

The Ancient Greeks: The Olympic Games

In their leisure time, the Ancient Greeks were encouraged to take part in sports. This kept them fit and meant that they would be in good condition for fighting if war began. They also loved to compete and show off their strength and fitness. The word athlete is actually an ancient Greek word that means 'one who competes for a prize'.

The most important sporting contests were the Olympic Games. They started in 776 BC and were held every four years at Olympia. The period between the games was called an olympiad. The games were part of a religious ceremony honouring Zeus, who was the god of the sky and thunder.

The Olympic Games attracted athletes and spectators from all over the Ancient Greek Empire. Messengers were sent across Greece, so that as many people as possible knew about them. All wars had to cease until the games were over to allow people to travel in safety.

Female athletes were not allowed to take part. They had their own games in honour of the goddess Hera. Women were allowed to spectate but only if they were unmarried.

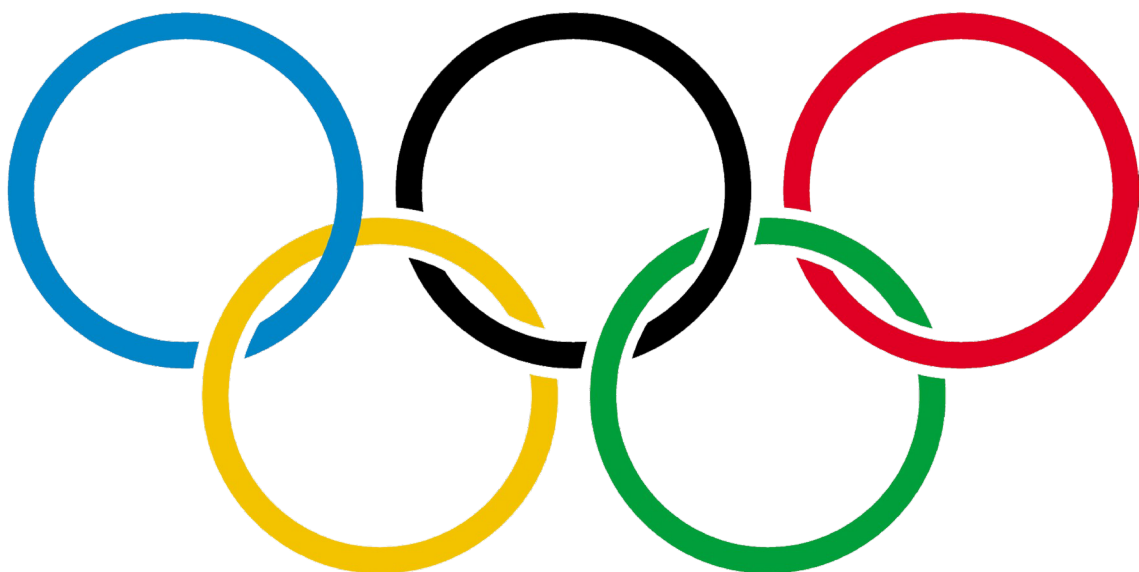
The games took place over five days and included horse and chariot racing, combat sports (wrestling and boxing), running races and athletics events such as discus, javelin and long jump. Whilst competing, the men would be absolutely naked. This was partly because the weather was so hot in Greece but also because the games celebrated the achievements of the human body.



The games were extremely competitive and there were no prizes for coming second or third. At the end of the games, winners were presented with a wreath of laurel leaves. After the games, winners would be welcomed back to their hometowns as heroes.

The Ancient Greek Games went ahead for over a thousand years and continued even when Greece was under Roman control. However, in 394 AD, Theodosius I, who was the Roman emperor at the time, put a stop to them. He didn't like that the games were in honour of the Greek god Zeus. He believed that everyone in the Roman empire should believe in just one god, the Christian god.

In 1896, the Olympics Games were brought back. The modern games are a celebration of sport around the whole world. There are many more sports in the modern Olympics and new sports are added every year. The games are still held every four years but they're hosted in different cities around the world. To honour the origins of the game, the first modern Olympics were held in Athens in Greece.



Questions

03

1 Which fact is true about the Ancient Greeks? (tick)

- ☐ They were all athletes.
- ☐ They only exercised so that they would be the best fighters.
- ☐ They played sports instead of fighting.
- ☐ They were encouraged to do sports to keep fit.

2 When were the first Olympic Games held?

3 Which God was honoured during the Olympic Games?

4 Which fact is true? (tick)

- ☐ No women were allowed to watch or spectate.
- ☐ Only unmarried women could compete, but all women could spectate.
- ☐ Women couldn't compete, but unmarried women could spectate.
- ☐ Women could compete at the Olympics, but they worshipped Hera.

5 How long did the games last? (tick)

- ☐ one day
- ☐ five days
- ☐ two weeks
- ☐ four years

6 What did an athlete get for coming second? (tick)

- ☐ nothing
- ☐ a silver medal
- ☐ a small wreath of laurel leaves
- ☐ a large wreath of laurel leaves

7 Which fact about the Olympic Games is true? (tick)

- ☐ When the Romans took over the Greek Empire, the games were stopped immediately.
- ☐ Theodosius I allowed the games to continue, but they were held in honour of the Christian god.
- ☐ The Olympic games continued even when the Greeks were no longer in charge of their empire.
- ☐ The Olympic games continued until 1896.

8 When were the first modern Olympic Games held?

9 Where were the first modern Olympic games held?

10 Draw three lines to match the facts about the ancient and modern games.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| ancient | • | • held in different cities around the world |
| modern | • | • held every four years |
| both Ancient and Modern | • | • held in Olympia |

Score:

Answers

A

1 Which fact is true about the Ancient Greeks?



They were encouraged to do sports to keep fit.

2 When were the first Olympic Games held?

776 BC

3 Which God was honoured during the Olympic Games?

Zeus

4 Which fact is true?



Women couldn't compete, but unmarried women could spectate.

5 How long did the games last?



five days

6 What did an athlete get for coming second?



nothing

7 Which fact about the Olympic Games is true?



The Olympic games continued even when the Greeks were no longer in charge of their empire.

8 When were the first modern Olympic Games held?

1896

9 Where were the first modern Olympic games held?

Athens

10 Draw three lines to match the facts about the ancient and modern games.

ancient - held in Olympia

modern - held in different cities around the world

both Ancient and Modern - held every four years