

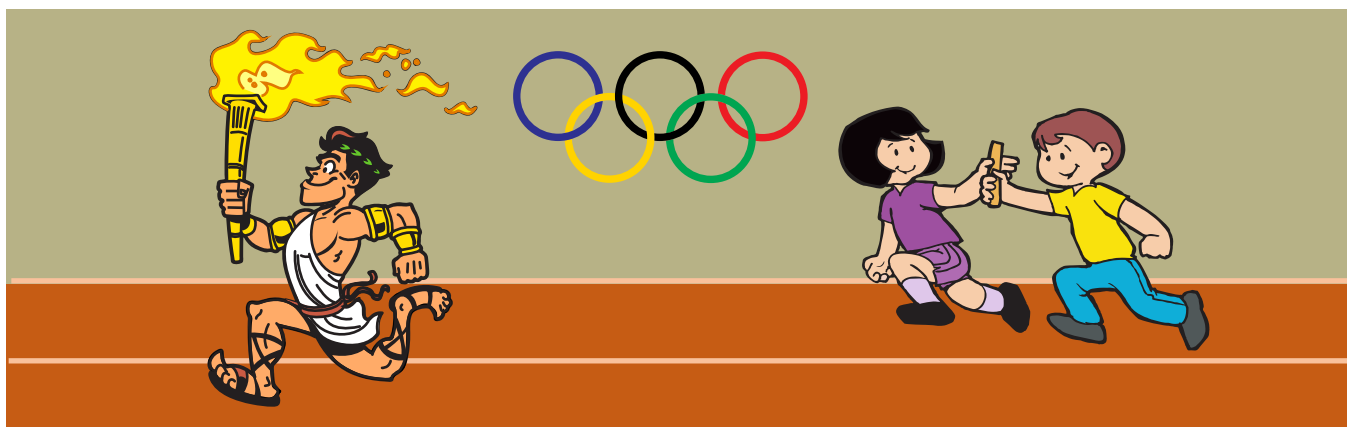
Tour of the Holy Lands - From Delphi to Olympia

