

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE OLYMPICS

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Purpose: The purpose of this lesson is to focus on a current event in which students are understandably interested--the Winter and Summer Olympic Games. Students will plot both Summer and Winter Olympic sites since 1896 (the "where" question of geography) and will, then, analyze the pattern of dots created (the "why" question of geography).

Teaching Level: grades 7-12.

Geographic Themes:

The geographic themes emphasized in this lesson are location and place.

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will have:

1. plotted both Winter and Summer Olympic sites on a world map,
2. analyzed data from a chart that lists where the Olympics have been held,
3. analyzed the pattern created by their maps, and
4. evaluated the possibility of Indianapolis holding the Summer Olympic games in the future.

Materials Required:

- World map for each student
- Handout of The Geography of the Olympics activity for each student
- Student atlas for each student or each group of students
- Classroom atlases for more detailed analysis (the National Geographic Atlas of the World, for example)

Procedure:

Opening

1. Ask the students, "How many of you have watched the television coverage of the Winter Olympics?"; "Where was it held?"; "Why was it held in Albertville?". Accept any answers at this point to encourage discussion.
2. Explain to the students about the purpose and objectives of this lesson.

Development

3. Distribute the handout to the students. They may work in small groups if they wish. Have the students use student atlases for larger cities and more detailed atlases for smaller cities, specifically, Winter Olympic sites.
4. Upon completion of the mapping exercise, the students will answer the twelve questions and the critical thinking scenario (which may be done for homework since the entire lesson will take 2 days).

Conclusion

5. Have a class discussion based upon the questions and the critical thinking scenario.

Evaluation:

Collect the handouts for the purpose of grading/evaluation.

Extensions/Adaptations:

1. Have the student or groups of students research in news magazines about how Atlanta was able to get the 1996 Summer Olympics. Would Athens have been a sentimental favorite? Why? What advantages did Atlanta have?
2. Choose a group of students to represent the International Olympic Committee (I.O.C.). Another group of students will be asked to represent Indianapolis, and through a simulated presentation in front of the I.O.C., the Indianapolis representatives will have to present why Indianapolis should be the site of a Summer Olympic games. Additional research would be necessary, so, statistics, maps, photographs, ..., could be used to encourage the favor of the I.O.C.
3. Use a map of Europe to plot Olympic sites on this continent alone.

References:

The idea for this lesson was conceived from a lesson previously developed by Beth Steinert of Madison, Indiana.

Answers to the Handout

1. France, 1924; USA, 1932; Germany, 1936.
2. World War I, 1916; World War II, 1940 and 1944.
3. Europe, North America, Australia, and Asia.
4. Africa, South America, Antarctica.
5. Answers will vary, but the following are a few examples: Climate is too harsh in Antarctica (ice and bitterly cold temperatures), much of Africa (desert and tropical conditions), regions of South America (tropical conditions); Governments are too unstable in portions of South America and Africa, so, security might be a problem for the athletes and officials; Developing nations could not afford to host an Olympics due to the high expense involved; Fewer nations in Africa and South America actually participate in the Olympic games; More people and land are in the Northern hemisphere than in the Southern hemisphere, which is less accessible.
6. Europe has a wide range of climates in a relatively small land area, a high concentration of people, and is centrally located.
7. USA has hosted 6; France has hosted 5.
8. Only one, Melbourne, Australia; Fewer people live in Australia, and it is relatively isolated geographically (you might tell students that fewer nations participated in the '56 Olympics than in 1952 due to the isolation factor); The reverse of seasons creates a physiologic problem for many athletes (The Summer Olympics were held in Nov/Dec in 1956, which is at the beginning of the Southern hemisphere's summer; Many athletes from the Northern hemisphere had to train differently so they could reach their peak in their winter months).

9. Only one, Mexico City. The climate is too muggy and oppressive in the tropics for athletes to compete safely. It is interesting to note that Mexico City's high altitude (almost 8,000 feet above sea level) moderates the tropical conditions to an extent.
10. Between 40-60 degrees north latitude; temperate climates where snow occurs in the winter is necessary.
11. Mountains (to hold outdoor events like skiing, bobsled, and luge). Specific names of landforms are: Sierra Nevada (Squaw Valley, now renamed Olympic Valley), Rockies (Calgary), Adirondacks (Lake Placid), Alps (several sites in Europe including the Dinaric Alps in Yugoslavia), Japanese Alps (Japan), and Kjolens (Norway).
12. Their winter is during our summer so that the athletes from the Northern hemisphere would have to be prepared to compete at a different time of the year. Also, there is very little land in the Southern hemisphere in the middle latitudes where conditions create snow during the winter months.

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