

THE ANCIENT OLYMPICS

This lesson will introduce students to the idea that sport was a unifying force in the geographically and politically diverse world of ancient Greece.

CONTEXT

Ancient Greece was full of diverse citizens from what are today many different nations and cultures. At times they waged bloody wars against one another, but managed to find common ground once every four years at the Olympic Games. Through the lens of the ancient Games, students will examine how cultural values are ever-changing.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

1. Contrast the geography, politics, and culture of ancient Greek city states.
2. Explain the same event from different points of view.
3. Identify changes in cultural values over time.

MATERIALS

- [Map of Ancient Greece](#)
- [The Ancient Olympics \(Student Question Worksheet pp. 3-5\)](#)
- 3 Articles: (pp. 6-8)
 - [Milon of Croton](#)
 - [Kyniska of Sparta](#)
 - [The Ancient Olympics: A New Idea](#)

PROCEDURES

- Share a map of your local area or school district with students. Ask students to point out loosely where they live on the map. Mark different spots where different students live.
- Divide students into small groups. Using the provided worksheet, have them work together to find answers to questions 1-2.
- Coming back together as an entire class, ask students if they learned anything about each other while filling out the worksheet, and have them reflect on what they just did. Discuss questions such as:
 - Just because we all live in roughly the same place, does that mean we're all the same?
 - Do you think people who live far apart from each other can have anything in common?

PROCEDURES (continued)

- Share the map of ancient Greece. Explain that just because we call all these different places “ancient Greece,” doesn’t mean they were all the same. Each city state had its own dialect, traditions, and values. Extension Activity #1 may be used to help students explore this idea further.
- Return students to their small groups. Have them work together to answer questions 3-5.
- As a class, use worksheet responses to create a list of things that made ancient Greeks different from one another, and a list of things that ancient Greeks might have had in common.
- Explain that the ancient Olympics happened every four years—just like they do today—and brought together people from across ancient Greece. Along with religion, the ancient Olympics were one of the few things that united people across ancient Greece. It was also one of the few reasons why warring city states might call a truce.
- Return students to their small groups, giving them time to read the three short articles about the ancient Olympics. In their groups, students can work on answering and discussing questions 6-12.
- As a class, reflect on everyone’s answers to question 12.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY #1

Select two locations from the map of ancient Greece. To understand the different cultures, find answers to the following question for **each** location:

- What holidays did they celebrate?
- What kind of government did they have?
- What did the art they created look like?
- What goddesses and gods did they worship?
- What did people wear?

Then, using complete sentences, compare and contrast the two locations.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY #2

Ask students to create a depiction of their interpretation of an ancient Olympics from the point of view of a person in Olympia. This person could be a competitor, spectator, or winner; they could be a man, a woman, a slave, or someone from far away. They can create a visual artwork, write a short story, or work together to put together a short skit.

Name: _____

Date: _____

THE ANCIENT OLYMPICS

1. What are at least **three** things everyone in your group has in common?

2. What are at least **three** things that make you unique from others in your group?

3. As a group, come up with at least **two** reasons why people across ancient Greece might have been so different.

4. Do you think it is important for people to find things they have in common? Why or why not?

5. How might the ancient Olympics have helped city states work together?

Read the short stories about what the time of the ancient Olympics was like in ancient Greece. Then, answer the following questions.

6. List at least **three** facts you learned about the ancient Olympics.

7. How did the ancient Olympics live up to each of our modern Olympic values?

8. How did the ancient Olympics **not** live up to each of our modern Olympic values?

9. What is at least **one** way the idea of **excellence** has changed at the Olympics over the last two thousand years?

10. What is at least **one** way the idea of **respect** has changed at the Olympics over the last two thousand years?

11. What is at least **one** way the idea of **friendship** has changed at the Olympics over the last two thousand years?

12. Do you think the way people might think about excellence, respect, or friendship might be different two thousand years in the future? Why or why not?

