Are the Olympics about More than Sports?

Supporting Questions

1. What is the history and mythology of the ancient Greek Olympics?
2. What are the goals of the modern Olympic movement?
3. How are the arts a part of the modern Olympics?
**6th Grade Olympics Inquiry**

### Are the Olympics about More than Sports?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New York State Social Studies Framework Key Idea &amp; Practices</th>
<th>6.5 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 also evolve. A golden age may be indicated when there is an extended period of time that is peaceful and prosperous and demonstrates great cultural achievements.</th>
<th><strong>Gathering, Using, and Interpreting Evidence</strong> <strong>Comparison and Contextualization</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staging the Question</strong></td>
<td>Discuss the pros and cons of school sports as they relate to uniting people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting Question 1</th>
<th>Supporting Question 2</th>
<th>Supporting Question 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the history and mythology of the ancient Greek Olympics?</td>
<td>What are the goals of the modern Olympic movement?</td>
<td>How are the arts a part of the modern Olympics?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formative Performance Task</strong></td>
<td><strong>Formative Performance Task</strong></td>
<td><strong>Formative Performance Task</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List 10 people, places, or events related to the history and mythology of the ancient Greek Olympics.</td>
<td>Construct a Venn diagram contrasting the modern Olympic movement with the ancient Olympics.</td>
<td>Make a claim about the importance of the arts in the Olympics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Featured Sources</th>
<th>Featured Sources</th>
<th>Featured Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source A:</strong> Image bank: Ancient Olympic games</td>
<td><strong>Source A:</strong> Excerpt from <em>Official Report of the Games of the First Olympiad</em></td>
<td><strong>Source A:</strong> Excerpt from “Pindar, Poetry, and the Olympics”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source B:</strong> “The Olympic Games, History,” excerpt from <em>Description of Greece</em></td>
<td><strong>Source B:</strong> “Video: Living the Olympic Values”</td>
<td><strong>Source B:</strong> Excerpt from “Inviting the Artists: Paris 1906”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source C:</strong> “Olympic Games, Mythical History,” excerpt from <em>Description of Greece</em></td>
<td><strong>Source C:</strong> “What Is Olympism?” excerpt from <em>Olympism and the Olympic Movement</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summative Performance Task</th>
<th>ARGUMENT Do the Olympics unite us? Construct an argument (e.g., a speech, movie, poster, or essay) using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical sources that explains to what extent the Olympics unite the world.</th>
<th>EXTENSION Craft a rationale for a proposal to hold a local version of the Olympics in the community.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking Informed Action</td>
<td>UNDERSTAND Identify why participating in sports is beneficial to students and the school community.</td>
<td>ASSESS Design a plan to implement one or more ideals of Olympism in the school or district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACT Implement one or more ideals of Olympism in the school or district.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry uses the ancient and modern Olympic games as a context for students to explore the compelling question “Are the Olympics about more than sports?” The Olympics play an important role in modern society, bringing together athletes from around the world every four years to display and celebrate human athleticism; however, the Olympics are about more than just sports. Since their inception in ancient Greece, the Olympics have provided people with different beliefs and backgrounds—even among groups in conflict—an opportunity to gather in the spirit of cooperation and sharing. Students investigate the ancient and modern Olympics using a range of historical and secondary sources to learn more about the historical and mythological origins of the games; the rebirth of the games in France under the leadership of Pierre de Coubertin; and the broader goals of the Olympics, including nurturing the arts.

In addition to the Key Idea listed earlier, this inquiry highlights the following Conceptual Understanding:

- (6.5c) A period of peace, prosperity, and cultural achievements may be indicative of a golden age.

NOTE: This inquiry is expected to take two to four 40-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources). Inquiries are not scripts, so teachers are encouraged to modify and adapt them to meet the needs and interests of their particular students. Resources can also be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question “Are the Olympics about more than sports?” students work through a series of supporting questions, performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument supported by evidence while acknowledging competing views.

