What can the Olympics tell us about the key events and changes of the 20th century?

The modern Olympics started in 1896. Since then, with a couple of exceptions, the Games have been held regularly every four years. Each Olympics reflects what the world is like at the time they take place. In this unit you will use the Olympics as a window on the 20th century. What can the Games tell us about the major political events of the last 100 years? What can the Olympics tell us about the social, cultural and technological changes that have taken place since 1896?

PICTURE PUZZLE

1. Each of the pictures on page 2 is taken from an Olympic Games that took place in the 20th century. Use the clues in the pictures to place the Games in chronological order.

2. For each picture try to answer as many of the following questions as possible. Do not worry if you cannot answer all the questions at this stage. Use the table on the right and the clues in the picture to help you.
   - Who is in the picture?
   - Where are the Olympics taking place?
   - When did these Olympics take place?
   - What is happening in the picture?
   - Why was this event important?
   - How useful is this source? What does it tell us about life at the time?

3. Try to solve the extra puzzles in the yellow boxes on page 2.

NUMBER PUZZLE

1. The Olympic Games are usually held every four years. Why were they not held in 1916, 1940 and 1944?

2. Why do you think the number of athletes competing in the Games fell in 1904, 1932, and 1956? CLUE – This has nothing to do with politics...think Geography!

3. In 1980 and 1984, lots of countries boycotted the Games. Why did they refuse to attend?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Male athletes</th>
<th>Female athletes</th>
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</table>

↑ The Olympics 1900-2000
What can you tell by looking through an Olympics window?

Why did the sprinter who came second win the gold medal?

What happened for the first time at this Olympics?

Why did this individual annoy Hitler?

Why did armed gunmen enter the Israeli team’s base in the Olympic village?

Why did Tommie Smith and John Carlos remove their shoes before stepping on to the medal podium and why are they saluting this way?
WOMEN COMPETE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN TRACK AND FIELD EVENTS

The modern Olympics were the idea of Pierre de Coubertin, a French educator. De Coubertin and many of his colleagues on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) believed that athletics was not ‘ladylike’ and that athletic exercise was damaging to women. In Athens in 1896 there had been no events for women. In the 1900 Paris Olympics women took part in the Olympics for the first time. However, they were only allowed to compete in golf and tennis. In 1912 this was extended to swimming.

It was not until the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics that women were allowed to compete in track and field athletics events for the first time. Even then, the number of events that they could take part in was limited. They were only allowed to participate in the 100 m, 800 m, 4 x 100 m relay, discus and high jump. After the women’s 800 metres there were complaints that the competitors looked too exhausted. Women were not allowed to run races of more than 200 metres again until the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

Things took a long time to change. Even in the 1980 Moscow Olympics, only 18 per cent of the athletes were women. Today women compete in a number of sports such as football and weightlifting that in 1980 were reserved only for men. However, male athletes still outnumber female athletes.

In Section 4 of this book you will explore how women had to campaign for equal rights in sport and in politics.
The **1936 Olympics** were perhaps the most infamous of them all. They were used by Hitler and Goebbels as propaganda to promote the Nazi regime. The idea of the Olympic torch relay was introduced. The torch was lit in Olympia and carried to Berlin by a relay of thousands of runners. At the Olympic stadium, against an elaborate backdrop of Nazi banners and symbols, it was used to light the Olympic flame during the opening ceremony.

Hitler believed that the Olympics would show that the German Aryan race was superior to all other races. However, a black American, Jesse Owens, became the hero of the games by winning four gold medals. In Section 3 of this book you will explore Hitler’s racist beliefs and the way he changed life in Germany.

**1968: MEXICO**

**Black Power Protest at Olympics**

The photograph shows the American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos (first and third in the 200 metres) giving the Black Power salute at the Olympic Games in Mexico in 1968. They wanted to raise awareness of the inequality that existed in America and to express their pride in being black Americans. As part of their protest, they removed their shoes to symbolise black poverty. They were thrown out of the Olympics as a result of their protest.

In Section 4 of this book you will find out more about how black Americans protested about the way they were treated in the United States.
1972: MUNICH

TERRORIST ATTACK ON ISRAELI ATHLETES

Just before dawn on the eleventh day of the Olympics, a small gang of Palestinian terrorists climbed the fence of the Olympic village. The terrorists were members of the Black September organisation. They made their way to where the Israeli team were staying, killed two Israelis and took nine hostages. The masked gunmen threatened to kill the Israeli hostages unless 200 Palestinian prisoners held in Israel were released.

After a day of negotiations the terrorists were allowed to take the hostages to the airport where they expected to be flown out of the country. The security forces launched a rescue attempt. In the gunfight that followed five of the terrorists, a German policeman and all of the hostages were killed.

