

Social Studies Teaching and Learning

Volume 2, Issue 2

An open-source peer-reviewed journal of the



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Inquiry and the Olympics: A Catalyst for Social Change

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Abstract

This article aims to give social studies teachers an inquiry-based framework while investigating the social impact of the Olympic games. While evaluating the impact of Margaret Abbott, Jesse Owens, Tommie Smith, and John Carlos and their Olympic successes, students can also examine the experiences and protests that can lead to social change. Using the Inquiry Design Model, social studies teachers can have students research, explore, and construct their own arguments regarding how the Olympic games provided a global platform that lead to equality, fairness, and justice.

Keywords: Social Studies, Inquiry, Olympics, Inquiry Design Model

Every four years, the Olympic games provide an international venue to display and compete with the best athletes in the entire world. Since the modern Olympic games, held in Athens in 1896, that included forty-two events in ten sports, athletes from around the world competed at the highest level of international competition (Finley & Pleket, 2005). Yet, the Olympics has also become a venue that changes our society on an international scale. Global sports, such as the Olympic games, have had a tremendous impact on promoting democracy and human rights (Black & Bezanson, 2004). The Olympics promotes not only the competitive spirit and nature of sports but also creates an international platform for social change and protest. Sports in the Olympics birthed the liberation of female athletes, and sparked the discussion of equality, fairness, and justice for all, especially within the United States. “Because it dramatizes victory, defeat, struggle against nature and other competitors, sport is a potent symbol constantly under pressure to lend its emotional power to other causes” (Marvin, 1982, p.81). For social studies, the Olympics should be celebrated not just as an international competition but as an experience that invokes the reflective conversations of equality and social justice. The purpose of this article is to give social studies teachers the instructional tools needed in their classrooms so that students can historically investigate, through the Inquiry Design Model, the social impact of the Olympic games concerning gender and racial equality.

Relevance for Teachers/ Practitioners

Women in 1900 Olympic Games

As women continued to fight for suffrage in the early part of the 20th century, the 1900 Olympics in Paris were the first games that allowed women to enter in two sports: tennis and golf (Semyonov, 1981). Margaret Abbott, unknowing that she was even participating in the Olympics, won a gold medal in the 1900 games. Margaret Abbott was known as a fierce competitor during her time at the Chicago Golf Club (Welch, 2016). In the 1900 Olympics, Abbott competed against 22 other ladies, including her mother, and shot a 47 in the nine-hole event (Lieberman, 2016). She received a porcelain bowl for her victory, but was unaware of her amazing accomplishment (Fuller, 2016). The 1900 Paris Olympics provided women the first opportunity to compete in international sports with other women. Thus, allowing for women to compete at the highest international competition in the world merged with the growing social activism of suffragists fighting for women's voting rights during the early 1900s. "In the suffrage campaign's last stages in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, women's demand for the vote had been intertwined with the ferment for social justice" (Dumenil, 2007, p.22). Therefore, the Olympic games broke the barrier of including female competition before women's suffrage was achieved. After the 1900 Paris Olympic games, groups such as the Congressional Union, which was formed in 1913, and the National American Women Suffrage Association continued the movement to amend the U.S. Constitution and secure voting rights for women (Cott, 1984). Although this was some 20 years before the passing of the 19th Amendment, the 1900 Paris Olympics served as a prominent catalyst on the equality of women not just at the Olympics, but in society.

Jesse Owens in Berlin

In 1936, the Olympics were hosted in Berlin, Germany, with over 3600 athletes representing nearly 49 countries (Edmondson, 2007). Hitler's rise to power in Germany, through the concept of Aryan superiority permeated the Berlin games. Hitler's idea of hosting the games was to give the world an example of German achievement and set the example of global domination through the games. "In Olympia, Hitler makes little more than a cameo appearance, and if there is a single individual who draws the most attention, it is a black American, Jesse Owens--the symbol, the personification of all that contradicted Hitler and his theories of a master race" (Deford, 1986, p.62). However, Jesse Owens challenged the Aryan ideology by winning four gold medals across various events in track and field, including a new world record of 10.2 seconds in the 100-meter race (Milford, 2018). Owens also led a men's group that won the 4x100 meter relay with a world record, a standard that would last nearly 20 years (International Olympic Committee, 2018). With wins in multiple events, despite the Nazi intent to display racial superiority, Jesse Owens emerged as an iconic hero in track and field (Blackman, 2016; Mandell, 1987).