MILON OF CROTON

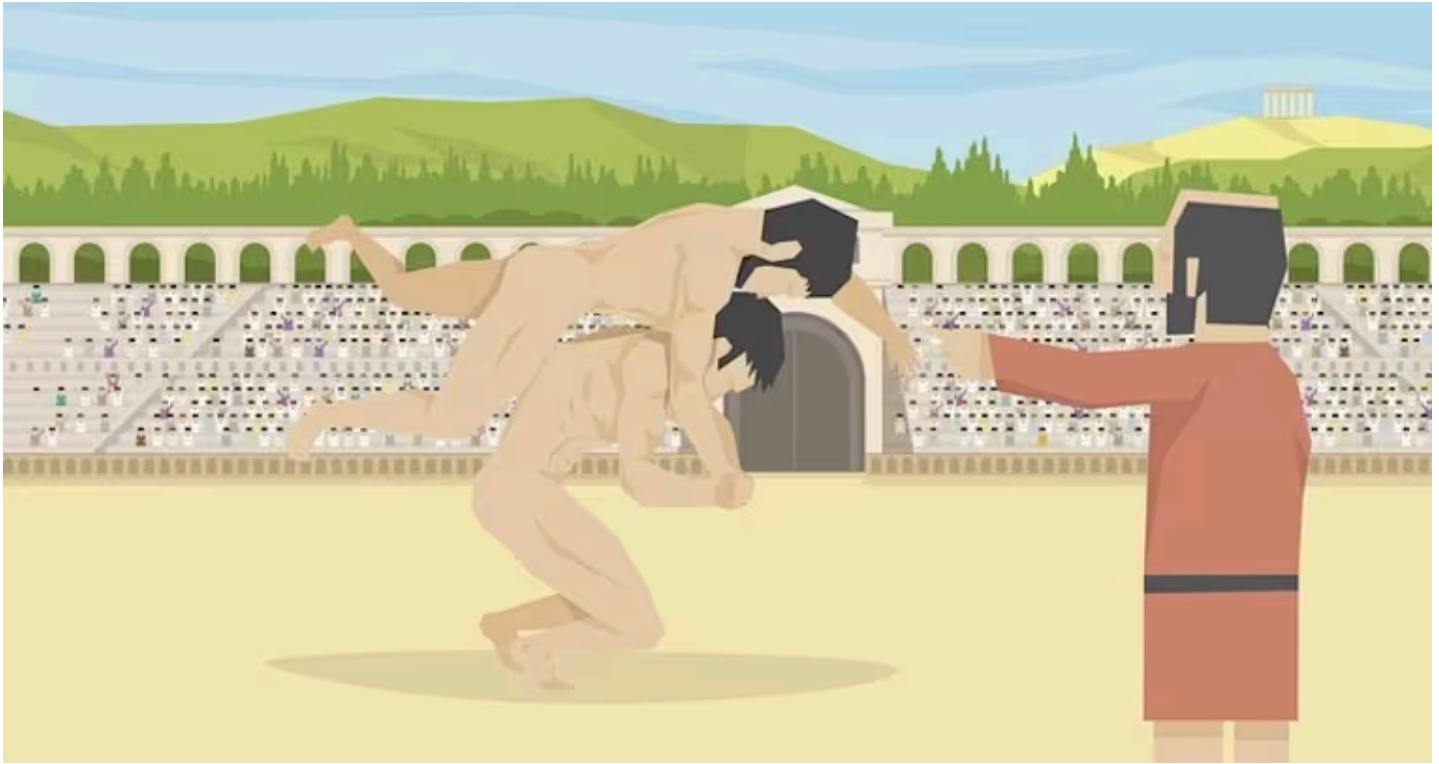


Image from olympics.com

Milon of Croton was a six-time Olympic champion. He was a giant person. At the start of each Games, he carried a cow on his back. Then, he would sacrifice the cow to Zeus. After, he ate the entire cow, all by himself, in one day!

Milon was from Croton. When he was not at the Olympics, he led Croton into battle. He wore a lion skin on his back, a crown on his head, and carried a club. He was a strong warrior. He was good athlete.

When Milon went to the Olympics a seventh time, he reached the final. He was around forty years old. He fought Timasitheos. Timasitheos was ten years younger than him. The wrestling match was long. Milon surrendered.

When Milon surrendered, the crowd cheered. They lifted Milon onto their shoulders. Timasitheos led the cheering. Milon retired from wrestling after that. He happily made way for the new champion.