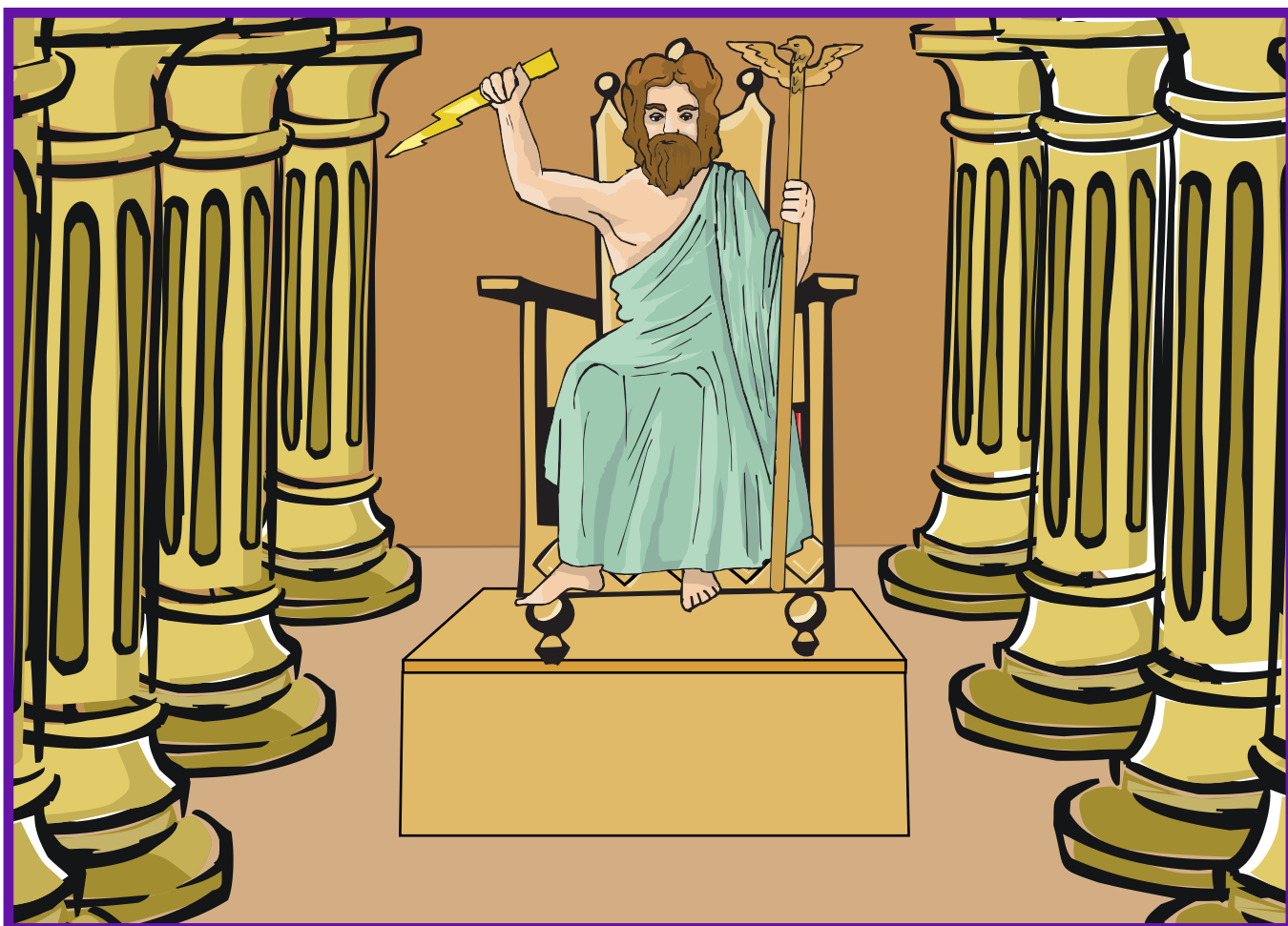


Now that we've said "goodbye" to the Center of the Earth, let's wind our way down the mountain to the Bay of Corinth. Ships carrying kings from different parts of the world once sailed here to ask questions of the Pythia. Up ahead we can see the beautiful modern bridge we'll be taking across the bay. The sun sparkles on it this morning, drawing us toward our next adventure.

