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Around the World



# Sports



QuébecAmérique

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**AROUND THE WORLD** takes readers on a journey to discover many of the planet's most fascinating peoples and places. **SPORTS** have left their mark on the world's cultures over time, whether they are practised in competition, to stay in shape, or simply for the fun of the game. While everyone runs the same way, each culture has its own version of sport—along with its own traditions.

What are these sports? What are these traditions?



The words in orange are defined in the glossary on the last page!

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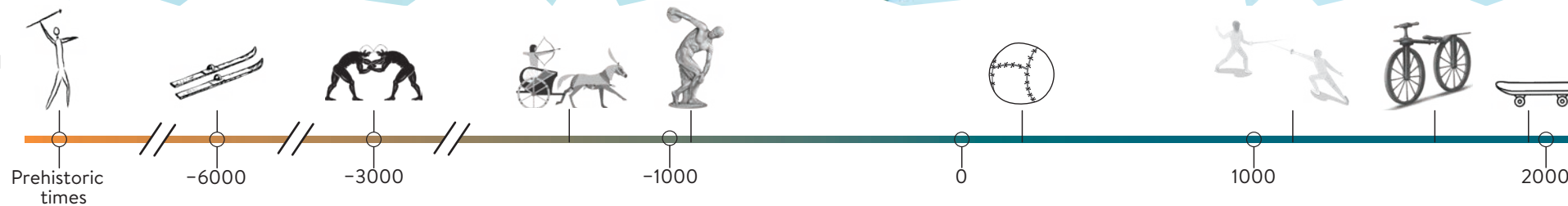
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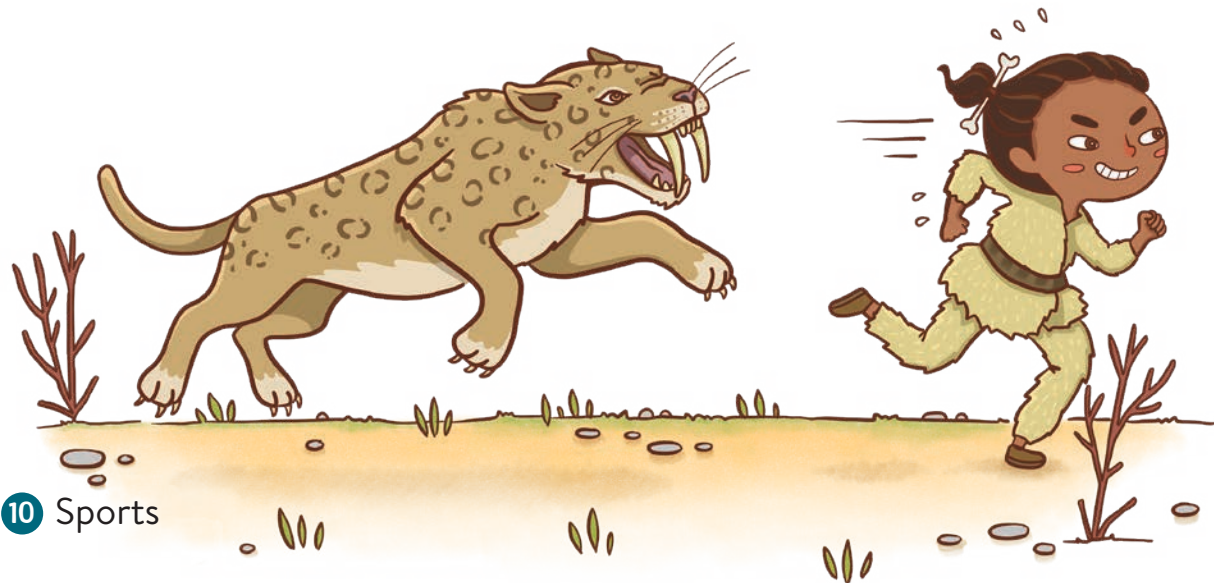
\* Answers can be found throughout the book.

# What is a *sport*?

Do you run? Play ball? Ride a bike? Those are all sports! A sport is any physical activity that requires special skills and follows certain rules and techniques. We participate in sports in order to exercise, to have fun, or to compete against ourselves or other people.

