

Olympic and Paralympic Games

What do you know about the history and symbols of the Olympic Games? Read the article to find out about this world-famous sports event.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises to check your understanding.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

- multisport
- to compete
- a disability
- the Ancient Greeks
- a combat sport
- a torch
- an honour
- core

Definition

- a. an illness, injury or condition that makes it difficult for someone to do some things that other people do
- b. a sport that involves fighting between two people or teams
- c. something that you are pleased or proud to do because people show you respect
- d. involving several different sports
- e. a thick stick that has fire at the top
- f. most important or most basic
- g. to take part in a race or competition
- h. people belonging to a civilisation around Greece and the Mediterranean that existed from around 1200 to 323 BCE

Olympic and Paralympic Games

The Olympic Games are the biggest, and most famous, multisport event in the world. Every four years, over 10,000 athletes from around 200 countries compete in about 30 different sports. The Paralympic Games are the largest international event for athletes with disabilities, and are held shortly after the Olympic Games in the same host city.

Why are they called the Olympic Games?

The name comes from Olympia, in Greece, where the first Ancient Olympic Games were held in 776 BCE. The Games were a very important event for the Ancient Greeks and they took place every four years, until around 393 CE. They were very different from the ones we know now! The athletes were mainly soldiers, and no women competed. Married women weren't even allowed to watch the Games. The athletes were completely naked, and a few even died during combat sport competitions.

When did the Modern Olympic Games start?

The Modern Olympic Games began in 1896, in Athens, and 280 athletes from 12 countries competed in 43 events. Women competed for the first time in the 1900 Olympics in Paris. By the time the Olympics took place in Paris again in 1924, there were around 3,000 athletes, from more than 44 countries, including more than 100 women. This was also the year that the first Winter Olympics were held. The Paralympic Games first took place in Rome, Italy, in 1960, with 400 athletes from 23 countries.

The Olympic rings

The 'Olympic rings', introduced in 1913, are the symbol of the Olympic movement. Five linked rings (from left to right: blue, yellow, black, green and red) appear on a white background. They represent the five continents and the meeting of athletes from around the world.

The Olympic torch relay

The Olympic torch relay symbolises peace and friendship. The flame is lit in Olympia several months before the Olympic Games. It is carried by one person after another as it travels around different places in Greece, and it is then taken to the country that is hosting the event that year.

Young Olympians and Paralympians

Over the years, many young athletes have had the honour of representing their countries. Gymnast Dimitrios Loundras was just ten years old when he competed in the 1896 Olympics! He has held the title of youngest Olympic athlete ever since. Natalia Partyka, a table tennis player from Poland, first competed in the 2000 Sydney Paralympics at age 11, and in Beijing in 2008, she became the first table tennis athlete to compete in both the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Many of the athletes taking part in newer Olympic sports, such as skateboarding, are teenagers. At the 2020 Olympics, 13-year-old skateboarder Sky Brown became Great Britain's youngest-ever medal winner.

Paris 2024

The 2024 Summer Olympics and Paralympics took place in France. The Paris Olympic Games included 28 'core' sports, plus four 'optional' sports: skateboarding, sport climbing, surfing and breaking (breakdance). The Paralympics have 22 different sports, with para athletics as the largest sport. Around 15 million international visitors went to Paris for the Olympic Games! Billions more people watched the event live on television, making it the world's most-watched multisport event.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
	True	False
1. Around 5,000 athletes from 100 countries take part in the Olympic Games.	True	False
2. The Ancient Olympic Games started in Athens, Greece.	True	False
3. Married women weren't allowed to watch the Ancient Olympic Games.	True	False
4. In the Ancient Olympic Games, most athletes were soldiers and they competed without clothes.	True	False
5. The Modern Olympic Games started four years after the last Ancient Olympic Games.	True	False
6. The Olympic rings are, from left to right, red, green, white, blue and yellow.	True	False
7. Different people carry the Olympic flame from Olympia to the city that is hosting the games.	True	False
8. Athletes must be at least 18 years old to compete in the Olympic or Paralympic Games.	True	False

Task 2

Complete the sentences with numbers or dates from the box.

1896	10,000	22	1960
32	ten	1900	776 BCE

- Over athletes compete in the Olympic Games.
- The Ancient Olympic Games began in
- The first Modern Olympic Games were in
- Women took part for the first time in
- The Paralympic Games started in
- The youngest ever Olympic athlete was years old.
- There were a total of sports at the Paris Olympic Games.
- The Paralympic Games have different sports.

Discussion

What sports do you enjoy watching? Do you have a favourite athlete?

Answers

Preparation task

1. d
2. g
3. a
4. h
5. b
6. e
7. c
8. f

Task 1

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. False
6. False
7. True
8. False

Task 2

1. 10,000
2. 776 BCE
3. 1896
4. 1900
5. 1960
6. ten
7. 32
8. 22