

The History of the Olympic Games

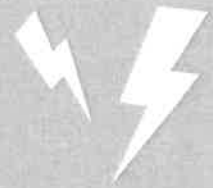


Thought to have started over 2,700 years ago in ancient Greece, the Olympic Games have a rich history but where did it all begin? Read on to find out about the first Games, how they ended and the resurfacing of the modern Olympic Games.

The First Olympic Games



It is believed that the first ancient Olympic Games were held in 776 BC. These Games took place in Olympia, Greece and were held every four years. Although sporting events played a large part, the main focus was as a religious ceremony to honour the king of the Greek gods, Zeus.



Zeus is said to have travelled to Olympia from his home in Mount Olympus in 1200 BC. He announced his visit by throwing his thunderbolt from Mount Olympus into Olympia. This became the setting for the first ancient Olympic Games.

As part of the festival, people would travel from all over Greece to visit the Temple of Zeus. The main event was the sacrifice of 100 oxen on an altar in honour of Zeus. The ashes of previously sacrificed oxen were collected over the years and formed the altar. By around AD 200, this was thought to be six metres high.

Ancient Olympic Events

Running

During the running events, competitors would run up and down a track that was 192 metres long. Despite being rebuilt several times, the track always stayed the same length. Some people believe that this is because 192 metres is how long the Greek hero, Hercules, could run on a single breath.

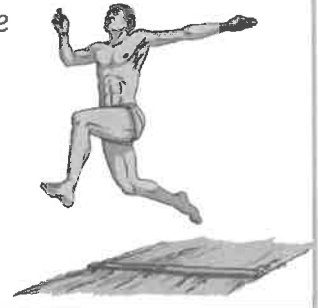
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Wrestling and Boxing

The wrestling and boxing matches seen at the ancient Olympic Games were more violent than those seen today. Competitors were expected to show that they had surrendered by raising a finger into the air. One of the most aggressive matches was known as pankration. In this match, the only rule was that you couldn't bite your opponent or poke them in the eye.

Long Jump

In this event, competitors would hold large weights (called halteres) in their hands and swing their arms around. This would propel them forward. A man playing a flute often accompanied the athletes; the music is thought to have helped them to accurately time their jump.



The Fall of the Ancient Olympic Games

When ancient Greece was invaded by the Roman Empire in the 2nd century BC, the Games continued. However, it is thought that the quality of the Games began to go downhill. In AD 67, a Roman emperor named Nero took part as a competitor in the chariot race (a dangerous race around a circular track on chariots led by horses). Although he fell off during the race, he still announced himself as the winner.

By AD 393, an emperor named Theodosius I had called for a ban of Pagan festivals. This meant that the ancient Olympic Games were cancelled after nearly 1,200 years.



The Modern Olympic Games

Around 1,500 years after the ancient games were cancelled, a French baron named Pierre de Coubertin wanted to promote physical education. He suggested the idea of holding an international athletics competition every four years just like the ancient Games in Olympia. Two years later, this idea was accepted and he started the International Olympic Committee.

The first modern Olympic Games were held in 1896 in Athens, Greece. 14 different countries competed in a total of 43 events. Since then, the modern Olympic Games have been held every four years. Throughout their history, the modern Games have only been cancelled or postponed a total of four times. Once in 1916 due to the First World War, in 1940 and 1944 due to the Second World War and again in 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Questions

1. Where did the first ancient Olympic games take place? Tick one.

- Athens
 Mount Olympus
 Olympia
 Rome

2. Draw **four** lines and match each event to the year that it is thought to have happened in.

Emperor Nero declared himself as the winner of the chariot race.

1200 BC

The ancient Olympic Games were cancelled.

776 BC

Zeus travelled to Olympia.

AD 67

The first ancient Olympic Games were held.

AD 393

3. Look at the section titled **The First Olympic Games**. Find and copy one word which means the same as **declared**.

4. In a pankration match, what was the only rule?

5. In which section would you find information about the ancient Olympic Games being cancelled?

6. Compare the ancient Olympic Games to the modern Olympic Games. How were they different?

7. Read the first paragraph beginning **Thought to have started...**
Explain why the author has chosen to include this paragraph.