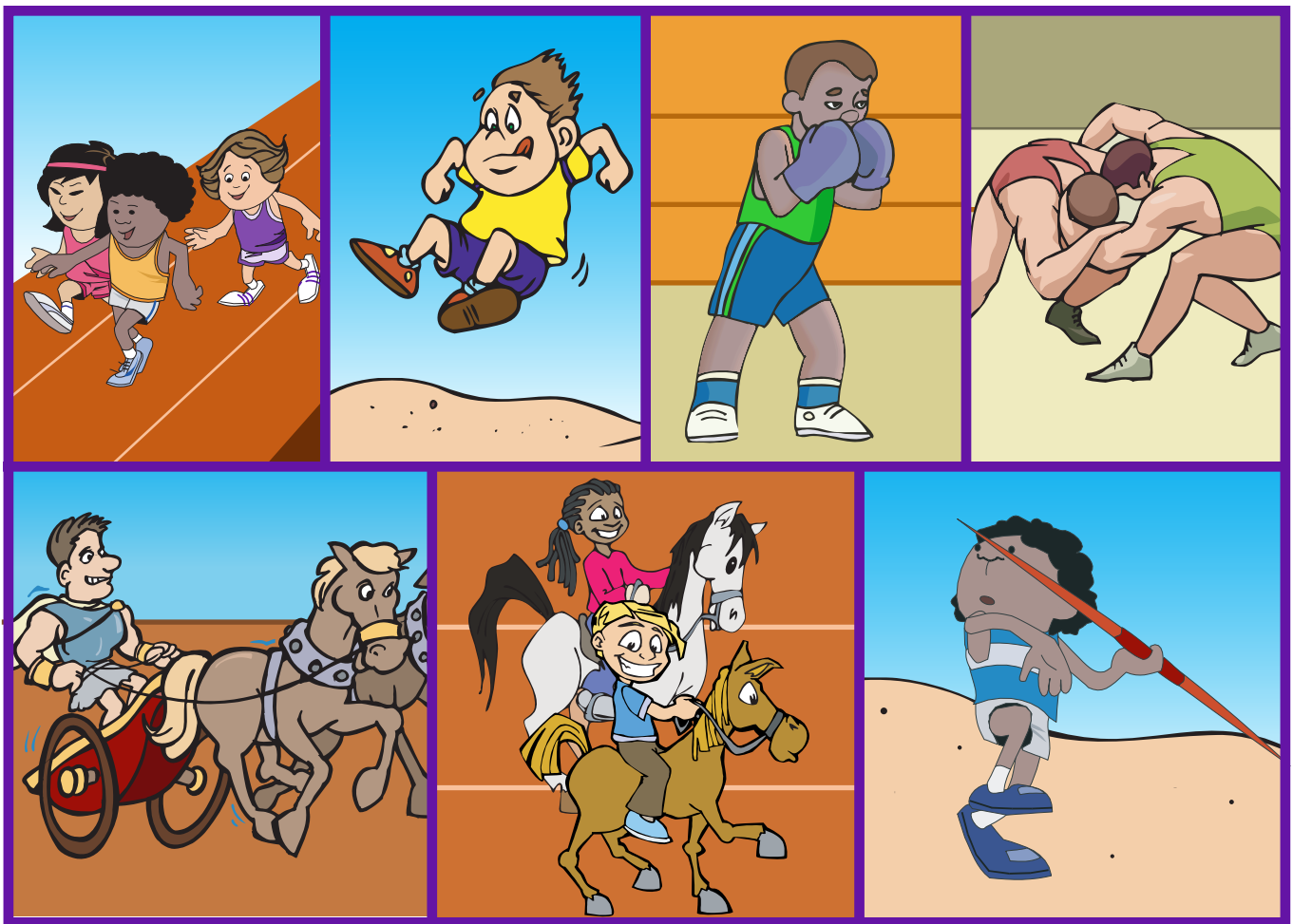


Heading south on the bridge, we land on the Peloponnese, which is sometimes called a peninsula and other times an island. We'll soon turn right and ride along the coast. Follow the road on your map and you'll see the famous city that will be our destination today -- Olympia. What is this city famous for? The Olympics! Many of you may already know about the Olympics and have seen some of the games on TV.