Staging the Compelling Question

The compelling question “Are the Olympics about more than sports?” may be staged by having students discuss the pros and cons of school sports as they relate to uniting people. Students may focus on Olympic sports, such as track and field, or non-Olympic sports, such as baseball or football. Students may also discuss occasions when athletic rivals look past their differences to cooperate through sports and related activities.
Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question—“What is the history and mythology of ancient Greek Olympics?”—invites students to focus on the origins of the Olympic Games in eighth-century BCE Greece. The games continued for 500 years as they came to be one of the most important traditions in Greek culture. The formative performance task calls on students to list 10 people, places, or events related to the history of the ancient Greek Olympics. The featured sources include an image bank with text that offers a short history of the Olympics and two 2,000-year-old descriptions of the history and mythology of the Olympics from Pausanias of Damascus.

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question—“What are the goals of the modern Olympic movement?”—enables students to make a connection between the ancient and modern Olympics while focusing on the goals of both movements. The formative performance task asks students to construct a Venn diagram contrasting the modern Olympic movement with that of the ancient Greeks. Featured Source A is an excerpt from a report by the founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, which provides a historical perspective on the modern Olympic movement. Featured Source B is a one-page flyer describing the modern concept of Olympism, which is a philosophy of life that places sport in the service of humanity.

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question—“How are the arts a part of the modern Olympics?”—provides students with an opportunity to examine how Olympism is expressed through the arts. In the formative performance task, students make a claim about the importance of arts in the Olympic movement. The two featured sources provide students with an opportunity to compare the incorporation of the arts in the ancient and modern Olympics.

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined the historical and mythological roots of the ancient Olympic movement as well as the goals of the modern Olympic movement and its broader focus on the arts. Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and ability to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students are asked to construct an evidence-based argument responding to the compelling question “Are the Olympics about more than sports?” It is important to note that students’ arguments could take a variety of forms, including a detailed outline, poster, or essay.

Students’ arguments likely will vary, but could include any of the following:
• The Olympics provide an opportunity for people in different countries to put aside their differences for the purpose of athletic competition.
• The modern Olympics unite humans and connect us to the past by following the example of the ancient Greeks.
• The Olympics unite humans through sports and the arts.
• The Olympics are important, but humans seem to be in conflict no matter how many times we hold the Olympic Games.

Students could extend these arguments by creating a rationale for holding a version of the Olympics in their community. To complete this extension, students may use the argument they made in response to the compelling question as an argument for investing community resources in a competitive athletic event.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action by thinking about how the ideals of the Olympics might be applied in their school community. To understand the issue, students think about why participating in sports is beneficial to students and the school community. To assess, students might design a plan to implement one or more ideals of Olympism in their school or district. Students act by implementing the ideals of Olympism in their school or district.
Images of the Ancient Olympic Games

The first ancient Olympic Games are thought to have begun in 776 BCE in Olympia, Greece. The ancient Games took place every four years and were always held in Olympia. Originally, the Games only lasted one day but later expanded to multiple days. Only free Greek male citizens could compete. Events included the long jump, boxing, javelin, running, horse racing, and an event called pankration which blended boxing and wrestling. The Games served as part of a religious festival honoring Zeus. In 393 CE Roman Emperor Theodosius, in trying to rid the Roman Empire of paganism, banned the Games. It would not be until 1896 CE when the Olympic Games would be revived in Athens, Greece and then include competitors from around the world.

Image 1: Greek artists painted scenes from the ancient Olympic Games onto ceramic jars or amphoras. This scene depicts a competitor in the long jump who is using hand-held weights, called halteres, to jump farther. Athletes used wooden pegs, called semeions, to mark off their landings.

Image from the BBC website. © The Trustees of the British Museum.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/ancient_greeks/the_olympic_games/.
Image 2: These scene portrays a boxing match. Boxing was added to the Olympic Games around 688 BCE. Fighters wore leather straps, originally made from ox hide, over their hands and wrists,

Image from the BBC website. © The Trustees of the British Museum.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/ancient_greeks/the_olympic_games/.
Image 3: There were both 2-horse chariot and 4-horse chariot races, with separate races for chariots drawn by foals (young horses). Another race was between carts drawn by a team of 2 mules. The course was 12 laps around the stadium track (9 miles).

