My Big Fat Greek Olympics

About the Show

A wild warp at the Olympia Diner sends Fred and Samantha to ancient Greece during the Olympic games. Can Samantha win the pentathlon and save the sacred Olympic truce between Sparta and Athens?

Introduction

Investigating the Olympic games appeals to students who are interested in history, ancient civilizations, or sports. It's an ideal topic to explore while studying ancient Greece, as the Olympic games include elements from Greek mythology, philosophy, politics, and society.

Historical Background

Ancient Olympics

The earliest inhabitants of what is now Greece were the Mycenaeans, who settled there between 1700–1300 B.C.E. In 499 B.C.E. a group of Greek city-states rebelled against the Persians who had conquered them. Although the initial revolt was crushed, the Athenian army managed to defeat the Persians in the famous Battle of Marathon, considered one of the greatest military victories in history. With this triumph, the city-states were rebuilt and the classical age of Greece began. In some of the city-states, a new form of government—democracy—was formulated and practiced. Great advances were made in art, playwriting, science, philosophy, and architecture. After Alexander the Great conquered Greece at the end of the 4th century, B.C.E., Greece remained an important center for learning and culture, but never again achieved the glory it had once enjoyed.

Curriculum Connections

- ancient civilizations
- ancient Greece
- mythology
- Olympics
- sports

Subject Areas

- language arts
- math
- social studies



My Big Fat Greek Olympics

Historical Background *continued*

The Olympics

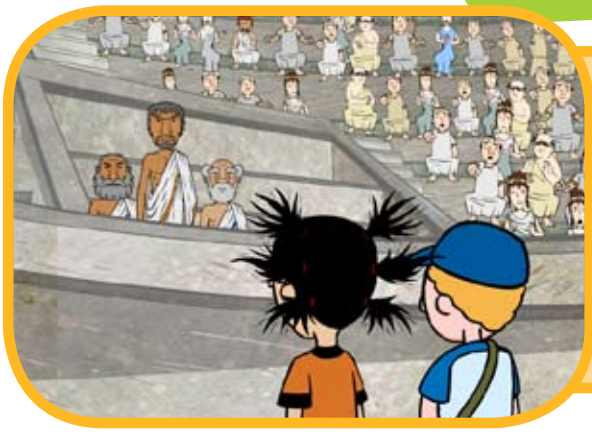
The first recorded Olympics occurred in 776 B.C.E. Part of a festival honoring Zeus, it was one of four Pan Hellenic (all-Greek) Games held in ancient Greece, each honoring a different god. The games were held at Olympia, a religious sanctuary near the west coast of Greece. For more than a thousand years, the Olympic games took place every four years in August without a single cancellation. The last recorded Olympics were in 393 B.C.E. The following year the emperor Theodosius banned the worship of all but the Christian god.

The games, which were also a way to help men keep fit for war, were at first made up of only short foot races. Men competed in the nude. Even when other events were added, there were no team sports. No medals were awarded. The winner (there were no second or third place winners) was given a wreath of olive leaves. These were cut from a sacred tree that stood behind the temple of Zeus at Olympia. Women were not allowed to compete and married women were not even allowed to attend the games. A separate women's festival, the Heraia, was held in honor of Hera, wife of Zeus.

At the height of their popularity, 20,000–40,000 people attended the games. The event was so prestigious that the city-states of ancient Greece observed a special truce, during which all hostilities were suspended for a month before the games. Men could train and spectators could make their journeys in peace. Merchants also came to the games to sell food and other wares.

In 1894, a French nobleman, the Baron Pierre de Coubertin, proposed that the games be revived. Two years later the first modern Olympic games were held in Athens. Since 1924, both winter and summer games have been played at designated sites all over the world.

Want students to get even more excited about history?



Check out the ancient Olympics adventure for kids at

www.timewarptrio.com/adventures/olympics/

Put It Back, Jack! and other interactive games to play.

Plentifax 487—the ultimate time traveler's guide—gives facts about ancient Greece, the Olympics, and more!

