

# What's Happening

I N T H E W O R L D ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

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## London Hosts the 2012 Olympics

This summer London will make history. Thousands of athletes will go there to compete in the XXX Olympiad from July 27 to August 12. This will be the third time that London has hosted the Olympic Games, and it will become the first city to do so in modern history.

Greece is the home of the Olympics. Those first games took place every four years in Olympia, beginning in 776 B.C. Initially the events were all on one day, but the Games expanded to include more events over five days. If there were wars between city-states or countries, a truce brought temporary peace so that athletes could travel safely to Olympia.

For about 1,500 years the Olympics did not take place at all. The ancient Games ended when Emperor Theodosius stopped them in 394 A.D. However, a Frenchman named Baron Pierre de Coubertin felt that a rebirth of the Olympic Games could lead to a new age of democracy and peace. When he gathered support for the idea, the modern Games began again in 1896.

London hosted the Olympics for the first time in 1908. Two important things happened that year. First, it was the first time that athletes paraded under their national flags, as they do now at every opening ceremony. Second, the distance of the marathon increased from 25 miles to 26 miles, 385 yards. That happened so that the starting line would be at Windsor Castle and the finish line in front of the king in the Olympic stadium.

In 1948 London hosted the Olympics again. It was actually supposed to host the 1944 Games, but World War II had caused their cancellation. Although the world was still suffering from the war, the Olympics did bring people from 59 nations together for a peaceful cause. It was also the year that a doctor in England organized the International Wheelchair Games, which led to the Paralympics.

Fire has become an important part of the modern Olympics. The ancient Greeks kept a fire burning throughout the Games. The 1928 Games reintroduced the Olympic Flame, which now always burns at the Games. Then in 1936 the torch relay also

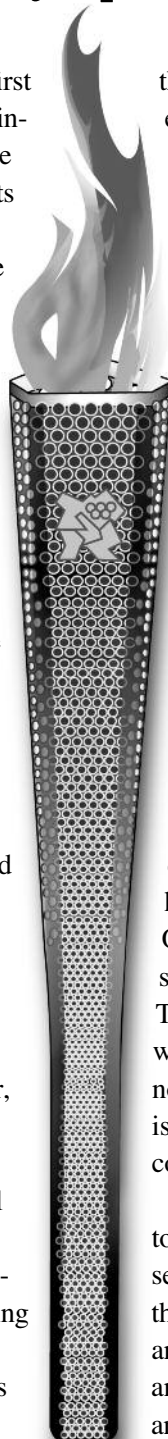
began. Several months before the Games begin there is a lighting ceremony at Olympia. From there Olympic officials transport a torch and flame to the host country.

This year the flame will arrive in the United Kingdom from Greece on May 18. The long, gold-colored torch has a triangular shape. Its three sides have a total of 8,000 small holes, one for every torchbearer and every mile of the relay. In 70 days the flame will pass through more than 1,000 cities, towns and villages. It will come within ten miles of 95 percent of the people in the country. The final runner will carry a torch into Olympic Stadium for the opening ceremony on July 27.

England's Queen Elizabeth II and her husband will attend the opening ceremony and open the Games officially. Olympic Stadium is a new structure that will hold 80,000 spectators. It stands as the centerpiece of the new Olympic Park, east of downtown London. The stadium will be the site of the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as most track and field events. After the Olympics, the stadium also will host events in the Paralympic Games for athletes who have physical disabilities.

The Olympics are the world's largest sporting event. More than 10,000 athletes will represent more than 200 nations. They will compete for gold, silver and bronze medals in hundreds of events in 36 sports. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has eliminated two sports from these games, baseball and softball. The IOC has added one new event though, women's boxing. That means that there are now no sports in which only men compete. Equestrian is still the only sport in which men and women compete against each other.

About five million visitors will go to London to see the Olympic Games. For 19 days they will see the world's finest athletes compete and fulfill their dreams. More important though, the IOC anticipates that the London Games will further the ancient dream of building understanding, friendship and peace among the nations of the world.



# What's Happening

## IN THE WORLD ?

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Greece is the home of the Olympics. They began in 776 B.C. and took place every four years in Olympia. At first the events were all on one day, but they expanded to five days. If there were wars between city-states or countries, a truce brought temporary peace during the Olympics.

