Worksheet 1. Reading: The Ancient Olympic Games

Read the article about the ancient Olympic Games. Then review the glossary and complete the exercises that follow it.

According to legend, the ancient Olympic Games were founded by Heracles, a son of Zeus (a Greek god). The first real Olympic Games for which we have written records were held in 776 BCE. These original Olympic Games were held on the plains of Olympia in Greece.

At the first Olympic Games, there was only one event: a sprint race, called the stadion race. The word *stadium* is derived from this foot race. The race was 192 meters (210 yards) in length and was won by a baker from a neighboring area. This first Olympic champion was awarded the equivalent of today’s gold medal: a wreath of olive branches, which was placed on his head. The olive tree of ancient Greece was not an ordinary tree; it was considered sacred, so to be for an athlete to be crowned with an olive wreath was a holy honor.

Over the years, more races and more events were added, including wrestling, boxing, and equestrian events (events with horses and people, such as chariot races and horse races).

In addition to the olive wreaths, winners received palm branches and woolen ribbons as prizes. Winners of the Games were honored throughout Greece and were hailed as heroes in their hometowns.

Unlike the Modern Olympic Games, only young men who spoke Greek were allowed to participate in the ancient Games. Women were not permitted to compete, and married women were not even allowed to attend the Games.

The Games were "international" in the sense that they included athletes from the various Greek city-states. Eventually, participants came from the Greek colonies as well, so that the range of the games extended to the far shores of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

Every four years, for 1,170 years, the Greeks held the Olympics, which continued to grow and change. The original Games had been dedicated to the god Zeus. But now a new kind of civilization, which did not accept the Greek gods, was brought into the area by the Byzantine empire. Its emperor wanted to eliminate influences that were different from his, so he abolished the Games in 393 CE.
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The original site of Olympia remained until it was destroyed by an earthquake in the 6th century CE. The games, which had been banned in 393 CE, were re-established in Athens in 1896 as the modern Olympic Games. The Olympic Games are now a truly international event, participated in by most countries of the world and watched on television by many millions.

Glossary
Line 1 *Zeus* — the most powerful of the gods of ancient Greece
Line 3 *776 BCE* — in the year 776, Before the Common Era. CE is an abbreviation for *Common Era*, or the year 1, in the current Gregorian Calendar. The year 2008 is the 2008th year of the Common Era.
Line 3 *on the plains of Olympia* — on the flat grounds of Olympia, a part of Greece
Line 4 *a sprint race* — a very short race in which the runners are exceptionally quick
Line 7 *a wreath of olive branches* — a circle made of the branches of an olive tree
Line 12 *woolen* — material made from the hair of sheep
Line 19 *city-states* — independent states that consist of a city and the surrounding country area, especially in the past.
Line 24 *Byzantine Empire* — the eastern part of the Roman Empire
Line 27 *393 CE* — 393 in the Common Era. This means 393 years after the year 1 in the Gregorian calendar.

Comprehension practice

Decide whether each sentence is true or false, according to the reading. Circle T if the sentence is true and F if the sentence is false.

1. The first Olympic Games took place in Greece.
2. There were five different events in the first Games.
3. Swimming was one of the sports at the early Olympic Games.
4. The winners of the early Games received gold medals.
5. People valued olive trees very highly in those days.
6. Women did not participate in the early Olympic Games.
7. People from all over the world took part in the ancient games.
8. The Olympic Games have been taking place continuously since they first began.
9. A hurricane destroyed the original site of the Olympic Games.