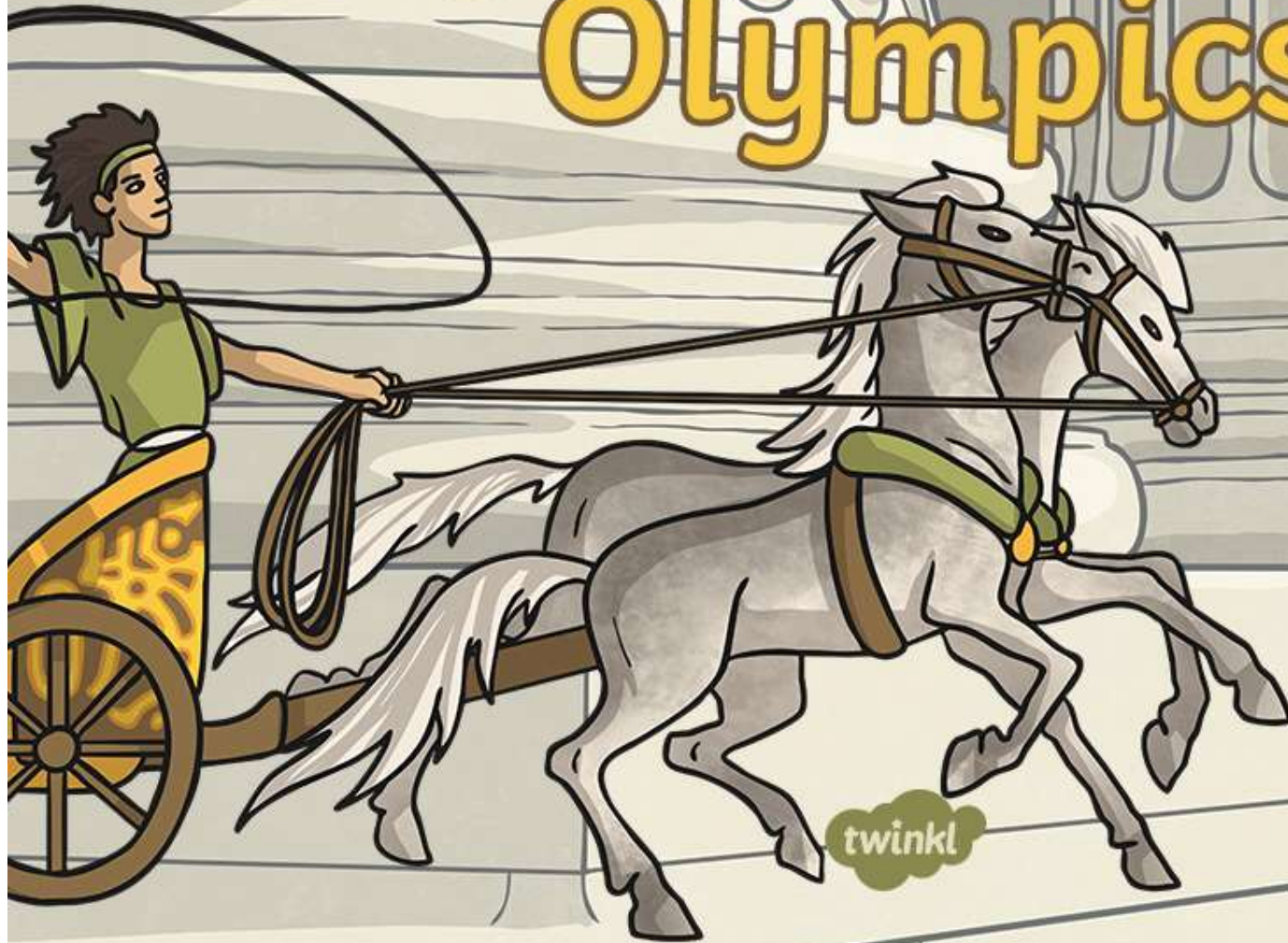


History of the Olympics



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The Ancient Olympics

The Olympic Games are thought to have started in 776BC in Greece.

The Games were part of a very important religious festival.

The Greek Olympics inspired the modern Olympic Games which began in 1896.

The Games were held every four years at Olympia, a valley in southwest Greece.

The Games were held in honour of the king of the gods, Zeus.

People from all over the Greek world travelled to watch and take part.



The Sacred Truce

The city-states of Greece were very often at war, which made travelling around the country dangerous.

Messengers were sent out from Elis, a city near Olympia, to announce a 'sacred truce' lasting one month before the games began.

This allowed people to travel to the Olympics in safety.

The truce was always honoured as the Olympic Games were a religious festival, and was much more important than war.



Events at the Games

The first Olympic Games only lasted a day, and the only event was a short race from one end of the stadium to the other.

Gradually, more events were added to make four days of competitions. The events included boxing, chariot, racing, discus, javelin, long jump and wrestling.

One of the toughest events was the race for the hoplites, men wearing armour and carrying shields.

Winners were given a wreath of leaves and a hero's welcome back home. Winners might have been allowed to marry rich women, and enjoy invitations to parties, free meals and the best seats in theatres.



Spectators

The stadium could hold around 50,000 people. Away from the arena, most spectators had to find somewhere to pitch their tents or sleep rough, but athletes and important people had hotel rooms.

It was very hot and overcrowded, with a very poor water supply, but this did not stop people from coming!

The games ended with a large feast. Traders came to do business, politicians made speeches to the crowds and entertainers such as acrobats and jugglers performed.



The Pankration

The pankration, or all-in wrestling, was a very nasty event!

All-in wrestling was very popular. There were hardly any rules! Biting and poking people's eyes were banned, but some competitors ignored these rules!

Boxing was tough too. The fighters wore leather gloves and a boxer was allowed to carry on hitting his opponent even after he'd knocked him to the ground!

Cheating was punished. For instance, anyone caught trying to bribe an athlete had to pay for a bronze statue of Zeus!



Women at Olympia

Only men, boys and unmarried girls were allowed to attend the Olympic Games. Any women caught sneaking in were punished!

Unmarried women had their own festival at Olympia every four years. This was called the Heraia, held in honour of Hera, wife of Zeus.

Women could compete in races, though only unmarried girls were allowed to take part.

The winners were awarded crowns of sacred olive branches, the same as men.