Since 1972 terrorism has remained a threat at all Olympics. Security was raised for the Games that followed Munich. However, at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics a bomb exploded on 27 July, which left one person dead and more than one hundred injured. The bomb was set by an American terrorist, Eric Robert Rudolph, who claimed that he had planted the bomb to protest against the American government allowing abortion. In Section 2 of this book you will learn more about how terrorism has developed.

1988: SEOUL

FASTEST MAN ON EARTH FAILS DRUG TEST

Many people thought that they had witnessed one of the greatest sporting performances of all time in 1988 when Ben Johnson, the Canadian sprinter, won the 100 metres in a world record time of 9.79 seconds. At the press conference that followed Johnson was asked what meant more, the record or the medal. He replied

`They can break my record, but they can’t take my gold medal away.’

However, his medal was taken away. Johnson tested positive for anabolic steroids and was stripped of both his world record and his gold medal. The second place American athlete, Carl Lewis, was awarded the gold medal.

The substance used by Johnson was stanozolol, which increases muscle bulk, strength and power. It was a sign that sport was now so big that competitors were willing to risk everything to win. Johnson was one of a number of competitors who were disqualified from the Games because of drug scandals.

Johnson was not the first athlete to use drugs to try and improve performance. As sport became more global and professional the stakes got higher and higher. Some athletes began to look to drugs as a way of gaining an advantage over their rivals. Rumours of widespread drug taking first emerged in the 1952 Winter Olympics. In the 1960 Rome Olympics a Danish cyclist died. His post-mortem showed that he had taken amphetamines. Drug testing was introduced at the 1968 Mexico Olympics. At the 1976 Montreal Olympics seven weightlifters, including a number of gold medal winners, were disqualified for using anabolic steroids.

You will consider whether drug taking is the main threat to future Olympics at the end of this introductory section.
Every number tells a story

Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, thought that they would promote peace and understanding between countries, and improve the physical and moral stature of young athletes. De Coubertin hoped that the Olympics would be free from politics. However, politics has always been part of the Olympics. The Olympics were soon affected by the major conflicts and political events of the twentieth century.

Political conflict

The Olympics did not take place in 1916 because of the First World War and there was a gap of twelve years between the 1936 Olympics and the next Games in 1948 because of the Second World War. These two conflicts also explain why Germany and her allies were not invited to the 1920 and 1948 Olympics. The boycotts of the 1980 and 1984 Olympics reflect the bad relations that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union during the early 1980s as a consequence of the Cold War. In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and as a result America and a number of other nations boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics in protest. In retaliation the Soviet Union and some of her allies in Eastern Europe boycotted the Los Angeles Olympics four years later.

Changes in technology

However, the Olympics can tell us about more than just politics. The table on page 1 shows that the number of athletes competing in the games fell significantly in 1904 and 1932 when the Olympics were held in America. This is a reflection of transport and technology at the time. In 1904 European athletes faced a long boat ride, followed by a slow 1000-mile train ride. Of the 548 athletes who took part, 432 were American. Numbers participating fell again in 1956 when the Olympics were held in Australia. This shows that long-distance travel was nowhere near as simple or straightforward as it is now. By the time the Olympics were held in Australia again, in 2000, technology had moved on and air travel was far quicker and easier.

ACTIVITY 2

Use the information on this page to check your answers to the number puzzle on page 1.

↑ British gold medal winners return from Sydney, 2000.
From Athens to Athens: exploring change and continuity

What changed and what stayed the same between the 1896 and 2004 Athens Olympics?

The first modern Olympics were held in Athens in 1896. Greece was chosen because it was where the Ancient Olympics had started in 776 BC and where they were held for hundreds of years. In 2004 the Olympic Games returned to Greece. Comparing the 1896 and 2004 Games can reveal a great deal about how the world changed during the twentieth century. However, it is not just the changes that interest historians. It is also what stays the same. Remember to look for evidence of continuity as well as change when you compare the two Games.

ACTIVITY 3

1. Look at the picture of the 1896 Olympics in Athens below. Compare it to the pictures of 2004 Athens opposite. What similarities and differences can you see?
2. Read the information boxes on each Olympics. What are the main changes that took place between the 1896 and 2004 Athens games?
3. What do these changes tell us about how life changed during the 20th century?

1896: Athens – The First Modern Olympics

- Fourteen nations took part
- 245 athletes participated
- Only male athletes were involved
- Nine sports (track and field athletics, gymnastics, cycling, fencing, weightlifting, wrestling, swimming, tennis and shooting)
- 43 events (none open to women)
- The games lasted ten days
- The USA won the most athletics events
- Greece won most medals overall (47)
- All athletes were unpaid and had to find their own accommodation
- The swimming events were held in the Aegean Sea. In the 1200 m event, the nine competitors were taken out to sea by boat and left to swim back to shore, struggling against 12-foot waves
- The events were reported in newspapers and were well attended. More than 100,000 spectators lined the route of the marathon, which was won by a Greek athlete, Spiridon Louis, in 2 hours 58 minutes
- James Connolly, the American triple jump champion, had to raise the funds for the trip to Greece himself. He then had to endure a sixteen-day boat trip to Naples in Italy, eventually arriving in Greece one day before he competed in the triple jump
- Every winner was presented with a silver medal and an olive branch
- The 100 metres was won by Thomas Burke, from the USA, in a time of 12.0 seconds
The 2004 Athens Olympics