## A bit of history

Physical exercise has been a part of our daily lives since prehistoric times. Humans have spent centuries running, swimming, jumping, throwing, or handling objects such as weapons. These actions helped us fight for our **survival**. Physical activity was linked to tasks such as hunting and gathering, or to fighting **predators** and other enemies. The first sports competitions probably evolved out of the need to train in order to become a better hunter or warrior.



# The world's oldest sports

In ancient Egypt, sports tournaments were already organized. Artwork discovered on temple walls dating back over 3,000 years depicts runners, wrestlers, rowers, or archers in action. Some scenes even show pharaohs using a bow and arrow in the middle of a chariot race!



Further north, the Inuit have long practised harpoon throwing, jumping, and sled dog racing. The Arctic Winter Games are held every other year to bring circumpolar athletes together in competition.

## BULL-LEAPING

A 3,500-year-old **fresco** was discovered in the ruins of the palace at Knossos in Crete (Greece) that depicts acrobats doing flips over a bull! This sport was very popular among the Minoans, an ancient Greek civilization.



# The Olympic Games

## A bit of history

The first Olympic Games were celebrated in Greece in -776 in the town of Olympia. They were held every four years for over a thousand years! The ancient Olympic Games featured competitions in running, horse racing, boxing, wrestling, long jumping, and javelin and discus throwing. Instead of a medal, the winners were crowned with an olive wreath. In 393, the Roman emperor Theodosius I banned the Olympics for conflicting with Christianity.

## The modern Olympic Games

In the 1890s, the French nobleman Pierre de Coubertin decided to revive the Olympic Games. Held in 1896 in Athens, Greece, the first modern Olympic Games brought together some 245 athletes from 14 countries—although women were not allowed to participate.

The circles on the Olympic flag represent the five continents and symbolize the gathering of athletes from around the world.

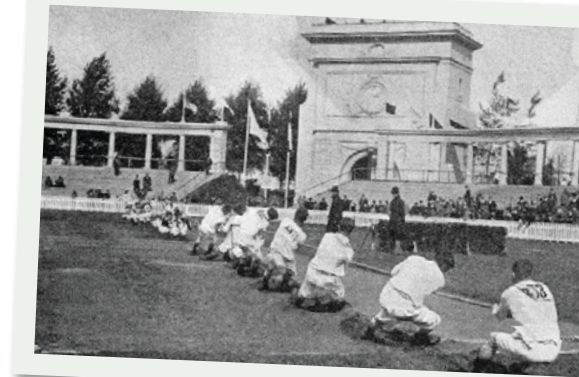


Fun fact: ancient Olympic athletes did not wear clothes—they competed naked!



## A changing Games

Women were first allowed to participate in the Olympics in 1900 in Paris, where they competed in tennis and golf. In 1924, the **Winter Olympics** were held for the first time in Chamonix, France. Some Olympic sports such as croquet and tug-of-war have been removed over time, while others like surfing and skateboarding have been added quite recently. Today, the Olympic Games bring together nearly 11,000 athletes from more than 200 nations.



Tug-of-war is no longer an Olympic sport.

The 2024 Paris Olympics is set to be the first Games to feature an equal number of male and female athletes.



## The Paralympic Games

After World War II, a doctor treating wounded soldiers in England had the idea to organize a competition for athletes in wheelchairs. This 1948 event paved the way for the first Paralympic Games. Today, the Paralympics are open to any athlete with a physical, visual, or mental disability.

# Run, Jump, Throw!

**Track and field** includes running, jumping, and throwing events. They are some of the world's oldest sports and were part of the Games in ancient Greece. Modern track and field is similar to its ancestor and features foot races, high and long jumps, pole vault, and various throwing events including javelin, discus, shot put, and hammer.

The **decathlon** consists of 10 track and field events: 4 running (100 m, 400 m, 110 m hurdles, and 1,500 m), 3 jumping (long, high, pole vault), and 3 throwing (shot put, discus, javelin).



