



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.

1 According to legend, the ancient Olympic Games were founded by Heracles, a son of Zeus
2 (a Greek god). The first real Olympic Games for which we have written records were held in
3 776 BCE. These original Olympic Games were held on the plains of Olympia in Greece.

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

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

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

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

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

21 Every four years, for 1,170 years, the Greeks held the Olympics, which continued to grow
22 and change. The original Games had been dedicated to the god Zeus. But now a new kind of
23 civilization, which did not accept the Greek gods, was brought into the area by the
24 Byzantine empire. Its emperor wanted to eliminate influences that were different from his,
25 so he abolished the Games in 393 CE.



Worksheet 1 (page 2)

26 The original site of Olympia remained until it was destroyed by an earthquake in the 6th
27 century CE. The games, which had been banned in 393 CE, were re-established in Athens in
28 1896 as the modern Olympic Games. The Olympic Games are now a truly international
29 event, participated in by most countries of the world and watched on television by many
30 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. T / F
2. There were five different events in the first Games. T / F
3. Swimming was one of the sports at the early Olympic Games. T / F
4. The winners of the early Games received gold medals. T / F
5. People valued olive trees very highly in those days. T / F
6. Women did not participate in the early Olympic Games. T / F
7. People from all over the world took part in the ancient games. T / F
8. The Olympic Games have been taking place continuously since they first began. T / F
9. A hurricane destroyed the original site of the Olympic Games. T / F