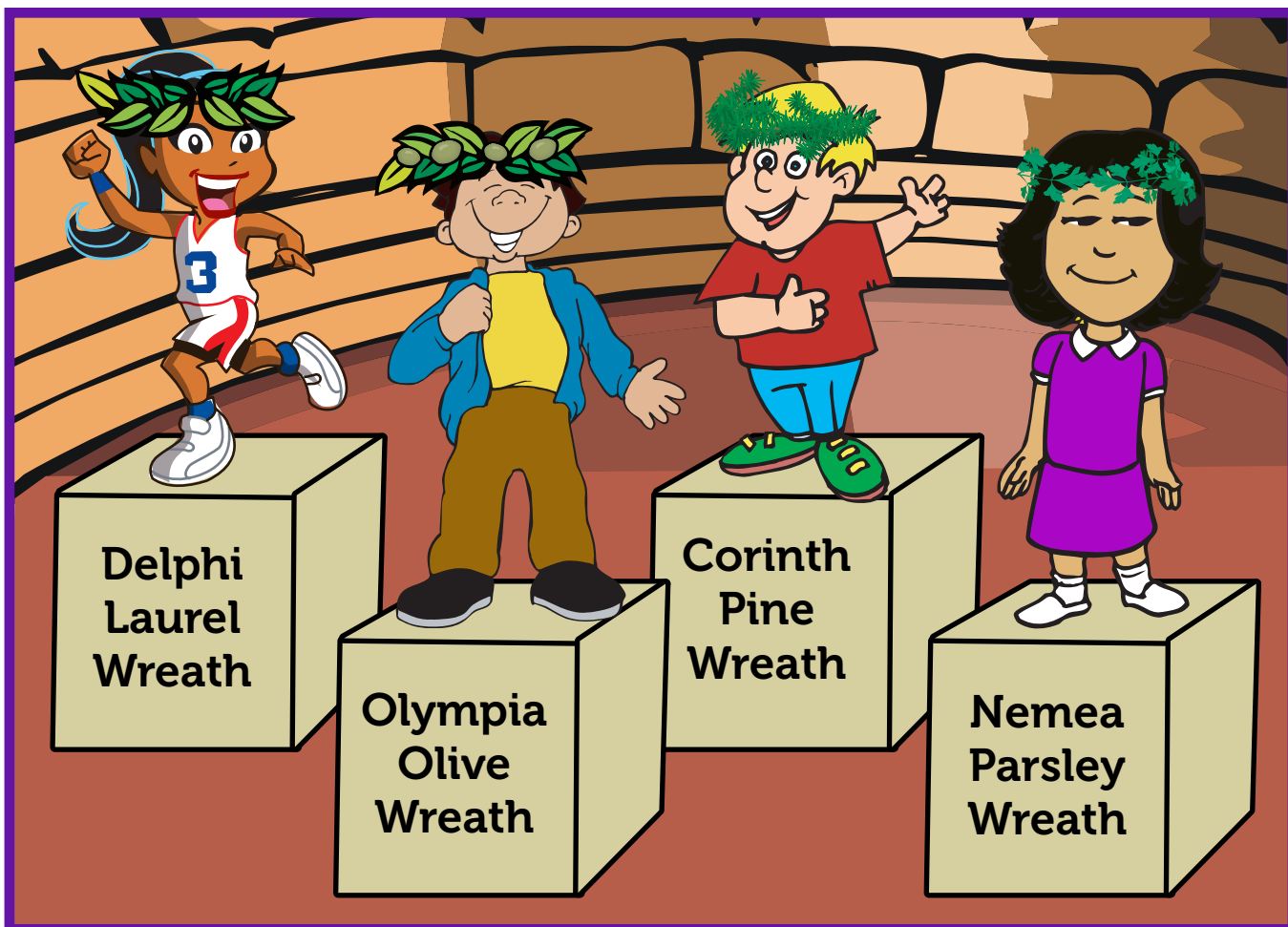


In ancient times, the Olympics honored a god — not the God we know from the Bible, but a pagan god. The Olympics honored Zeus whose Temple can be found in Olympia. The world in those days loved sports, and men (not women) would come to Olympia every four years to watch the Olympics. In order to keep these men safe while they traveled to Olympia on land and sea, a truce would be called in this part of the world. What's a truce? It's a time when nations agree not to fight one another; the truce lasts until the Olympics are over.



Everyone loved the Olympics! Soon, other cities in Greece began to hold their own games in honor of their city's god. These games took place the year before and the year after the Olympics.