Cool Books that kids will love.

Activity 1



What's in a Name?

This activity provides students with a chance to become more familiar with Greek tales and myths, and to understand their influence on modern culture.

Instructions

1. Discuss with students the influence of Greek tales such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey,* as well as Greek mythology, on our language. Give examples of terms that come from Greek myths or stories and how the imagery associated with these tales have contributed to our culture. For instance, Nike, the messenger of the gods, was very fast, since the gods had little patience. In addition to contributing his name to an athletic shoe company, his symbol of winged sandals is used by a florist, signaling that their flowers will arrive quickly.
2. Distribute the "Terms Derived from Greek Tales" handout. Individually, in pairs, or in groups, assign students a Greek myth or story to research.
3. Distribute the "Pitch Your Product" handout. Have students draw a picture to illustrate the term and then write the myth or story in their own words in the appropriate space on the handout.
4. Ask students to think of an advertising pitch that might include the term. Using the handout, students will first have to choose or imagine a product, company, or person that could be promoted by the use of the Greek name or associated symbol. It could be that the product helps the user do something ("Don't make cleaning a Herculean effort! Use Clean-All instead."), is named after the term ("Listen to the new CD by singer Aurora Borealis. It's heavenly!"), or embodies the qualities of the term ("Midas Touch Investments turns your money to gold.").
5. Have students present their pitch. Make sure they explain why the name, the myth, and its symbolism are ideal for expressing the product, company, etc.

Objectives

- to develop narrative writing skills
- to explore word origins
- to enhance students' familiarity with Greek myths
- to become more media literate

Materials

- art and writing supplies
- "Terms Derived from Greek Tales" handout
- "Pitch Your Product" handout

Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**
  Culture: Students will explain and give examples of how language, literature, and the arts contribute to the development and transmission of culture.
- **NCTE/IRA**
  Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information, to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

TERMS DERIVED FROM GREEK TALES

ACHILLES HEEL

ACHILLES TENDON

AMAZON

ATLAS

AURORA BOREALIS

CEREAL

ECHO

EUROPE

GIGANTIC

HERCULEAN EFFORT

HYACINTH

HYGIENE

HYPNOSIS

IRIS

MARS

MARTIAL

MEDICINE

MIDAS TOUCH

MUSEUM

MUSIC

NARCISSUS

NIGHT

NIKE

OCEAN

ODYSSEY

OLYMPICS

PANDORA'S BOX

PANIC

PHOENIX

PSYCHOLOGY

SIREN

SIREN SONG

SPHINX

TANTALIZE

TITANIC

URANIUM

VOLCANO

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Pitch Your Product

TERM _____

Draw a picture to illustrate the term.

Explain the myth or tale.

Think of a product and an advertising pitch. Write about them below.

Explain why the name, the myth, and its symbolism are ideal for expressing your project, company, etc.

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Activity 2



Pentathlon

In "My Big Fat Greek Olympics," the judge decrees that Samantha must throw the discus and wrestle—two of the five events that made up the pentathlon. As Sam later explains, the pentathlon was one of the most popular events in the Olympics, which also included long jumping, running four different races, and javelin throwing. In contrast, since 1912, the modern Olympic pentathlon has consisted of shooting, fencing, swimming, riding, and cross-country running.

In both the ancient and modern Olympics, the events were selected to show an athlete's versatility and breadth of ability. In this activity, students take a survey and then hold a mock Olympics.

Instructions

1. Divide the class into two groups. Have one group research the athletic events in the ancient Olympics. Ask the other group to research the events in the modern summer Olympics.
2. Have the two groups present their findings. As a class, create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the events. (The only common activity is running.)
3. Ask for volunteers for an Olympic Committee. This group will be in charge of collecting information from the class as to which of the 10 pentathlon events (ancient and modern) they would most like to see and/or compete in. The information can be collected by way of a survey, vote, petition, etc.
4. Have the Committee create a graph to indicate which five events students have chosen.
5. In pairs or small groups, have students "compete" in the event on a mock Olympic Game Day. Each group will be assigned one of the five events. They can then decide how they would like to represent the event. They can re-enact it, create a skit, describe it as if they were sportscasters, etc.
6. Congratulate student groups with "wreaths" of victory using a variety of criteria: most creative, most humorous, etc., so that each group receives a wreath.

