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# Opening and Closing Ceremonies

## Opening Ceremonies

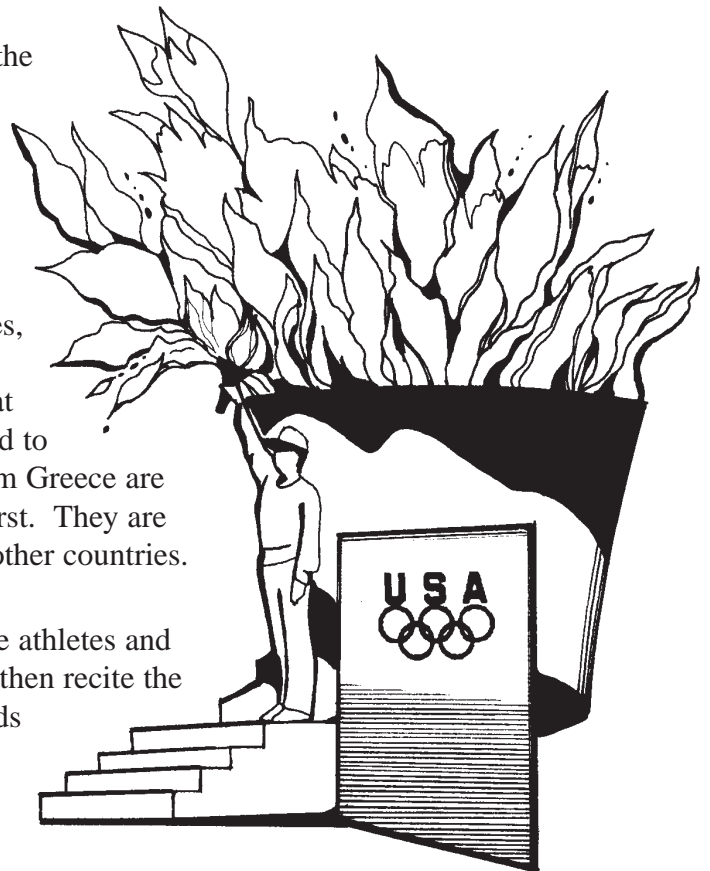
In ancient Greece, the first day of Olympic Games competition opened with judges in royal purple robes, a herald, and a trumpeter entering the Hippodrome, the oval track used for the races. The judges took their stand and the competitors, in chariots drawn by four prancing horses, paraded past them. The herald called out each competitor's name, the name of his father, and his city. Then the herald declared the Games officially open.

More than 2,500 years later, on a cool afternoon in 1896, another opening ceremony took place. Parading into the stadium in Athens, Greece, were 258 athletes from 13 different countries. Along with the 70,000 spectators in the stands, they heard the King of Greece declare the Games of the first modern Olympiad officially open.

The opening ceremonies have continued as a grand highlight of the Olympic Games. With television carrying its imagery around the world, the pageantry has grown. Each host city stages a spectacular performance of music, dance, and special effects. Local citizens, young and old, perform together to welcome the world to their city.

Athletes from each participating country parade into the stadium, following their national flag. Each flag is carried by the athlete chosen by his or her teammates to lead the delegation. As each team passes the reviewing stand, the flagbearer dips the flag in honor of the head of state of the host country. However, you may note that the flag of the United States is never lowered. This practice goes back to the London Olympic Games of 1908. In decorating the stadium for the Games, the organizers forgot to display the flags of some of the participating nations, including the United States. One country withdrew its team from the Olympic Games in protest. The United States decided to stay and compete. Yet, they did not allow the slight to go unnoticed. At the opening ceremonies, the flagbearer held the banner high as the team passed in front of the King of England. Since that time, flagbearers of the United States have refused to lower the flag for any head of state. Athletes from Greece are always given the honor of entering the stadium first. They are followed in alphabetical order by athletes of the other countries. The host country's team enters last.

A representative of the host country welcomes the athletes and declares the Games officially open. The athletes then recite the Olympic Games oath. A flock of doves—the birds symbolic of peace—is usually released, and the Olympic Games flame is lit. The ceremonies usually conclude with an explosion of breathtaking fireworks.



# For Amateurs Only (cont.)

Although defeated in 1972 and 1988, the U.S. has won more gold medals in men's basketball than has any other country. In 1992, the U.S. men's basketball team, nicknamed the "Dream Team," was dominated by well-known professional players.

In 1988, tennis became an official Olympic Games sport, and many well-known stars took to the court in hopes of Olympic gold. Professionals who took part included Sweden's Stefan Edberg, Germany's Steffi Graf, and the U.S.A.'s Chris Evert, Pam Shriver, and Zina Garrison.

A major breakthrough for figure skaters came in 1994 when those who had turned professional were again given Olympic Games eligibility. This ruling saw stars such as Brian Boitano and Katerina Witt once again on Olympic Games ice. Some returned because they wanted to compete with the very best in the world and perhaps gain another medal. Others, realizing there were young talented athletes ready for the gold, simply wanted to renew the wonderful Olympic Games experience. Undoubtedly, there will continue to be changes in the future.

There are mixed feelings about allowing professional athletes and teams to compete in the Olympic Games. If the Olympic Games are to reflect the best talent in the world, some say, then let them come. However, there are only so many spots on each country's team. If these spots are filled with professionals, up-and-coming young athletes will miss the chance to display their talents and participate in the Olympic Games. Many of today's professional athletes might have missed their opportunity for stardom had they not first shared in Olympic Games glory.

Choose some members of your class who would be interested in debating the pros and cons of amateur competition. Prepare and stage a debate on the subject. Work with a group to compile a list of well-known athletes whose careers were launched by their participation in an Olympic Games.