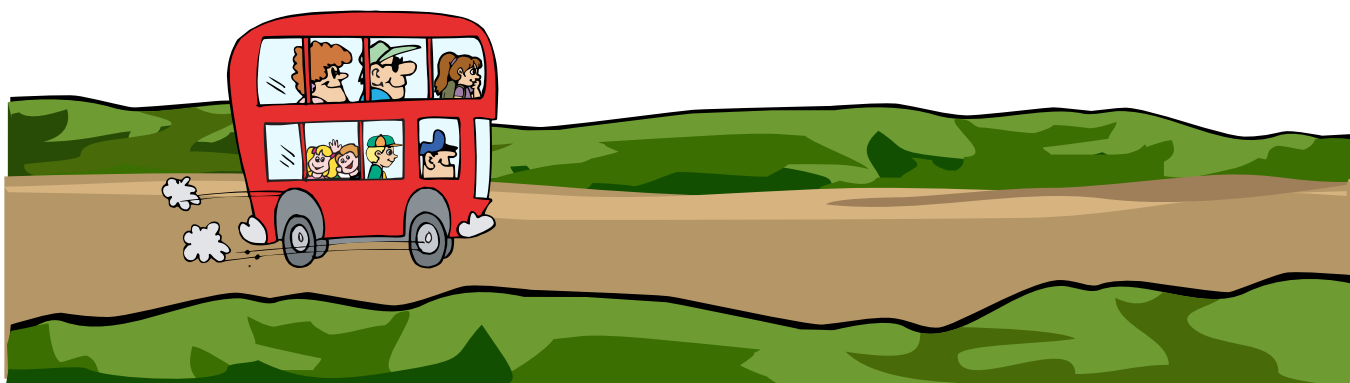
The events included running, leaping, boxing, wrestling, chariot racing, horse racing, hurling the spear and other sports. Each city had a gymnasium. Greeks knew all the rules of each game. A judge had to swear that he had spent 10 months learning the duties of his office. Also, he had to spend 30 days watching over the athletes. If a judge lacked this training, he would be disqualified.



The winners of the games won humble prizes. In Delphi, they won a laurel wreath, which they wore on their heads. In Olympia, they won an olive wreath. At Corinth, they won a wreath of pine branches. At Nemea, they won a parsley wreath. The highest of all honors was an olive wreath for the chariot race at the Olympics. Later, in addition to wreaths, the winners won things like prize money, a statue, a poem in their honor, a home-town parade, a front seat at festivals and other honors. After winning, they paraded around the stadium while their names as well as the names of their parents and their country were announced for all to hear. Next summer, when we go to the stadium we'll be able to imagine the shouts of the audience as the winners pass by.