Even with global notoriety, and being heralded as a national hero, Owens recognized the boundaries that remained constant at home. Owens stated:

"When I came back to my native country, after all the stories about Hitler, I couldn't ride in the front of the bus," Owens said. "I had to go to the back door. I couldn't live where I wanted. I wasn't invited to shake hands with Hitler, but I wasn't invited to the White House to shake hands with the President, either." (Schwartz, 2017, p. 1).

Owens' dominance at the Olympic games shattered the Aryan ideology, but even with victory, Owens' accomplishments gave rise to other societal concerns, specifically, the issue of equality at home for African Americans. African Americans were still fighting the challenge of segregation in the Jim Crow era. Even in the nation's capital, Washington D.C., segregation was an invisible line in American society. "A color line - at once inflexible and defied - had long run through the city, demarcating where white and black residents were expected to live, work, study, shop, dine, and relax" (Verbrugge & Yingling, 2015, p.57). Since *Plessy v. Ferguson*, segregation was the doctrine of society, especially in the south, where separate but equal was legally supported discrimination (Riegal, 1984). The 1936 Olympics gave a reflective opportunity to examine citizenship, equality, and justice for all Americans as Owens scattered the ideas of racial superiority within track and field sports.

Tommie Smith and John Carlos Stand in 1968

Throughout the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the Black Power movement was a collective group that embraced a radicalized means to fight for social equality. This would include people like Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, and groups such as the Black Panther Party (Joseph, 2008). Disillusioned with the progress of sit-ins, protests, and civic demonstrations, collegiate and professional athletes dealt with substantial social inequalities, including racial slurs, biased coaching, modest housing, and prevention of eating at the same restaurants as their white peers (Bass, 2002). At the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, two African American track and field athletes decided to protest during the platform ceremony if they placed in their respective events. The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, (JBHE Foundation, 2008) states:

"After making the U.S. Olympic team, Smith sought to organize a demonstration at the games to protest race relations in the United States. When he failed to garner support among his fellow athletes, Smith came with the idea of a silent protest if he won an Olympic medal" (p.43).

During the events in Mexico, Tommie Smith set a world record in the 200-meter dash and won the gold medal (JBHE Foundation, 2008). John Carlos placed third in the same event and won the bronze medal. Smith and Carlos stood with fists held high in silent protest during the national anthem after winning first and third in the 200-meter event (Ratchford, 2012). "The movement permanently inscribed itself in popular culture through the iconic images of athletes Tommy Smith and Juan Carlos raising their fists in the Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City" (Joseph, 2008, p.13). This action on the podium was non-violent and threatening, yet, powerfully displayed Black Nationalism (Henderson, 2010). Even with the

immediate suspension by the United States Olympic Committee, they had mixed support from the other American athletes; some supported the cause, and some were embarrassed by the gesture (Sheehan, 1968). Although Carlos was more aligned with the philosophy of Malcolm X and Smith identified with Dr. King, both men protested as a unified front against the injustices still occurring for African Americans in the U.S. (Smith & Steele, 2007). This was a clear determining factor that even with the progress of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 there were ongoing racial issues that still plagued the United States in the late 1960s. Since the Olympics is an international event with representation from various nations, people worldwide, including members of the international press, illuminated this protest to a global platform highlighting the social justice movement in America.

