

THE OLYMPIC GAMES

THE ANCIENT OLYMPICS

The first ancient Olympic Games took place in Greece nearly three thousand years ago in 776 BC. They were held in the religious sanctuary of Olympia, a rich land surrounded by olive trees.

Initially, the ancient Olympics were organised as part of a religious festival to honour the leader of the Greek gods, Zeus. He was the god of the sky and lived on Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece.

In 392 AD, the Olympic Games were suspended until 1500 years later.

The Modern Olympics

In 1896, Pierre de Coubertin, a French educator and historian, believed that coming together to play sports would encourage peace among the world's countries. He launched the first modern Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, in 1896.

Pierre also designed the Olympic rings. The five rings represent the five continents that originally participated in the Games.

The modern Olympics is the largest sporting event in the world. It is held every four years.



EVENTS AND REWARDS

At the start of the ancient Olympics, only men who spoke Greek were allowed to participate. They ran short, straight 200 metre foot races that were wide enough for twenty men to run at once. This was to keep them fit for the intensity of war. Eventually, other individual events were added to the ancient Olympics. Team events were only introduced at the start of the modern Olympics.

During the ancient Olympics, there was only ever one winner who received a wreath of olives as a prize and a statue built in his honour. The olive leaves were taken from the sacred Olympia olive trees near the temple of the Greek god, Zeus.

Today, athletes are rewarded with a gold, silver or bronze medal for achieving a first, second or third place when competing in one of the sporting events.

Participation of Women

During the ancient Olympics, women were not allowed to participate in the events and married women were not allowed to attend the Games. A separate event was created for women called Heraia, dedicated to the wife of Zeus.

Women are able to attend the modern Olympics and participate in a range of sporting events.

THE OLYMPIC TORCH

As part of a modern Olympic tradition, an Olympic torch is lit in Olympia. The flame is then passed on from torch to torch until it reaches the location of the games.

During the opening ceremony, the flame from the torch is used to light a cauldron at the stadium of the host city to symbolise the start of the Games and peace between countries. The cauldron stays alight for the duration of the games.

Name _____

Date _____

The Olympic Games

1. Why were the ancient Olympics initially organised?

2. How and when did the modern Olympics begin?

3. Why were athletes originally given olive wreaths as a reward?

4. Why do you think women were not allowed to participate in the ancient Olympics?

5. Why is a flame lit at the modern Olympics? Where does the flame come from?