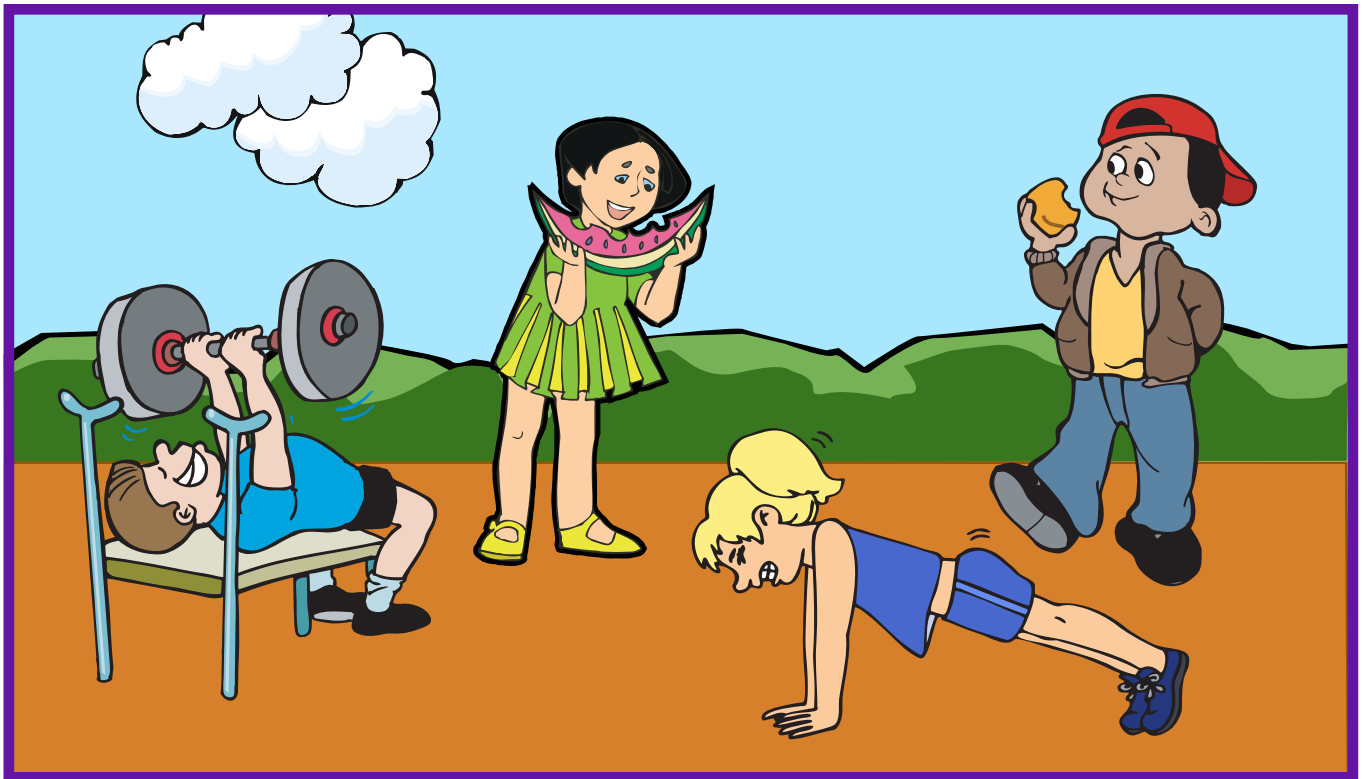
Why have we driven out of our way to see Olympia when it's very unlikely that Paul ever came here? Guess where you'll find the answer to this question... In the Bible! Think of how Jesus told stories, called parables, that taught his followers about God, about ourselves as God's children, and about how to treat one another. He often talked about bread, sheep, birds, trees and flowers. We have read many of Jesus' parables during these summer tours of the Holy Lands.





Paul followed Jesus' example, especially when he wrote letters to the churches he had started in different parts of Greece. He taught his listeners through word pictures of things that everyone knew about and cared about. The Olympics was a hugely popular event in Bible times, just as it is today.

Paul used images of athletic events to help the church members (and Bible readers like us today) understand and feel the power of his words. Let's listen to a few examples.



Paul writes to the Corinthian church to convince them to put all their energies into being the best Christians they can be. He explains: Be like runners who train hard, eat the right foods, and expect to win. Their prize is a simple wreath of leaves that wither and fade. A good Christian puts his energies into studying the Gospel, but he expects to win a glorious prize - eternal life. Runners keep their eyes focused on the goal; there's a purpose in every step. In a similar way, a Christian is disciplined; he doesn't play around or drift away from the path to the goal.

Editor's note: For further study turn to I Corinthians 9:24-27.



Paul reminds the church members in Galatia that they began their race well as Christians, making progress. But someone cut in, distracted their concentration, shoved them off balance, all illegally. Who is it that always lays stumbling blocks in the path of Christians? It is Satan who tries to divert us. Turn a deaf ear. Drive him out. Get on with your race.