KYNISKA OF SPARTA

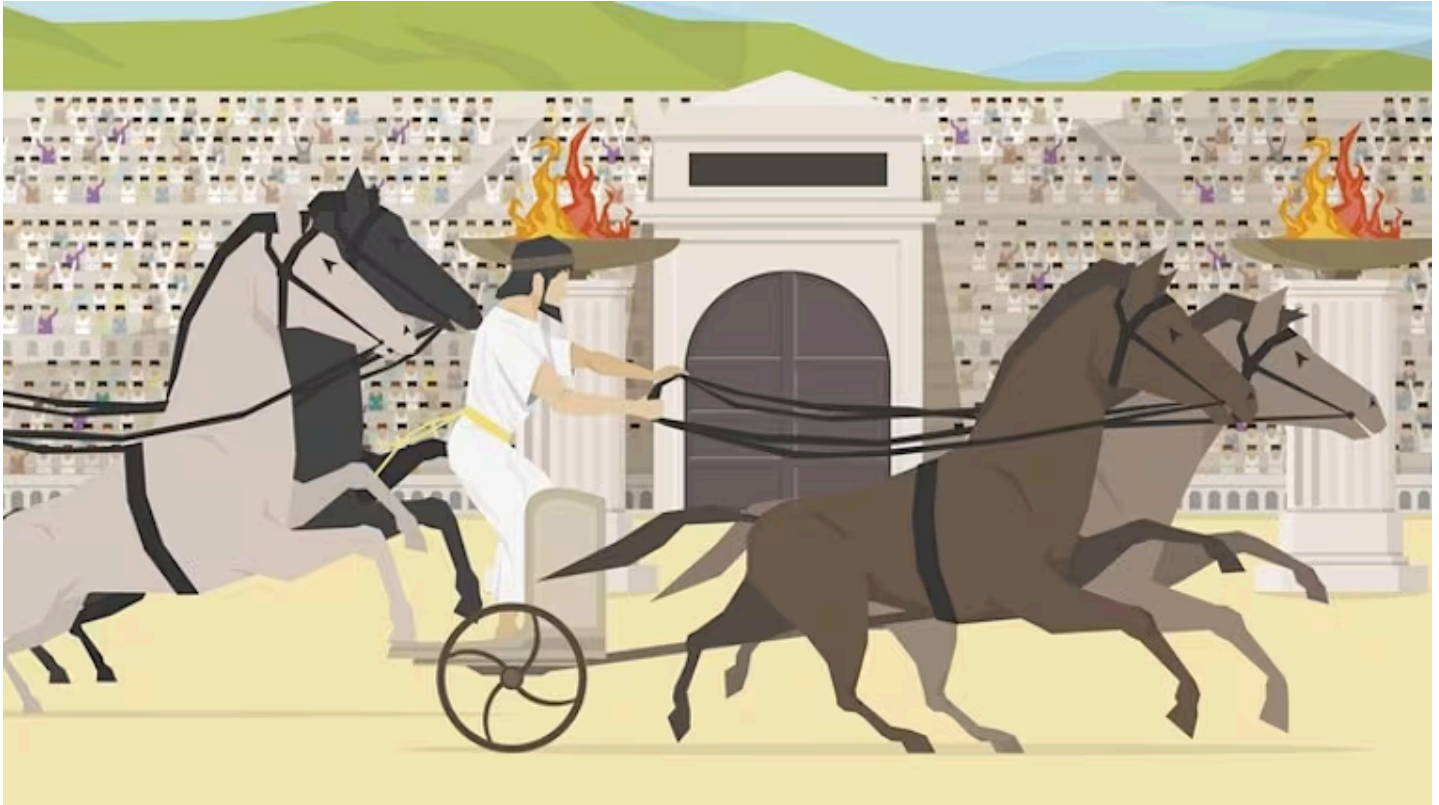


Image from olympics.com

Kyniska was a princess. Her father was the king of Sparta, a Greek city state. She always dreamed of winning Olympic glory. However, the rules at the ancient Olympics said that women could not compete.

But Kyniska was crafty. The owners of chariots were the winners, not the drivers. And women were allowed to own chariots. Kyniska selected the best chariot teams. She went on to win Olympic wreaths in the chariot race two times. She was the first woman to win an Olympic wreath. This paved the way for a total of twelve women to receive wreaths in chariot racing before the end of the ancient Games.

However, the rules never changed. Women never competed themselves. According to some sources, women were even not able to watch the Games.

THE ANCIENT OLYMPICS: A NEW IDEA



Image from olympics.com

The ancient Olympics were unique. Up until this point in history, few people could win glory. They had to be born into it, like a king, or from a rich family. Thousands of years ago the rules of the Olympics changed that. They said that any man born free in Greece could compete.

This was a very new idea. It was a kind of equality. Rich or poor, anyone could become a champion.

But the Olympics did not actually include everyone. The rules excluded women, slaves, or people who moved to Greece from other places. Slaves and foreigners could only watch. Women were not allowed at all. Free men of ancient Greece, however, still found common ground at the Olympics. Even though they were all Greek, they were all different. The ancient Olympics gave them something to share.

Today, modern Olympism has three values:

1. **Excellence**, which encourages people to be the best they can be.
2. **Respect** towards yourself, opponents, the rules, the environment, and more.
3. Believing that through **friendship**, we have more that unites us than divides us.

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Social Studies

COMPARATIVE CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS IN THE EASTERN HEMISPHERE (ca. 600 B.C.E. – ca. 500 C.E.): As complex societies and civilizations change over time, their political and economic structures evolve. A golden age may be indicated when there is an extended period of time that is peaceful, prosperous, and demonstrates great cultural achievements. (Standards: 2, 3, 5; Themes: ID, TCC, GEO, SOC, GOV, CIV)

- **6.5a** | Geographic factors influence the development of classical civilizations and their political structures.
 - Students will locate the classical civilizations on a map and identify geographic factors that influenced the extent of their boundaries, locate their cities on a map, and identify their political structures.
 - Students will compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the Chinese (Qin, Han) and Greco-Roman classical civilizations by examining religion, job specialization, cities, government, language/record keeping system, technology, and social hierarchy.
- **6.5b** | Political structures were developed to establish order, to create and enforce laws, and to enable decision making.
 - Students will examine the similarities and differences between the political systems of Chinese (Qin, Han) and Greco-Roman (Athens, Sparta, Roman Republic, Roman Empire) classical civilizations.
- **6.5c** | A period of peace, prosperity, and cultural achievements may be indicative of a golden age.
 - Students will examine how cultural achievements of these civilizations have influenced contemporary societies.