8. Using 20 words or fewer, summarise what you have learnt about the modern Olympic Games.

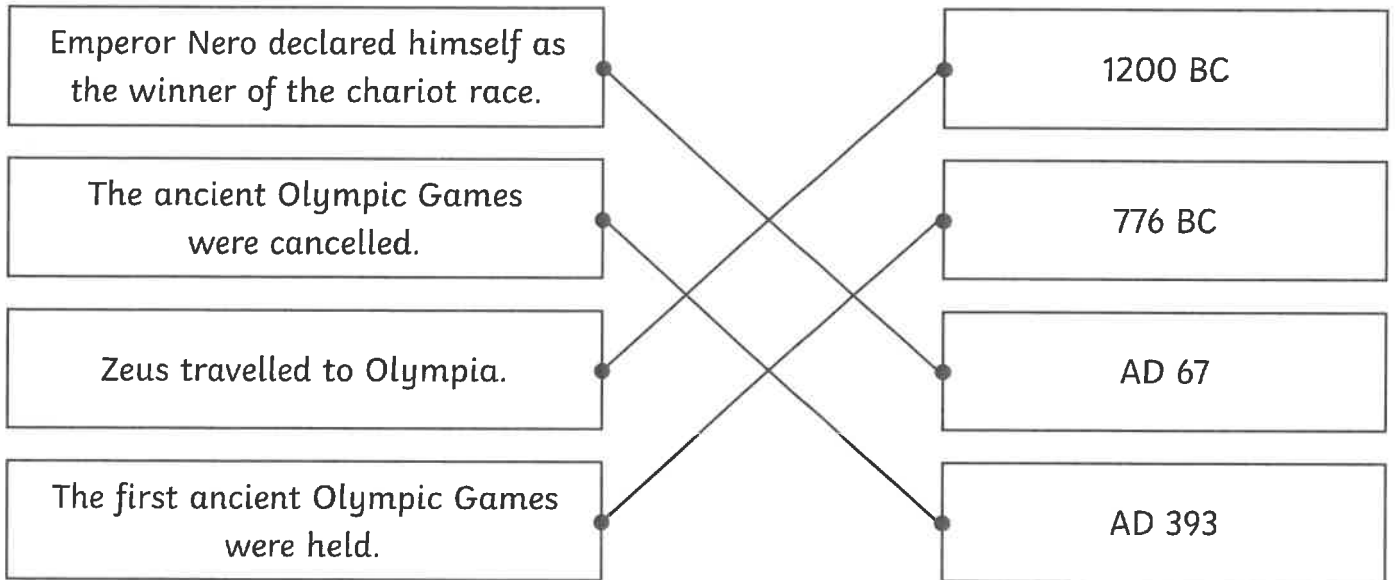
9. Would you have preferred to have been a spectator or a competitor at the ancient Olympic Games? Fully explain your answer

Answers

1. Where did the first ancient Olympic games take place? Tick one.

- Athens
 Mount Olympus
 Olympia
 Rome

2. Draw **four** lines and match each event to the year that it is thought to have happened in.



3. Look at the section titled **The First Olympic Games**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as **declared**.

announced

4. In a pankration match, what was the only rule?

The only rule was that you couldn't bite your opponent or poke them in the eye.

5. In which section would you find information about the ancient Olympic Games being cancelled?

You would find this information in the section 'The Fall of the Ancient Olympic Games'.

6. Compare the ancient Olympic Games to the modern Olympic Games. How were they different?

Pupils' own responses, such as: The ancient Olympic Games had more violent boxing and wrestling matches than the modern Olympic Games. The ancient Games were also a religious celebration for the Greek god, Zeus, which the modern Games are not.

7. Read the first paragraph beginning **Thought to have started...**
Explain why the author has chosen to include this paragraph.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the author has chosen to include this paragraph to make the reader excited about reading the rest of the text. It also gives a hint about what the text is going to be about without giving everything away.

8. Using 20 words or fewer, summarise what you have learnt about the modern Olympic Games.

Pupils' own responses, such as: They were first held in Athens in 1896 and were started by a French baron named Pierre de Coubertin.

9. Would you have preferred to have been a spectator or a competitor at the ancient Olympic Games? Fully explain your answer

Pupils' own responses, such as: I would have preferred to be a spectator at the ancient Olympic Games because the sports sound too dangerous to take part in. I especially don't like the sound of taking part in pankration but I would enjoy watching it.