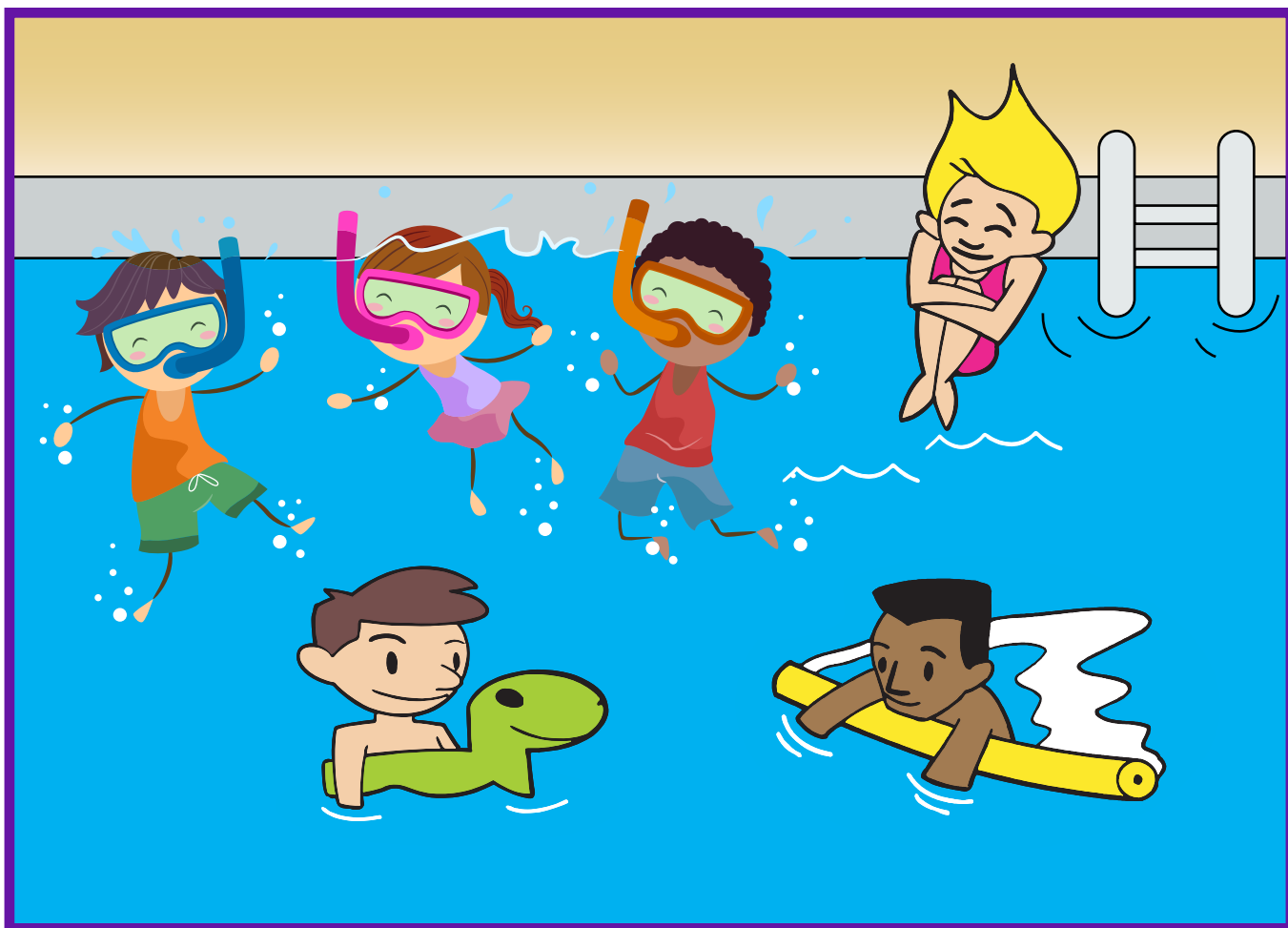
Editor's note: For further study turn to Galatians 5:7.



Then in 2 Timothy, Paul compares our faith to fighting a good fight, to finishing the race and winning a crown of righteousness for our efforts. Here are Paul's words. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me." In other words, all of us will earn crowns of righteousness when we finish our own races.

Just think how long ago Paul wrote these letters, yet the images and their meaning are still crystal clear!

Editor's note: For further study turn to II Timothy 4:7-9.



Now, here we are in Olympia. Let's go swimming in the hotel pool, and tomorrow we'll go exploring.

