The Olympic Games

Pre-reading

Questions:

What do you know about the Olympic Games?
What would you like to learn about them?

Definitions:

Contradict – to say or mean the opposite of; untrue or wrong
Encourage – to help bring about or make happen

Reading:

The first Olympic Games took place over 3,000 years ago in Greece. The Greeks believed that they honored the gods by using and displaying their athletic abilities. Every four years a month-long festival was held in a large city. These celebrations were so important that during the month of the festival all fighting among the people stopped.

The festival that our modern Olympic Games are patterned after was held at the foot of Mount Olympus, the peak that was believed to be the home of the gods. This festival was one of the largest and most important to the Greeks because of its location and religious purpose. To show further honor to the gods, the Greeks built a temple and very large stadium in which to hold the Games.

During the early Games, the events included only a few foot races. As time went on, more were added. This growth continued in events as well as participants. At first, only male Greek citizens could compete. Later it was opened to women and foreigners as well. Pageants, parades, feasts, and religious rituals were added to the Games.

The Roman Empire conquered Greece around 100 B.C. As a result, there was an Olympic decline for several years. The festival lost its religious significance as money became the center of the Games. In 393 A.D. the Roman emperor declared an end to the Olympics because of its contradiction with Christianity.

In 1889 the idea of the Olympic Games returned. A French educator named Baron Pierre de Coubertin felt that by encouraging athletics for the youth, people of the world would come to have a better understanding of one another. This in turn would promote peace. In June of 1894 a group of representatives from 12 countries met and formed the International Olympic Committee (the IOC).

The IOC decided to organize an international sports competition, much like those Games of ancient Greece. It would take place every four years in different cities around the world. The first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece, in 1896. Two hundred eighty-five people from thirteen countries participated. Since then the games have been held every four years with the exception of the years during the World Wars (1916, 1940, and 1944).

These first Games consisted of only summer sports. Winter sports were not included until 1908 when ice skating was a first time event. Both ice skating and hockey were part of the 1920 Games.

People enjoyed these winter events so much that it was deemed worthy to organize a separate Olympics for winter sports. In 1924 the first Winter Games were held in France where three hundred athletes were represented from sixteen nations.

The modern Olympics represent an international sporting friendship. This is seen in the symbolic element of the five interlocking circles that represent the five continents. The colors used on the flag are found at least once in all nations’ flags. The heart of the Olympic Games is the uniting of countries in friendship to celebrate and honor the finest Olympians from each country.

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Understanding

1. Why do you think someone chose to call the Games the “Olympics”? ________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Where and when were the first modern Olympic Games? ________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________

3. What does the word **honor** mean? __________________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Why is it (the word honor) used in this reading about the Olympics? ________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________

5. In what years were the modern Olympics not held? Why? ________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________

6. Compare and contrast the first Olympic Games to the modern ones. ________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Where were the first Winter Games? _____________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________________

Writing

**Option A:** Summarize the reading in your own words.

**Option B:** Do you prefer the Summer or Winter Games? Why? What are some of your favorite sports
to watch during the Olympics?

**Option C:** What do you think of our current Olympic Games? Do they really promote peace and a
greater understanding among people?

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