100 m



hurdles



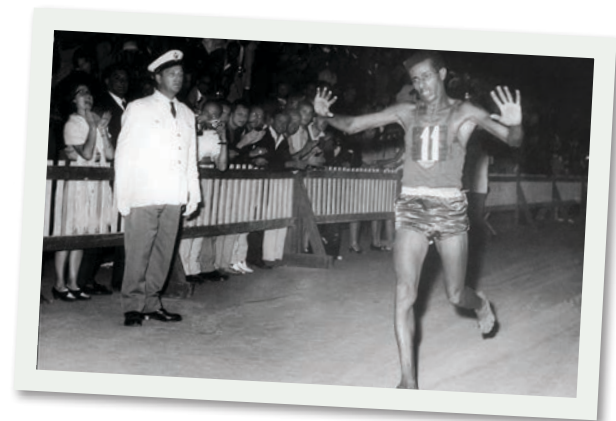
high jump



javelin

## A test of endurance

The **marathon** is a 42 km race that debuted at the 1896 Athens Olympics. The event celebrates a legendary feat of endurance that occurred 2,500 years ago. The Greek soldier Pheidippides is said to have run 40 km from the city of Marathon to Athens to tell the Greeks they had beaten the Persians in battle. Legend has it that Pheidippides died of exhaustion after arriving in Athens.



Many of the world's greatest marathoners come from East Africa. Ethiopian Ebele Bikila is one of the most famous. At the 1960 Olympics in Rome, he ran barefoot to win his first Olympics gold medal!

# The art of the flip

For the ancient Greeks, gymnastics was a way to maintain balance between physical and mental fitness. It was most likely the favourite sport of philosophers, who trained their body while exercising their minds. In Germany in the 1810s, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn founded modern gymnastics by incorporating apparatus such as the horizontal bar, the parallel bars, and the rings.

Today, there are many types of gymnastics. The best known is **artistic gymnastics**, in which athletes perform routines on different apparatus or on the floor. **Rhythmic gymnastics** is a variation that combines elements of dance with apparatus such as a ball, hoop, ribbon, rope, or club. Other types of gymnastics include the **trampoline** and **acrobatic gymnastics**, in which groups of gymnasts work together to form pyramids and perform acrobatics like those done by circus artists.



At the Montreal Olympics in 1976, Romanian Nadia Comăneci became the first gymnast in Olympics history to score a perfect 10. She was only 14 at the time!

# Hand-to-hand

## A bit of history

Since prehistoric times, humans have fought each other to defend themselves and train for combat. Evidence of competitions exists as far back as 5,000 years ago in Mesopotamia (the Middle East). In Greece, several combat sports were featured in the ancient Olympic Games. Centuries later, wrestlers in Europe became a type of fairground attraction, similar to clowns or jugglers.

## Pinning opponents to the ground

The goal of **wrestling** is often to take down an opponent and pin their shoulders to the ground. However, wrestling has many variations. In Japan, **sumo** wrestlers must force their opponent outside the circle of combat or make them touch the ground with any body part other than the feet. In Togo, **evala** is a **ritual** that marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Young people take part in several events, including a wrestling match, where they must prove their endurance and courage.

Wrestling in an age-old sport in Iran. It is still the country's national sport today.



Sumo wrestlers can be very imposing. Some can weigh nearly 300 kg, as much as a grizzly!

## Fortifying body and mind

Martial arts are sports that combine combat and self-defence techniques. They traditionally aim to strengthen both body and mind and require tremendous self-control. Once taught by monks, **kung-fu** has given rise to many variations of martial arts today. In China, it has been practised by both men and women for centuries.



## More than a combat sport

A Japanese form of martial art inspired by kung-fu, **karate** uses the body's natural defences: hands, elbows, arms, feet, knees, and head. Matches are more than combats—they are demonstrations of skill, too. Athletes must follow **choreographed movements** or break wooden boards, blocks of ice, and more.

In Japan, martial arts such as karate and judo are so important, they are taught at university!

In many martial arts, athletes wear coloured belts that correspond to their skill level and knowledge of various techniques.