Text © Perseus Digital Library, Tufts University. Photograph by Maria Daniels, courtesy of the Tampa Museum of Art. Photo: Black-Figure Stamnos Attributed to the Group of Louvre F314 Greek, Attic, ca. 525-500 BC Ceramic H. 23.8 cm Tampa Museum of Art, Joseph Veach Noble Collection 1986.034. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Olympics/equestrian.html#chariot.
Supporting Question 1


[5.8.6] This I can prove; for when the unbroken tradition of the Olympiads began there was first the foot-race, and Coroebus an Elean was victor. There is no statue of Coroebus at Olympia, but his grave is on the borders of Elis. Afterwards, at the fourteenth Festival, the double foot-race was added: Hypenus of Pisa won the prize of wild olive in the double race, and at the next Festival Acanthus of Lacedaemon won in the long course.

[5.8.7] At the eighteenth Festival they remembered the pentathlum and wrestling. Lampis won the first and Eurybatis the second, these also being Lacedaemonians. At the twenty-third Festival they restored the prizes for boxing, and the victor was Onomastus of Smyrna, which already was a part of Ionia. At the twenty-fifth they recognized the race of full-grown horses, and Pagondas of Thebes was proclaimed “victor in the chariot-race.”

[5.8.8] At the eighth Festival after this they admitted the pancratium for men and the horse-race. The horse-race was won by Crauxidas of Cranon, and Lygdamis of Syracuse overcame all who entered for the pancratium. Lygdamis has his tomb near the quarries at Syracuse, and according to the Syracusans he was as big as Heracles of Thebes, though I cannot vouch for the statement.

[5.8.9] The contests for boys have no authority in old tradition, but were established by the Eleans themselves because they approved of them. The prizes for running and wrestling open to boys were instituted at the thirty-seventh Festival; Hippothenes of Lacedaemon won the prize for wrestling, and that for running was won by Polyniecis of Elis. At the forty-first Festival they introduced boxing for boys, and the winner out of those who entered for it was Philytas of Sybaris.

[5.8.10] The race for men in armour was approved at the sixty-fifth Festival, to provide, I suppose, military training; the first winner of the race with shields was Damaretus of Heraea. The race for two full-grown horses, called synoris (chariot and pair), was instituted at the ninety-third Festival, and the winner was Evagoras of Elis. At the ninety-ninth Festival they resolved to hold contests for chariots drawn by foals, and Sybariades of Lacedaemon won the garland with his chariot and foals.

[5.8.11] Afterwards they added races for chariots and pairs of foals, and for single foals with rider. It is said that the victors proclaimed were: for the chariot and pair, Belistiche, a woman from the seaboard of Macedonia; for the ridden race, Tlepolemus of Lycia. Tlepolemus, they say, won at the hundred and thirty-first Festival, and Belistiche at the third before this. At the hundred and forty-fifth Festival prizes were offered for boys in the pancratium, the victory falling to Phaedimus, an Aeolian from the city Troas.

Public domain. Theoi Greek Mythology website:  [http://www.theoi.com/Text/Pausanias5A.html](http://www.theoi.com/Text/Pausanias5A.html)
Supporting Question 1


[5.7.6] These things then are as I have described them. As for the Olympic games, the most learned antiquaries of Elis say that Cronus was the first king of heaven, and that in his honor a temple was built in Olympia by the men of that age, who were named the Golden Race. When Zeus was born, Rhea entrusted the guardianship of her son to the Dactyls of Ida, who are the same as those called Curetes.

[5.7.7] Heracles, being the eldest, matched his brothers, as a game, in a running-race, and crowned the winner with a branch of wild olive, of which they had such a copious supply that they slept on heaps of its leaves while still green. It is said to have been introduced into Greece by Heracles from the land of the Hyperboreans, men living beyond the home of the North Wind.