Objectives

- to compare and contrast the modern and ancient Olympics
- to tally information
- to practice graphing

Materials

- writing supplies
- compass or string and a pin/nail
- protractor, ruler

Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**
  People, Places, & Environments: Students will estimate distance, calculate scale, and graph information.
- **NCTE/IRA**
  Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

Resources

Recommended Books

For Teachers

Ancient Greek Athletics by Stephen Miller. (Yale University Press, 2004)
An overview of the Pan Hellenic games, events, and the role the games played in society.

The Ancient Olympic Games, 2nd ed. by Judith Swaddling. (University of Texas Press, 2000)
Tracing the mythological and religious origins of the games, this history describes the events, ceremonies, and celebrations of the games. It includes a large, detailed model of ancient Olympia.

The Ancient Olympics by Nigel Spivey. (Oxford University Press, 2004)
A revealing look at the games as a military, not just religious or social event, as well as how Greek notions of beauty and competitiveness have influenced modern culture.

Games and Sanctuaries in Ancient Greece by Panos Valvanis. (Getty Trust Publications, 2004)
With more than 500 illustrations, this is a study of the sporting tradition in ancient Greece and the importance of the Olympic games in Greek culture.

Games for the Gods: The Greek Athlete and the Olympic Spirit by John J. Hermann, Jr. and Christine Kondoleon. (MFA Publications, 2004)
With over 140 illustrations of sculptures, vases, coins, etc. this is an overview of the ancient games and the Olympic spirit through the ages.

The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Daily Life, Volume 1 edited by Joyce E. Salisbury. (Greenwood Press, 2004)
A comprehensive look at the lives of ordinary people in ancient times—their clothes, food, culture, customs, beliefs, etc.

Sport and Society in Ancient Greece by Mark Golden. (Cambridge University Press, 1998)
Key Themes in Ancient History series. A general introduction to the topic, this book includes the origin and history of the Olympic games.

For Students

Fiction

Asterix and the Olympic Games by Rene Goscinny. (Orion, 2004)
Asterix, Obelix, and their friends enter the ancient Olympics. Will they triumph over the powerful Greek and Roman athletes? For younger readers.

The Courtesan's Daughter by Priscilla Galloway. (Delacorte, 2002)
Fourteen-year-old Phanos, married to Theo, tells the complicated story of her stepmother, a former courtesan in Athens. For older readers.

Goddess of Yesterday by Caroline B. Cooney. (Delacorte, 2002)
Anaxandra, companion of the crippled Princess Callisto, is the only survivor after pirates attack their small island home. Taken to Troy, she becomes involved in the intrigue that leads to war between Sparta and Troy.

Mr. Semolina-Semolinus: A Greek Folktale retold by Anthony L. Manna. (Atheneum, 1997)
In this folktale, Princess Areti is not satisfied with any of her suitors so she decides to make a man of her own.

Pandora of Athens, 399 B.C. by Barry Denenberg. (Scholastic, 2004)
The Life and Times series. Pandora is approaching the age at which she must marry the man her father has chosen. Will a chance meeting with the wise teacher Socrates change her life?

Say Cheese, Medusa! by Kate McMullen. (Hyperion, 2002)
Myth-o-mania series. The story of Perseus and the snake-haired Gorgon Medusa is retold with a twist.

The Talisman by Lynne Ewing. (Hyperion, 2003)
Daughters of the Moon series. As Maggie's life is nearing its end, she reflects on her girlhood in ancient Athens.

Nonfiction

Ancient Greece by Matilde Bardi. (Peter Bedrick Books, 2000)
Art and artifacts show how people lived, traded, entertained, and fought their enemies—and how the civilization influenced how we live now.

