
16. The ancient Olympics were held to honor _____.