[5.7.9] ... Heracles of Ida, therefore, has the reputation of being the first to have held, on the occasion I mentioned, the games, and to have called them Olympic. So he established the custom of holding them every fifth year, because he and his brothers were five in number.

[5.7.10] Now some say that Zeus wrestled here with Cronus himself for the throne, while others say that he held the games in honor of his victory over Cronus. The record of victors includes Apollo, who outran Hermes and beat Ares at boxing. It is for this reason, they say, that the Pythian flute-song is played while the competitors in the pentathlum are jumping; for the flute-song is sacred to Apollo, and Apollo won Olympic victories.

Supporting Question 2


The Olympic Games: Athens 1896

By Pierre de Coubertin

It is generally fairly difficult to know why and how an idea is born—emerges from the tide of other ideas that await realization—takes on substance and becomes fact. This, however, is not the case regarding the Olympic Games. The idea of their revival was not a passing fancy: it was the logical culmination of a great movement. The nineteenth century saw the taste for physical exercises revive everywhere: at the dawn of the movement it was in Germany and in Sweden; at its meridian it was in England; at the time of its decline it was in the United States and in France. At the same time the great inventions, the railways and the telegraph have abridged distances and mankind has come to live a new existence; the people have intermingled, they have to learn to know each other better and immediately they started to compare themselves. What one achieved the other immediately wished also to endeavor: universal exhibitions brought together to one locality of the globe the products of the most distant lands; literary or scientific congresses have brought together, into contact, the various intellectual forces. How then should the athletes not seek to meet, since rivalry is the very basis of athletics, and in reality the very reason of its existence?

It was this, in fact, that happened. Switzerland invited rifle marksmen from abroad for its federal competitions, while cyclists have taken part on all the cycle tracks of Europe. Britain and the United States have challenged each other upon water and grass, and fencers of Rome and Paris have crossed foils. Gradually internationalism has found its way into the various events, augmenting the interest and increasing the sphere of action. Thus the revival of the Olympic Games was becoming possible.

Supporting Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Featured Source</th>
<th>Source B: Video: Living the Olympic Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Note:** The link below connects to an International Olympic Committee video on values.

[http://www.olympic.org/living-the-olympic-values](http://www.olympic.org/living-the-olympic-values)

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Supporting Question 2

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**What is Olympism?**

*The Olympic Creed - “The important thing in life is not the triumph, but the fight; the essential thing is not to have won, but to have fought well.”*

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**WHAT IS OLYMPISM?**

Olympism is a philosophy of life which places sport at the service of humanity. This philosophy is based on the interaction of the qualities of the body, will and mind. Olympism is expressed through actions which link sport to culture and education.

This philosophy is an essential element of the Olympic Movement and the celebration of the Games. It is also what makes them unique.

The pursuit of this ideal and the other “fundamental principles of Olympism” [set out in the Olympic Charter] gives rise to a series of values, which are applicable both on the field of play and in everyday life.

The IOC has identified the following three Olympic values:

**Excellence** In the Olympic ideal, this value refers to giving one’s best, on the field of play or in life, without measuring oneself with others, but above all aiming at reaching one’s personal objectives with determination in the effort. It is not only about winning, but mainly about participating, making progress against personal goals, striving to be and to do our best in our daily lives and benefiting from the combination of a strong body, will and mind.

**Friendship** Men and women are at the centre of the Olympic Movement’s focus encouraging the links and mutual understanding between people. This value broadly refers to building a peaceful and better world through solidarity, team spirit, joy and optimism in sport. The Olympic Games inspire humanity to overcome political, economic, gender, racial or religious differences and forge friendships in spite of those differences. The athletes express this value by forming life-long bonds with their team-mates, as well as with their opponents.

**Respect** In the Olympic ideal, this value represents the ethical principle that should inspire all who participate in the Olympic programmes. It includes respect for oneself and one’s body, respect for one another, for rules and for the environment. It thus refers to the fair play that each athlete has to display in sport, as well as avoiding doping.

