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General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 2 Comprehension

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INSERT

1 hour 30 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This insert contains the passage for comprehension.

This document consists of **3** printed pages and **1** blank page.



The Olympic Games

- 1 There can be few people who have not heard of the Olympic Games. Originating almost three thousand years ago in Ancient Greece, the Games are a test of physical excellence, and, amazingly, they are as famous today as they were all that time ago. They took place on Olympia, the holy mountain on which was situated a temple built in honour of the Greek gods. Sports such as running and wrestling played a key part in the education of Greek boys in a society which believed that developing the body was as important as exercising the mind. In addition, the Greeks honoured their gods through athletic competition. For the inhabitants of the Greek islands, Olympia, situated as it was near the coast, became the venue for the most important of these athletic competitions. 5
- 2 The original Olympic Games took place every four years; men and boys participated, and running was the only event. A promise not to engage in fighting, called a 'truce', was made among the Greeks for one month before the Games to allow competitors to reach Olympia safely. The tension mounted as the venue filled up with participants all eager to win. The judges had the authority to fine cities or ban their athletes from the competition if the truce was broken. There were no cash prizes, but a winner was treated as a celebrity when he went home, having so greatly enhanced the reputation of his city. 10 15
- 3 Before the Games began, oaths were sworn by competitors that they would not cheat and that they had been in training at home for ten months. Some young men arrived and, intimidated by their opponents, left even before the Games started; fines were introduced to prevent this from happening. Fines were also imposed for not attending the further obligatory training period at Olympia. Most spectators slept under the stars, although the wealthy among them erected elaborate tents and pavilions. Merchants, craftsmen and food vendors arrived to sell their wares. The busy schedule included poetry recitals, parades and victory celebrations. 20
- 4 For various reasons, the Olympic Games eventually died out, and the ancient site fell into an inevitable state of disrepair. However, there was a flurry of excitement when its ruins were uncovered by archaeologists in the nineteenth century. Many wondered whether this would be a good time to revive the ancient Games, but no action would have been taken without the enthusiasm of Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin. He believed that giving young people the opportunity to compete against one another in sport would instil in them a spirit of solidarity which would ultimately contribute to the development of a more peaceful world. He campaigned tirelessly for the revival of the Games, and his dream was realised with the 1896 Olympics. These took place, appropriately, in Greece, and have been followed by Games every four years since, with fierce competition to be the country to host them. 25 30
- 5 Despite their fascinating history, the Olympic Games have their critics today, who claim that the Games are more of a curse than a blessing for the host country. Huge sums of money are needed to build the new facilities – swimming pools, sports arenas, athletics tracks – required for the various competitions. There will almost certainly not be enough of these facilities across the country, although the capital city might be more fortunate. Often there is a huge discrepancy between the estimated and the actual costs of these new massive building projects. Many people argue that the government money involved would have been better spent on other things, such as education and housing. Such expenditure, they say, could have been spread more evenly over the country; one criticism of hosting the Olympic Games is that, although benefits are derived, this happens only in the cities where the sporting events take place, notably the capital. In some countries, not only government money but also money from national charities has been spent on the Olympic Games; critics argue that it is wrong to divert money from needy charities to something which may be considered a luxury. 35 40 45

- 6 Apart from the provision of facilities, there are other less obvious expenses involved in the Games. Regrettably, tensions exist in the world today, and there are huge financial implications in keeping competitors and spectators safe. Airport security is only the tip of the iceberg; inner-city safety – as well as security on all transport – becomes a major problem. Preparing to host the Olympic Games can place severe pressure on government officials to meet targets, particularly when their costs spiral upwards. Modern technology means that the Games can be televised and watched by millions of people all over the world. However, being in the world spotlight can become a source of expensive anxiety as well as national pride, because competition sometimes arises between host countries to stage increasingly lavish opening and closing ceremonies. 55
- 7 But enthusiasts of the Olympic Games would argue that the benefits of hosting the Games far outweigh any perceived disadvantages. The huge influx of people to the host country during the Games means that existing transport systems within the country – for example, railways – may be improved. In the cities where the main sporting events are to take place, new transport facilities may be created, such as monorail or underground systems. It is clearly important that the disruption caused by the Games to the lives of local residents is kept to a minimum, and one way to do that is through new public transport. Attention must also be given to airports – is the country able to cope with the arrival from all over the world of competitors, spectators and journalists? New or enlarged airports may be the result; indeed, one of the first Olympic targets set by China when it was appointed as host country for 2008 was the building of a brand new, modern airport in Beijing. For any host country, the benefits of better airports will be felt by its tourist industry long after the Games are over. 60
- 8 Accommodation is required for visitors to the Games; consequently, hotels are built, which creates employment for architects and builders, as well as for the local people who will secure permanent jobs. Furthermore, the building of these hotels will be of great benefit to the tourist industry in the years ahead. Similar employment advantages will be created by the construction of accommodation for competitors, and these Olympic villages, as they are called, can be converted after the Games into new homes for local residents. Thus the Olympic Games bring with them opportunities for urban regeneration. 75
- 9 The new sports facilities built for the Olympic Games act as more than monuments to the Games – the new sports arenas, swimming pools and athletics tracks provide a means of keeping fit for thousands of local people when the Games have come to an end. Media attention on the Games makes ordinary people more aware of the importance of physical exercise. This is of particular significance in industrialised countries where being overweight has become a major issue and, in some cases, a national obsession. The Olympic competitors, especially the winners, provide role models for teenagers; young people can be inspired by their heroes' determination and so reach their own potential, not only in sport. 80
- 10 For most people, the Olympic Games are a pageant of athletic skill and competitive spirit, bringing together people of diverse cultures and fostering a spirit of global cooperation. In the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, around 200 countries competed in around 300 events. Over 16,000 journalists were there, and almost 4 billion people were television spectators. In the face of such astounding statistics, can we deny the importance of the Olympic Games and their capacity to influence the entire planet? 85