For about 1,500 years the Olympics did not take place at all. However, the modern Games began again in 1896 when a Frenchman gathered support for them. He felt that they could lead to a new age of democracy and peace.

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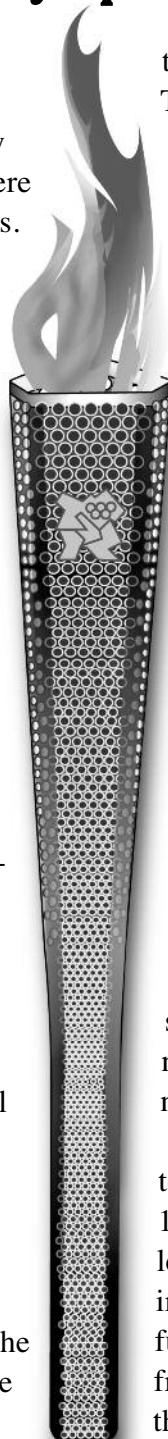
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# Background Information

An earthquake destroyed the Olympic site at Olympia in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

This year Queen Elizabeth II is also celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> year of her reign.

World War II also caused the cancellation of the Games in 1940.

British Olympic officials say that the triangular shape of the torch represents the three times that London has hosted the Olympics and the three words in the Olympic motto “Faster, Higher, Stronger.”

Torchbearers in the relay will carry about 110 torches a day. Most of the runners are 14–24 years old. The final torchbearer is usually someone famous from the host country, and that person’s identity is kept a secret until the opening ceremony.

This year 147 countries will participate in the Paralympic Games, which include 20 sports. They last from August 29 to September 9.

Construction of the Olympic Stadium began in 2008 and took just under three years. After the Olympics it will host sporting events as well as cultural and community events. London is also building a couple of temporary stadiums for Equestrian and Beach Volleyball events.

The Olympic Park is in a part of London that used to be an industrial area. It had junkyards, abandoned factories and a sewage plant. An environmental manager for London says the area had suffered “two or three centuries of industrial abuse.” The park covers 500 acres, including more than 100 acres of wildlife habitat. After the Games it will be the site of businesses and 3,600 new homes.

Sailing and some soccer events will be held outside London.

The 1900 Summer Olympics in Paris were the first to allow women to compete.

The newest Olympic sports are Triathlon and Taekwondo, which were added for the 2000 Games in Sydney.

In 2016 golf and seven-man rugby will fill the slots left open by this year’s elimination of baseball and softball. Golf was an Olympic sport in 1900 and 1904, and it will return for both men and women. A number of professional golfers already have announced that they will participate. Rugby was last an Olympic sport in 1924.

## Topics for Discussion and Writing

### *Pre-reading:*

- Describe what happens at the Olympics’ opening ceremony.

### *Comprehension:*

- Tell how the Olympic torch relay works and what its purpose is.

### *Beyond the Text:*

- Explain why you feel that the Olympics do, or do not, further the cause of peace in the world.
- Which of the Olympic sports do you enjoy the most?
- Describe the ceremony at which athletes receive their medals.

## Vocabulary (\*advanced article only)

*Article-specific:* to compete; to host; truce; ancient; marathon; relay; torch; torchbearer; spectator; equestrian\*

*High-use:* initially\*; to expand; temporary; rebirth\*; cancellation\*; to transport; ceremony; structure\*; event; disability; to anticipate\*

## Sources

*National Post* (London) April 19, 2012

*Daily Mirror* March 29, 2012

*The Independent on Sunday* March 11, 2012

*Associated Press* October 9, 2009

*The Economist* July 9, 2005

[www.london2012.com](http://www.london2012.com)

## CA Curricular Standards (4–12)

### English-Language Arts

*Reading* 1.0 Vocabulary Development

2.0 Comprehension (Informational Materials)

*Writing* 1.0 Writing Strategies

2.0 Writing Applications

### ELD—Intermediate and Advanced

Reading Vocabulary Development/Comprehension

Writing Strategies and Applications

Listening and Speaking