Ancient Greece and the Olympics by Mary Pope Osborne and Natalie Pope Boyce. (Random House, 2004)
This companion book to the fictional *Hour of the Olympics* describes the research and facts that Osborne used to write the novel.

Ancient Greek Olympics by Richard Woff. (Oxford University Museum, 1999)
An examination of the games, covering each of the five days of the athletic and religious festival.

Ancient Greek Women by Haydn Middleton. (Heinemann, 2003)
People in the Past series. The everyday domestic tasks and responsibilities of women in ancient Greece are described, as well as the rare occasions when they were able to appear in public. Other titles include *Ancient Greek Children, Ancient Greek Homes, Ancient Greek Jobs.*

Resources

Ancient Medicine: From Sorcery to Surgery by Michael Woods. (Runestone, 1999)
A look at the medical practices and innovations in ancient Egyptian, Indian, Chinese, Greek, and Roman cultures and how they have influenced medicine today.

Ancient Olympics by Jackie Graff. (Heinemann, 2004)
Information about the history, rules, and organization of the Olympics.

The Gods and Goddesses of Olympus by Aliki. (HarperCollins, 1994)
Introduces 15 major Greek gods and goddesses with descriptions of their special talents and responsibilities.

Olympia, Warrior Athletes of Ancient Greece by Dyan Blacklock. (Walker, 2000)
In the 8th century, B.C.E, the Greek city-states were embroiled in bloody and seemingly endless war with each other. King Iphitus of Elis revives the ancient athletic competition to distract the warriors. For younger readers.

The Olympic Games: Athens 1896–Athens 2004 by DK Publishing. (DK Adult, 2004)
Hundreds of action photographs chronicle the modern Olympics.

The Original Olympics by Stewart Ross. (Peter Bedrick Books, 1996)
The history, customs, and events of the ancient Greek games.

Spend the Day in Ancient Greece by Linda Honan. (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998)
Visit a fictional family in 432 B.C.E., join two children in their typical activities, and make several projects to understand life in ancient Athens.

Swifter, Higher, Stronger: A Photographic History of the Summer Olympics by Sue Macy. (National Geographic, 2004)
Photographs portray the rebirth of the ancient games, women in the Olympics, outstanding athletes, controversies, and more.

A Visitor's Guide to Ancient Greece by Lesley Sims. (Usborne, 2003)
If you could time travel, this book has all you'd need for Athens: maps, tips on where to stay, what to see, shopping, a section about side trips, and a traveler's advisory to avoid Sparta!

Poetry

Ancient Greece by Susan Altman and Susan Lechner. (Scholastic, 2001)
Modern Rhymes About Ancient Times series. Contains 27 poems about famous people, gods, goddesses, buildings, myths, and other aspects of life in ancient Greece.

Web Sites

ANCIENT GREECE
www.ancientgreece.com/
Explore various topics about ancient Greece, such as the Olympics, architecture, mythology, people, and more.

THE ANCIENT OLYMPICS
www.perseus.tufts.edu/Olympics/
Created as a tribute to the 1996 Centennial Olympic games, this digital library allows users to compare ancient and modern Olympic games, learn about famous athletes at the ancient games and more.

ANCIENT GREECE—OLYMPIC
www.bbc.co.uk/schools/ancientgreece/classics/olympics/intro.shtml
This interactive comic book presents facts about the ancient games as part of a scavenger hunt game.

BBC HISTORY—THE ANCIENT GREEK OLYMPIC GALLERY
www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/greeks/greek_olympics_gallery.shtml
Explore ancient artifacts and artwork depicting the Olympic games.

ZEUS
www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html
Learn about Zeus, the supreme ruler of Mount Olympus, and the other Greek gods who lived there.

MYTHOGRAPHY—THE GREEK GOD ZEUS IN MYTH AND ART
www.loggia.com/myth/zeus.html
This site offers forums, information, and artwork about Greek, Roman, and Celtic myth and art.

Please note:
Although these sites were verified at the time of publication, Web site addresses and content are frequently subject to change.

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