

The Ancient Olympics



The Olympic games are thought to have started in 776 BC in Greece. The Games were part of a very important religious festival.

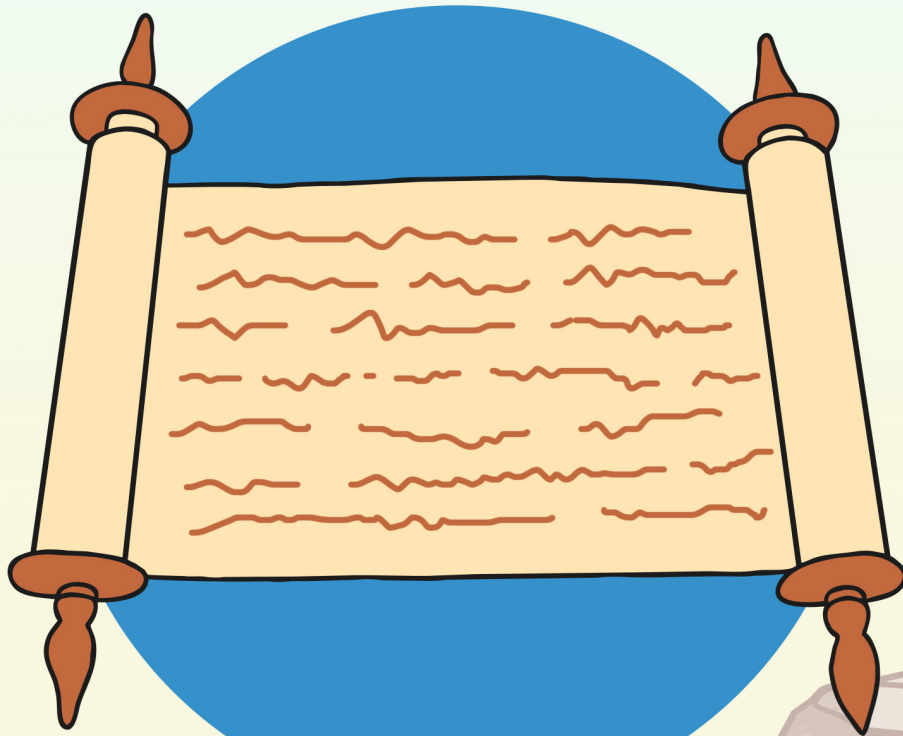
The Greek Olympics inspired the modern Olympic Games which began in 1896.

The games were held every four years at Olympia, a valley in southwest Greece.

The Games were held in honour of the king of the gods, Zeus.

People from all over the Greek world travelled to watch and take part.

The Sacred Truce



The city-states of Greece were very often at war which made travelling around the country dangerous.

Messengers were sent out from Elis, a city near Olympia, to announce a 'sacred truce' lasting one month before the games began.

This allowed people to travel to the Olympics in safety.

The truce was always honoured as the Olympic Games were a religious festival, and was much more important than war.

Events at the Games



The first Olympic Games only lasted a day, and the only event was a short race from one end of the stadium to the other.

Gradually more events were added to make four days of competitions. The events included boxing, chariot racing, discus, javelin, long jump and wrestling.

One of the toughest events was the race for the hoplites - men wearing armour and carrying shields.

Winners were given a wreath of leaves and a hero's welcome back home. Winners might have been allowed to marry rich women, and enjoy invitations to parties, free meals, and the best seats in theatres.

Spectators



The stadium could hold around 50,000 people. Away from the arena, most spectators had to find somewhere to pitch their tents or sleep rough, but athletes and important people had hotel rooms.

It was very hot and overcrowded, with a very poor water supply, but this did not stop people from coming!

The games ended with a large feast. Traders came to do business, politicians made speeches to the crowds and entertainers such as acrobats and jugglers performed.

The Pankration



The pankration or all-in wrestling was a very nasty event!

All-in wrestling was very popular. There were hardly any rules! Biting and poking people's eyes were banned, but some competitors ignored these rules!

Boxing was tough too. The fighters wore leather gloves and a boxer was allowed to carry on hitting his opponent even after he'd knocked him to the ground!