Supporting Question 3


![Image](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010717092/)

It is the Lyre of Pindar: The Play at Olympia. Watercolor by Corwin Knapp Linson, 1896.

**Pindar, Poetry, and the Olympics** by Peter Armenti

The relationship between poetry and the Olympics reaches back at least 2,500 years, when the Greek poet Pindar (ca. 518-438 B.C.) composed victory odes, or *epinicia*, for victorious athletes competing in the Olympics and the three other major Panhellenic games—those at Pythia, Nemea, and the isthmus of Corinth. Of these, the Olympic games were the most important, as Pindar recognizes in his first Olympian ode, written to celebrate the victory of the racehorse Pherenikos, owned by Hieron, ruler of Syracuse:

*But if, my heart, you wish to sing of contests, look no further for any star warmer than the sun, shining by day through the lonely sky, and let us not proclaim any contest greater than Olympia....*  
(prose tr. Diane Arnson Svarlien)

While only fourteen of Pindar’s Olympic odes survive—they can be read online in Greek and in various English translations—his influence, and the larger influence of poetry on the Olympics, has lasted. In fact, the push to revive the Olympics was initiated by Greek poet Panagiotis Soutsos, who first raised the prospect in his 1833 poem “Dialogue of the Dead,” in which the ghost of Plato says to a Greece suffering through economic and political hardship:

*If our shadow could fly to your earth it would daringly shout to the Ministers of the Throne:  
Leave your petty politics and vain quarrels.  
Recall the past splendour of Greece.  
Tell me, where are your ancient centuries?  
Where are your Olympic Games?...*

Inviting the Artists

Paris 1906

Norbert Müller

Fourth Olympic Congress (Advisory Conference)
Paris, Comédie Française and Touring Club, May 23-25, 1906

1 Arts and Olympism

In 1906, Coubertin drew the Olympic movement’s attention to the relationship between the Olympic Games and the arts. From the beginning, this was one of his basic aspects of his Olympic idea.

At the start of the Olympic movement, Coubertin did not stress this aspect explicitly because “the first necessity was to revive them and the second to shape them.”

The Congresses of Le Havre and Brussels connected the Olympic movement to science, and the integration of art was to come. According to Coubertin’s view, Olympic Games should comprise elements which led them beyond international championships and demonstrated their spiritual content, thus coming closer to the ancient ideal. In 1904, he explained:

“Now the moment has come when we enter a new phase and intend to reestablish the original beauty of Olympic Games. In the high times of Olympia...the fine arts were combined harmoniously with the Olympic Games to create their glory. This is to become reality once again.”

...The most essential decision of the Conference referred to the introduction of five competitions of the fine arts in the genres of architecture, sculpting, painting, literature, and music at future Olympic Games. The competitions should be set on an equal footing with sports competitions and should be inspired by the spirit of sport. An international jury was to be responsible for the prize awards, and awarded works were to be exhibited or performed during the Olympic Games...

- As to architecture it was stated that stadia and sports halls could fulfill their purpose only as an entity...A group of architects pursued the draft of a model for a rural gymnasium. The Conference was convinced that the ancient stadium could no longer have any exemplary character for modern sports facilities.

- As to theatre, playwrights should allow sport to inspire them... Sports clubs in turn could engage in amateur dramatics.
- As to dance, it was demanded that it returned to a more athletic way of expression.

- As to the decoration of sports events, the clothing the participants wear in parades should reflect their individual disciplines.

- Literature could deal with topics of sport. It was recommended that authors should experience sport themselves to write authentically about it.

- In contrast to literature, music could support sport by the singing of choirs. The IOC was to encourage sports federations in this respect. Related to this, it was stated that “singing was as important for training the technique of breathing as it was for the majority of sports.” This statement was a sign of the desperate efforts made by the Conference participants to prove a link between sport and arts. The suggestion that sports clubs and choirs should support each other in their festivities was much more sensible.

- As to painting and sculpting, it was recommended that artists create motifs in the modern sports halls wherein other opportunities should be given for artists to exhibit their works.

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