- 201 nations took part
- 10,625 athletes (4,329 women, 6,296 men) competed in the Games. They were housed in an Olympic village
- Many of the athletes were professional sportsmen and women
- 28 sports
- 301 events (133 open to women)
- The events were contested on 37 different sites
- The Games lasted 17 days
- 45,000 people were responsible for security at the Games
- 21,500 journalists
- Popularity of the Games soared to new highs as 3.9 billion people had access to the television coverage
- The United States won the most gold medals
- The cost of the Games was estimated to be 7.2 billion euros. Lots of this money was spent on state-of-the-art venues. The Olympic stadium, for example, was designed with a retractable glass roof
- The 2004 Summer Paralympics were also held in Athens: 4000 athletes took part
- The men’s 100 metres was won by Justin Gatlin from the USA in a time of 9.85 seconds
- The marathon was won by Stefano Baldini from Italy in a time of 2 hours and 10 minutes
What is the biggest danger facing future Olympics?

Sport as big business?
As you have seen, the Olympics have changed a great deal since 1896. Many people are concerned that sport has become too much like big business and that the Olympics are in danger of becoming too commercialised.

ACTIVITY 4

1. Use the information on pages 9-10 to explain why the Olympics became commercialised.
2. Do you think that commercialisation is the biggest danger facing future Olympics? Place the following potential threats in order of importance and explain your choices.
   - Drugs
   - Commercialisation
   - Terrorism
   - Political boycotts

1948: London – The ‘Make Do and Mend’ Olympics

These Olympics were the first to be held after the Second World War. Britain had very little money to spend on the Games and the 1948 Olympics have been called the ‘make-do-and-mend Games’.

- Transport was provided on London buses
- RAF camps, nurses’ hostels and local schools provided the accommodation for the athletes.
- Term ended early for some local schoolchildren as their classrooms were turned into bedrooms for the athletes
- When the cycling event went into the evening, spectators were invited to circle the track in their cars, with headlights full on so that the racing could be completed
- The athletics events were held in Wembley Stadium (as well as football and hockey finals). It cost just £89,000 to prepare the stadium. Some changes had to be made. The greyhound track that encircled the football pitch had to be made suitable for athletics events
- The Empire pool (built in 1934) was used to hold the swimming events. It held 8000 people and there was still black-out paint on the glass roof from the Second World War
- Food for athletes was rationed (although athletes were put on the largest allowance). Meat, eggs and butter were scarce and some athletes ate whale meat (which was not rationed) to try to get enough protein
- Many athletes competed in home-made kit and some training methods were very different from today. Emil Zatopek, the 5000 and 10,000 metres champion, prepared for the Olympics by running with his wife on his back!
- Security was provided by bobbies on the beat (mainly by local policemen patrolling on foot)
1960: ROME – TV TAKES OVER

The Rome Olympics were the first Games to be televised across the world. Over 100 television channels broadcast both live and recorded footage of the Games to eighteen countries across Europe as well as to the United States, Japan and Canada. CBS-TV paid $660,000 to film the Games. Footage from Rome was flown to New York so that it was ready for ‘prime-time’ broadcasts.

Some people on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) hated the idea of commercialisation. However, the IOC could no longer ignore the potential for huge sums of money to be made from the Games. By the time of the 1976 Montreal Olympics ABC were paying $25 million for the rights to broadcast the Games. The introduction of TV coverage also increased the interest of big business. Soon companies were making deals with athletes to wear their brand of shoes or to use their sports equipment.

1984: LOS ANGELES – RECORD PROFITS

The Los Angeles Games were the first to be staged without government financing. Big business took over and, despite the boycott by the Soviet Union and her allies, the Games made a $223 million profit. $130 million was raised from 30 corporate sponsors. ABC paid $225 million for the television rights and there were also 43 companies licensed to sell ‘official’ Olympic products. The Mars Bar was the official snack food of the Games and McDonald’s sold the official Olympic burger. For the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, NBC paid $456 million to televise the Games and received $600 million back in advertising revenue.

2012: THE OLYMPICS RETURN TO LONDON

- Total cost = £9 billion
- Cost of the building programme = £7 billion
- Cost of staging all the events = £2 billion
- Cost of the athletes’ village is expected to be £1 billion. The village will provide accommodation for over 17,000 athletes and officials
- Cost of security = £1.2 billion
- A new 80,000 seat Olympic Stadium will be built to hold the athletics events
- A new venue to host the swimming events is also being built. The building will cost an estimated £300 million and will hold 17,500 spectators. The roof of the building has been designed to resemble a wave
- The Olympic Park will have its own power station