Cheating was punished. For instance, anyone caught trying to bribe an athlete, had to pay for a bronze statue of Zeus!

Women at Olympia



Only men, boys and unmarried girls were allowed to attend the Olympic Games. Any women caught sneaking in were punished!

Unmarried women had their own festival at Olympia every four years. This was called the Heraia, held in honour of Hera, wife of Zeus.

Women could compete in races, though only unmarried girls were allowed to take part.

The winners were awarded crowns of sacred olive branches, the same as men.

The Olympic Flame



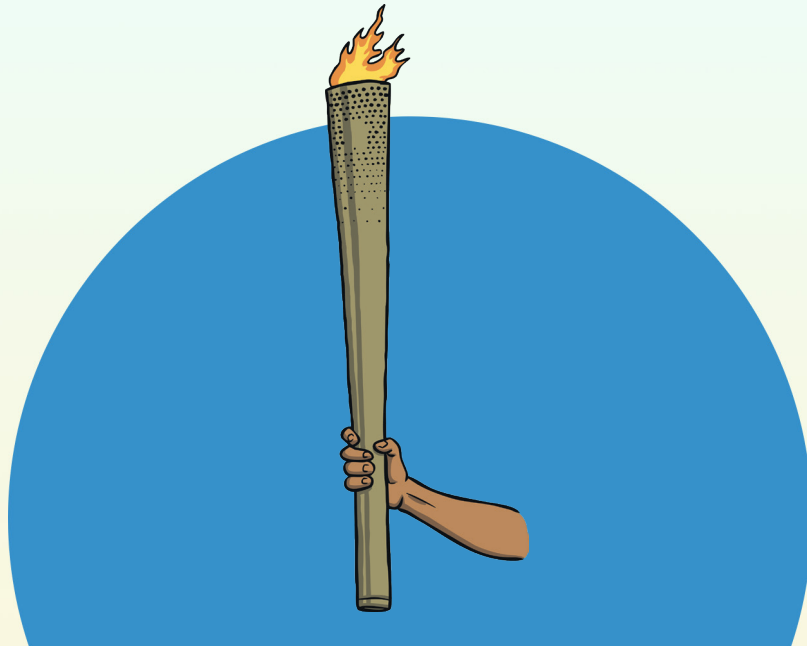
In the ancient games, the Olympic flame was lit and homed at the altar of Hera and the games were held nearby.

Since 1936, a Lighting Ceremony has been held at the site of the first Olympic Games. To show the flame's purity, it is lit by reflecting the rays of the sun with a parabolic mirror, just as it was in ancient times.

A special torch, which is forged from silver and inspired by the pillars inside the Temple of Goddess Hera, is used to ignite the flame during the ceremony. It remains lit and is taken to the Altar of Hera.

The flame is passed to the first of the torchbearers and a dove is released to signify peace.

The Olympic Torch Relay



The Olympic torch relay originated not in ancient times but in 1936, ahead of the games in Berlin.

The Torch relay begins with the lighting of the Olympic flame in Olympia.

From here, it travels over thousands of miles to the host city, passed in a relay by several thousand torchbearers.

The first and last torchbearers in the relay have a special significance to the host country. Since 1972, games committees have selected 'ordinary' people to be torchbearers, alongside athletes and officials.

The host countries design and create their own distinct torches. The designs usually reflect the culture or reference significant landmarks of the host country.

The final torchbearer brings the flame into the stadium, as part of the opening ceremony, and has the honour of lighting the cauldron where the flame will burn for the duration of the games.

The Legacy



The legacy of the Olympic Games began in the ancient games, when fighting cities would call a truce for the duration of the competition. Winning athletes received a hero's welcome back home.

Since the modern games began in 1896, the Olympics has become a worldwide sporting event. Every four years, for two weeks, millions of people around the world watch (either in person or on television) the sporting spectacle.

Proud athletes represent their countries and compete against the best of the best for the coveted medals and similar accolades as their ancient counterparts.

Inspiring future athletes and allowing sportspeople from all over the world their moment in the spotlight, the Olympics, much like it did in the ancient games, breaks down borders and allows the world to celebrate.