

Ancient Olympics!

In History, we have been looking at the impact Ancient Greece had on us today and asking why we study it. An aspect of this the children could look into at home is the Olympics – especially with the Olympics coming to Japan in 2020!

I would love children to present information about the Olympics, comparing back in 776BC to today. They could do this in lots of ways – a poster, drawing pictures, PowerPoint or writing about it.

For those who are feeling more confident, my question to you is: why did the world 'bring back' the Olympics in 1896? What is it about the Ancient Olympics that has made people decide that they want to hark back to it?

Other resources worth investigating:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z87tn39/articles/z36j7ty>

<https://www.olympic.org/ancient-olympic-games>

Information from Ducksters.com:

The Greeks started the Olympic Games almost 3000 years ago in 776 BC. They were held nearly every four years for over a thousand years until they were stopped in 393 AD.

Who competed in the Ancient Olympic games?

In order to participate, athletes had to be a free man (no slaves) who spoke Greek. There may have also been a rule about age. Apparently they wanted the athletes to be youthful, or at least youthful looking. From what we know, athletes were supposed to only be men, however, there are records of at least one woman winning an event, probably as an owner in a chariot race. Before the start of the games, athletes also had to take a vow to Zeus that they had been training for ten months.

The winners of the games were considered heroes. They got olive branches for winning, but also became famous. Sometimes they received large sums of money from their home town.

Where were the games held?

The Olympic Games were held in Olympia, hence the name Olympics. They were held there because the gods lived on Mount Olympus and the games were in honor of the king of the gods, Zeus. Athletes would travel to Olympia from many different Greek city-states and sometimes from far away Greek colonies to compete.



Ancient Olympia by Pierers Universal-Lexikon

Ancient Olympic Events

The original Olympics had fewer events than what we have at the modern Olympics today.

At the first Olympics there was only a single event. It was called the stadion and was a running race that went the length of the stadium, or around 200 meters. It wasn't until the 14th Olympics that they added in a second event. It was another running event that was one lap around the stadium; around 400 meters.

More events were added over the next several Olympics. These events included more running races of different lengths, wrestling, chariot racing, boxing, and the pentathlon. The pentathlon combined the total scores of five events: long jump, discus throw, javelin throw, a stadion race, and wrestling.

Some of the events had similar names to events we have today, but had different rules and requirements. For example, in the long jump, jumpers used hand weights to help propel their bodies forward. Also, boxing and wrestling were very dangerous events with few rules. In boxing you could hit the opponent while they were down and the match didn't stop until one fighter gave up or died. It wasn't a good idea to kill your opponent, however, as the dead boxer was given the victory.

Politics and Religion

Religion played a big part in the games. Eventually the games lasted five days with the first and last day devoted to honouring the gods. One hundred oxen were sacrificed to Zeus during the games. Politics played a role in the games as well. During the games a truce was observed between warring city-states. Athletes were allowed to pass through enemy territory to get to the games.