

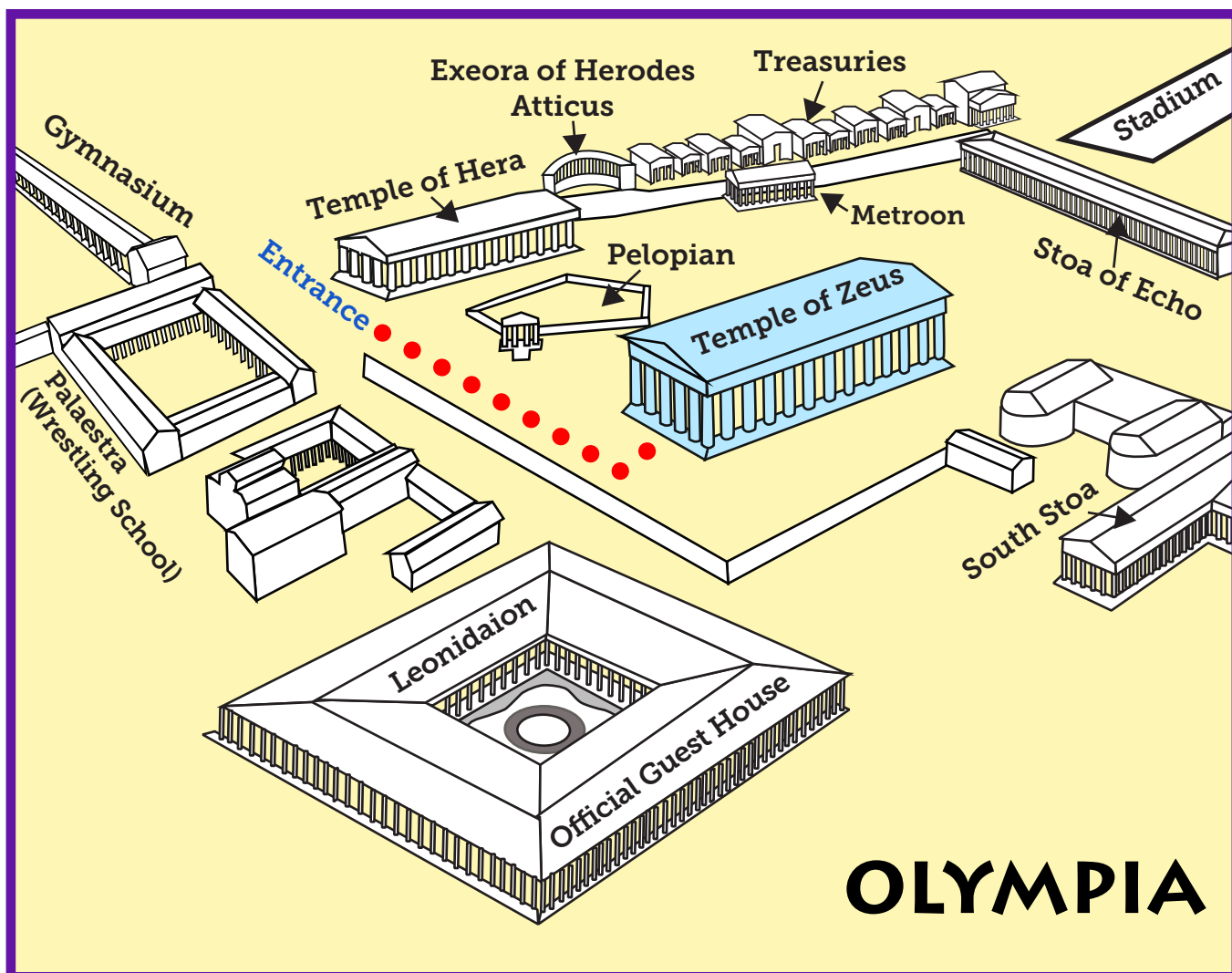
Tour of the Holy Lands - Olympia (Part 2)



Hi Kids! It's so good to see you all back in this beautiful country of Greece. Before we join up with Paul again, we're going to pick up where we left off last summer and spend some time in Olympia, the original city of the Olympic Games. Our timing for this stop couldn't be more perfect since the 2016 summer Olympics will be taking place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Our tour of Olympia, Greece is a great way to learn about the ancient Olympic Games and where they were held.

Let's get going and start exploring Olympia!





Do you remember how to get to one of the sites we visited last summer — the Temple of Zeus? Lead the way!

The large buildings in the picture above are thousands of years old. Imagine constructing a building all by hand — without bulldozers, cranes, or power tools — only with manpower. With all that hard work, it's not surprising that there were strong athletes at that time — athletes who were eager to compete.



The Games at Olympia were held for 1000 years -- from 776 BCE until 393 CE. At the end of Roman Emperor Hadrian's reign (in 393 CE), the city of Olympia became less and less important. What caused such a big change around the country? It was the rise of Christianity. When Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, Olympia and several other Greek cities became less and less important as centers of pagan worship. Many pagan temples were neglected or destroyed.



