

Deepening Understanding

YR3 Non-fiction Text

The Ancient Greek Olympic Games by Vicky Birch



The Olympic Games

The Olympic Games are a universal event which captivates the world once every four years. In 2016, the Olympic Games saw men and women from 206 countries unite in Brazil to participate in 28 different sports. With 33 now scheduled to take place at the 2020 Games in Japan, the Olympics continues to evolve each time it is held. But it hasn't always been this way. In fact, things have changed dramatically since the first Olympics was held in Ancient Greece around 3000 years ago.

Ancient Greece

The majority of Ancient Greek citizens made their living by farming or fishing, with some well-educated men becoming scholars or artists. Life in Greece was difficult as the climate meant farming was strenuous and challenging, and often farmland and water was scarce. Consequently, many Greeks were poor and struggling. Despite this, once every four years the Greek civilization had a momentous event to look forward to - The Olympic Games.

The First Olympic Games

The first games were launched in 775BC in Olympia, Greece.



Originally, they were held as festivals or celebrations in honour of Zeus, the supreme god of the Olympians. Representatives from cities all over the country would gather to compete against each other, rivalling neighbouring cities as they participated in a number of sporting activities.

Historically, the Olympic Games had far fewer events than modern-day Olympics. Their main sports involved: pentathlon (a combination of five different sports including running, long jump, discus, javelin and wrestling), chariot racing, boxing and pankration (an amalgamation of wrestling and boxing which had almost no rules). Crowds of over 50,000 people would travel to Olympia, gathering together to observe the athletes compete.

The games were held once every four years - a tradition which has continued to this day. Prizes, however, have changed significantly over time, as there were no gold, silver or bronze medals to be seen. Instead, athletes who were victorious would be awarded an olive leaf wreath or crown to celebrate their triumphs.

The games were often held during times of conflict and war. As a result, political agendas were frequently associated with the games and priests would offer sacrifices to the gods, hopeful this would aid them in becoming victorious in wars which were being fought. One man - Peregrinus - even used the enormous crowds which gathered together at the 165AD Olympics as witnesses to his own political statement, as he threw himself to his death protesting for what he believed in.

Changing Traditions

The Olympics have advanced in many ways since they originated in Greece in 775BC, and although they continue to take place every four years, many other aspects have altered. Destinations change, women can now participate and a wider variety of sports are involved. We even have a Winter Olympics to celebrate 7 additional sports, including snowboarding and curling. But although some customs may continue to change as time goes on, the fundamental aspects of the Olympic Games will continue to remain the same: celebrating sporting achievements across nations.

