mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Why are the Olympic Games so popular?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hi, it's Jay! What are you best at on the playground? Are you a fast runner? Awesome at hand clapping games? A hula hoop hero? Well, think about this. Whatever you love to do most, there are probably other kids around the world who love doing that too. What if you could get all those kids together to play in one place? Then you could try your skills against the best runners, hand clappers, or hula hoopers out there. I wonder who would win. Someone named Aija has a question about something a little like this. Let's call Aija now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Jay.
- Hi, Aija.
- I have a question for you. Why are the Olympic Games so popular?
- That's a great question.

Every few years, the best athletes from around the world gather together in one city to compete in sports that test speed, strength, and skill. These games are called the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and they are a big deal. Any city hosting the Games prepares for years. Crowds flock from all over to watch thousands of athletes compete in dozens of events. The athletes who compete here are the best in the world at their sports. The best swimmers, the best long jumpers, the best weightlifters, and more. The winner of each event gets a medal,

gold for first place, silver for second, and bronze for third. Right now, athletes all over the world are getting ready to go to the Olympics. Imagine what it would be like to be one of them. If you were getting ready to compete in the Olympics, how do you think you'd feel?

VIDEO 2

If you're about to compete in the Games, you might be pretty nervous. What if you mess up in front of thousands of people? What if your competitors are really good? It's a lot of pressure. But you'd probably be pumped too. You get to meet amazing athletes from all over the world. You get a chance to compete against the very best for gold medal glory. Sounds pretty fun. Okay. But what if instead of heading to the games today, you were heading to the first Olympic Games a long, long time ago? How would that be different? The earliest Olympic Games took place in ancient Greece thousands of years ago. If you were an Olympic athlete back then, you'd be getting ready to travel to a place in Greece called Olympia where the games were held. That's where the Olympic Games get their name. Once you got there, you'd compete in sports like foot races or chariot racing. You probably wouldn't have much special equipment or clothing. Runners ran barefoot. And if you won, you wouldn't get a gold medal. Instead, you might get one of these, a crown of wild olive branches. Still, even back then, winning at the Olympics was a huge deal. Thousands of people traveled from all over Greece to compete or watch the games. Winners sometimes had statues made of them in their hometowns. Poets wrote songs about their accomplishments. The Olympics today are a tribute to those ancient Greek Olympic games, but that doesn't mean they are exactly the same as they were thousands of years ago. Back in ancient Greece, only some Greek men were allowed to compete in the Olympics, mostly soldiers. Today, women and men from more than two hundred different countries can and do

compete. Athletes with disabilities also compete in games alongside the Olympics called the Paralympics. The Paralympics did not begin in ancient Greece. The games that became the Paralympics began in the 1940s when a hospital in Europe held a competition for athletes who used wheelchairs. Over the years, this competition grew and grew and became more and more popular and competitive until it became such a big deal that it started being held alongside the Olympics. Because of these changes and more, the way athletes compete at the games also looks really different now than it did in ancient Greece. Runners don't run races barefoot anymore. Far from it. Check out these specially designed shoes for Olympic sprinters. They help runners grip the track, run faster, and keep from getting injured. Similarly, some Paralympians use specially designed prosthetic legs like these to help them run fast. The Olympics and Paralympics today also include some sports that the ancient Greek Olympics didn't have at all. One of the biggest changes they've made over the years is this, winter sports.

Back in ancient Greece, sports were only included if you could play them outdoors in the summer. Today, the Olympics and Paralympics have a whole separate competition in the winter for snowy and icy sports like figure skating, skiing, and snowboarding. Also, every few years, the organizers of the Olympics and Paralympics consider brand new sports to add to the games. Even in the summer, some sports have been added that the ancient Greeks never imagined, from surfing to this sport called breaking or this one called goalball. So, in summary, the Olympics and Paralympic Games are international athletic competitions. The Olympics today are a tribute to the huge athletic competitions held thousands of years ago in ancient Greece. But who plays and how we play has changed a lot since then. Those changes have made the Games more interesting and more competitive. That's why so many people still love watching them today. What changes would you want to see in the future? That's all for this week's question. Thanks for asking, Aija.