In the case of the Temple of Zeus, earthquakes almost completely buried it. For hundreds of years, Olympia was covered with 10 feet of rubble. That's about as high as the roof of a one-story house! Looters (robbers) stole the temple's statues and artwork.



It took another 1000 years for Greece to realize its beautiful treasures were disappearing. Finally, in the late 1700s and early 1800s, a team of German archaeologists was given permission to excavate Olympia.

Who remembers what an “archaeologist” is? Right, it’s a scientist who digs in the earth for artifacts. That’s another interesting word – “artifacts.” We’ve seen lots of them on our tour. What are they? Right again; artifacts are objects that are left over from the past – pieces of history. And what about the meaning of “excavate”? To an archaeologist, it means to dig down to the original level of a structure, or in this case, an entire city.



Years of excavating uncovered many of the original buildings of Olympia. Eventually, the archaeology team was able to sort the artifacts, put tons (literally!) of tall columns back in place, and move the most valuable artifacts into the Museum of Olympia. And we're going to see some of them today.

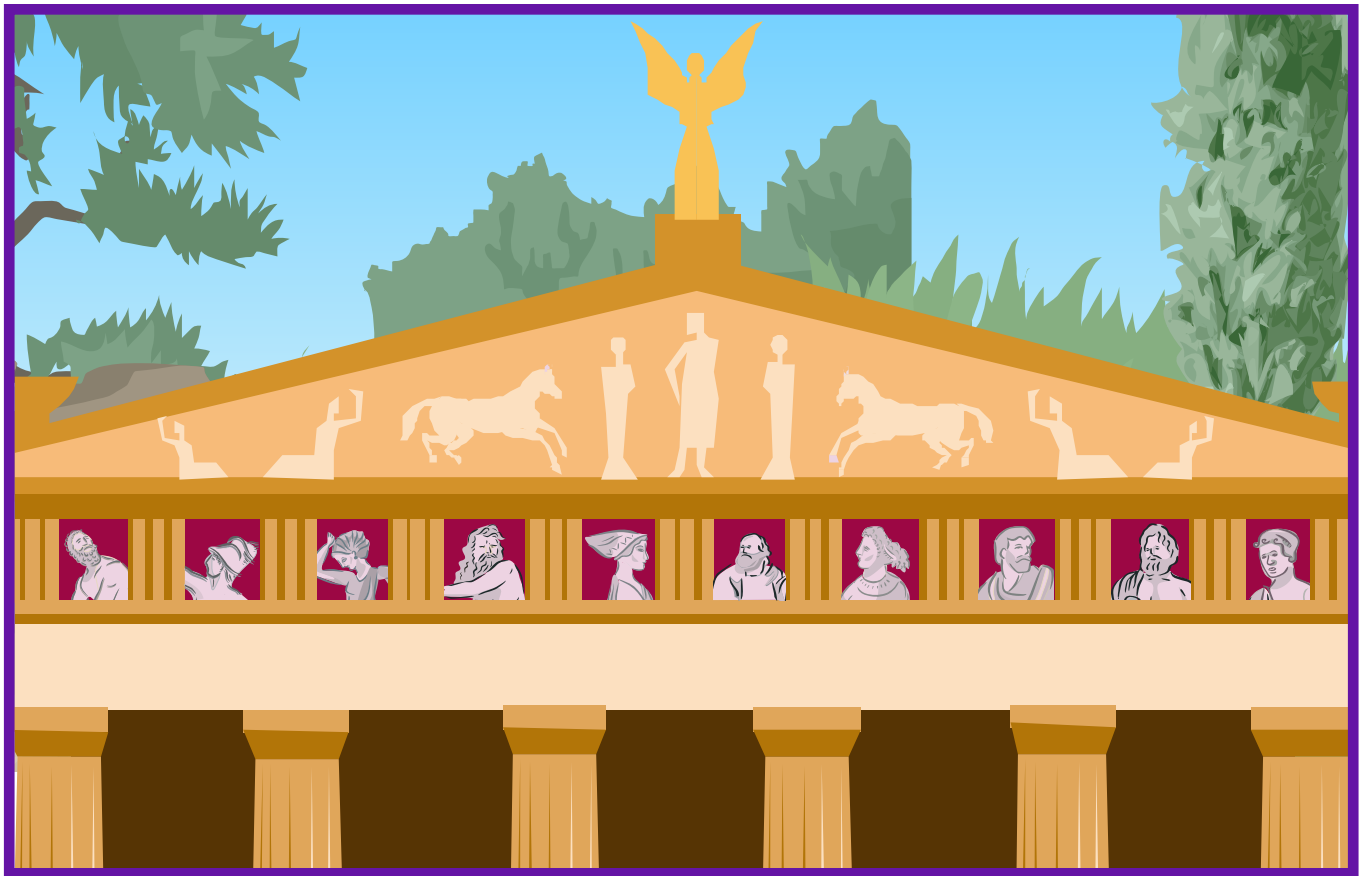


The Temple of Zeus used to be the largest and most important temple in the Peloponnese. Do you think the archaeologists were able to find all of its lost pieces? Probably not ALL, but enough to understand the stories. It would be impossible to find all of the lost pieces. Just like a cookie crumbles when you drop it or step on it, stone falls apart too, and pieces of it eventually turn into powder.