Context for Teaching and Learning Inquiry-Based Instruction

To profoundly examine the social impact of these historic Olympic games, while offering a critical lens to teach empathy that sparked social change, we recommend using a model of inquiry-based instruction. According to Ednacott and Brooks (2018), historical empathy is a perspective recognition to a greater understanding, based on the use of evidence in making an argument and being able to disagree with others. Inquiry encourages academic investigation and data collection for students to develop evidence-based arguments (Levy et al., 2013). Inquiry-based instruction builds upon disciplinary questioning and investigative exploration to foster and support ideas and concepts (NCSS, 2013). This type of instruction also provides an opportunity for students to collaboratively discuss issues from several perspectives while using multiple forms of knowledge; thus, allowing for a metacognitive and constructivist approach to historical critical thinking (Harste, 2001). Generating questions and inquiries, like that of historical inquiry-based learning, benefits the cognitive and motivational capacities, critical thinking, and comprehension skills of students (Ness, 2016). This type of historical inquiry involves the exploration of evidence from various sources, including documents, photographs, film, and art (Vansledright, 2009). These classroom opportunities enable students to answer provoking questions by interpreting evidence, reflecting on the sources before constructing a narrative; thus, fostering a deep historical learning approach to knowledge (Barton & Avery, 2016; Hess, 2009; Journell, 2016).

Implementation and Impact of the IDM

The Inquiry Design Model (IDM) provides a classroom framework method of inquiry for social studies classrooms (C3Teachers.org, 2021). The IDM model provides social studies teachers with a multi-day inquiry-based approach to historical investigations. The purpose of the IDM Model is to have students, either independently or collaboratively, answer the compelling question after a thorough exploration and examination of documents and evidence by constructing their arguments. First, the IDM stages the question with a brief introduction. Then,

students move to examine several supporting questions. These supporting questions give students a specific perspective, asking them to complete a performance task, while conducting research and analysis through featured sources. After all of the supporting questions have been completed, students should have the knowledge and understanding to answer the overarching compelling question. Thus, students display their understanding through the summative performance task, which is divided into an argument and an extension. “Each inquiry ends with students constructing an argument (e.g., detailed outline, drawing, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views” (C3 Teachers.org, 2021). While the extension offers an additional task as an option for the summative argument.

One of the most significant components of the IDM, towards the end of the inquiry, is the taking informed action section. Social studies, through its organized structure, allows the knowledge gained through the discipline to be explored and examined in a variety of manners. Not only does the social studies “provide students with opportunities to apply disciplinary knowledge and skills as they examine enduring questions related to human experiences”...but students may also develop the habits of mind that will allow them to develop “the interdisciplinary thinking to apply to real-world problems in college, career, and citizenship” (Swan & Griffin, 2013, p. 319). This portion of the inquiry takes the knowledge and understanding of the inquiry and propels the historical understanding to relevant civic issues, such as social equality in this inquiry. This relevancy could be applied towards local, state, or national concerns and emphasizes the students becoming civically engaged. For example, in our IDM Model provided below on the Olympics, students are asked to work with their physical education department and develop a PeacePlayers organization within their community. This organization promotes community unity, equity, and peace through the game of basketball (PeacePlayersIntl, 2021). Taking informed action, moving from understanding, to assessing, to action in the IDM, is designed so that students can civically connect with the content that is being learned in the classroom (Grant et al., 2017). Thus, students simply do not stop at historical understanding alone, but are given relevant, real-world activities that help develop students into active citizens within their communities.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The Olympics created a global setting for athletes to compete in sports; yet, it also allows athletes an opportunity to raise greater societal issues and concerns. Thus, the Olympics has the potential to be a catalyst that continues to spark social change and offer a sense of self-reflection among global citizens. Due to the nature of inquiry-based instruction, this type of method allows for students to research primary documents, ask and reflect on questions, and have an opportunity to hear rich perspectives from their fellow peers in class. “Genuine historical inquiry demands that students learn to ask authentic questions, to select and examine historical evidence, to appreciate historical context, to evaluate divergent perspectives, and to reach, albeit tentatively, logical conclusions” (Foster and Padgett, 1999, p. 358). This type of social learning

promotes not only student engagement, but is a direct reflective nature of our democratic environment and principles we strive to emulate in our classrooms. Inquiry based learning allows for a deep sense of metacognitive reflection and constructionist view of education where student understanding takes place (Vygotsky, 1978).

Our aim for sharing both the Olympics as a catalyst for social change and inquiry-based instruction is to present social studies teachers a group of classroom topics and resources that can be used throughout the social studies curriculum. By engaging students into inquiry-based instruction, students will be able to explore, engage, create, and develop relevancy to current topics, social studies curriculum, and citizenship.

Inquiry Design Model (IDM) Blueprint™	
Compelling Question	How is the Olympics an example of the struggle for social equality and created that sparked social change?
Standards and Practices	<p><u>NCSS National Standards:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Culture and Cultural Diversity II. Time, Continuity, and Change III. People, Places, and Environments V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions VI. Power, Authority, and Governance VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption X. Civic Ideals and Practices <p><u>College, Career and Civic Life (C3 Framework) Standards</u></p> <p>D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.</p> <p>D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.</p> <p>D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.</p> <p>D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.</p> <p>D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives.</p> <p>D2.His.6.9-12. Analyze the ways in which the perspectives of those writing history shaped the history that they produced.</p> <p>D2.His.7.9-12. Explain how the perspectives of people in the present shape interpretations of the past.</p> <p>D2.His.8.9-12. Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.</p> <p>D2.His.9.9-12. Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them.</p> <p>D2.His.10.9-12. Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations.</p>

	<p>D2.His.11.9-12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.</p> <p>D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.</p> <p>D2.His.13.9-12. Critique the appropriateness of the historical sources used in a secondary interpretation.</p>		
Staging the Question	<p>Using a video clip from the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, how did Jessie Owens' performance in the Olympic games provide evidence against the concept of racial superiority? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yf6ryOWfYN4</p>		
	Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
	What issues of equality are evident in the 1900 Olympic games?	How does the Olympic games represent society; specifically, equality since 1896?	What responsibility does the IOC have regarding equality within the Olympic games?
	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
	Students will be researching the 1900 Olympic games and gather primary sources from the Women's golf and tennis games. Students will be asked to print and display all of their primary sources, leading to a gallery walk (students leading and discussing the primary sources collected) from both Olympic events.	Students will research and compare the 1936 Olympics and the 1968 Olympic games and discuss how these events impacted racial equality in the U.S. Students will be asked to imagine themselves as a news reporter and write a news article comparing the social impact of both Olympic games.	Students will be asked to research topics involving equality now within the IOC (International Olympic Committee), focusing on the issues that need to be addressed and potential solutions. Students will be asked to write a letter to the IOC addressing any current issues concerning equality.
	Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
	<p>https://blog.genealogybank.com/5-facts-about-the-summer-olympics.html</p> <p>https://usopm.org/an-unknowing-historymaker-margaret-abbott-was-the-first-american-female-to-be-an-olympic-champion/</p> <p>https://alchetron.com/Margaret-Abbott</p>	<p>http://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/packages/html/sports/year_in_sports/08.04.html?pagewanted=print</p> <p>https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/1936-newspaper-jesse-owens-sets-1822618210</p> <p>https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/1936-newspaper-jesse-owens-wins-track-1801549637</p>	<p>https://olympics.com/ioc/overview</p> <p>https://olympics.com/ioc/beyond-the-games</p>

		http://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/packages/html/sports/year_in_sports/10.16a.html http://100photos.time.com/photos/john-dominis-black-power-salute https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-na-1968-timeline/	
Summative Performance Task	Argument	Students will develop an interactive website, detailing the trials, struggles, successes, and triumphs relating to social equality during the Olympic games. The purpose of this assignment is for students to detail how empathy through the games, and specific athletes might have sparked social change. This activity creates a deeper understanding of transferability by students constructing their websites, becoming content experts, and presenting those concepts to their peers.	
	Extension	Students will be asked to develop or plan a PeacePlayers organization in their community. PeacePlayers is an organization that promotes equality and understanding through organized athletics; specifically, basketball. By allowing children to participate in these organizations, the goal is to build equality from within the community.	
Taking Informed Action		Cross Curricular Activity- In conjunction with the extension, students can work with a local school physical education department or community center to research and plan for their PeacePlayers organization within their community.	

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