Look at the wide triangle just under the roof of the temple. That's called a "pediment." One pediment stretched across the front of the temple. The other pediment stretched across the rear of the temple. They were very fancy.

Inside each triangle were marble sculptures carved by talented men. Viewed one after the other, the sculptures told a story. These pediment stories inspired the athletes and other visitors.

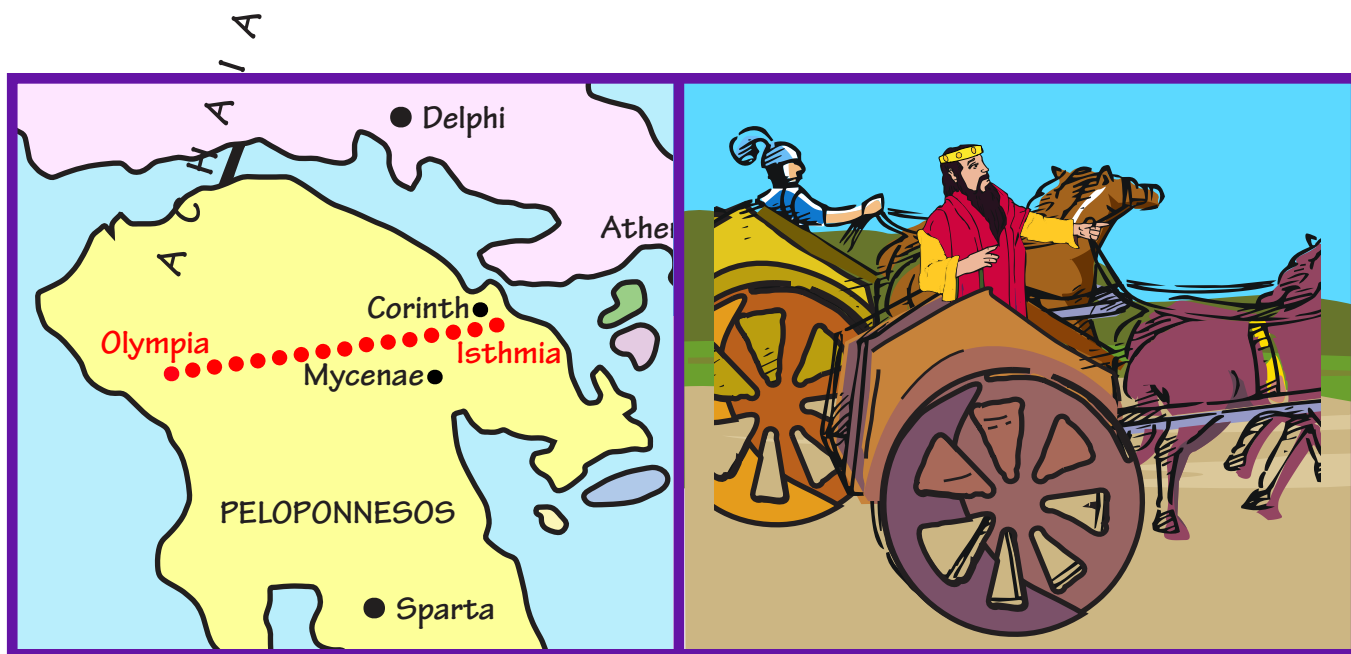


Lined up below the pediments are square sculptures called “metopes” (meh’toe-pee-z). These are also meant to inspire the athletes.

Guess which god these metopes featured. I’ll give you some hints: He was one of the mightiest characters in mythology. His father was Zeus and his mother was Hera. This god had done evil things, like killing his wife and six sons. The oracle at Delphi gave him an assignment to go and serve his cousin, the king, for 12 years. As punishment, the king told him to perform 12 labors. Now do you remember his name? That’s right – it’s Hercules! “Hercules” was his Roman name and “Herakles” (Hair’i-klee-z) was his Greek name.



Here we are in the large room in the museum dedicated to the pediments -- one on this wall and the other on the opposite wall. Remember, the sculptures were looted and buried underground for many years. That's why pieces are broken and missing. But if you look at the sculptures closely while I tell you the story, you should be able to follow along.



The king of Pisa, a small town east of Olympia, was warned by an oracle that he would be killed by his son-in-law. The king challenged each of his daughter's boyfriends to a chariot race from Olympia to Isthmia (Izth-mee' ah). The winner of the race would win the hand of the king's daughter. The king believed his horses could outrun all others. Before each race, the father let the boyfriend go first while the father sacrificed a ram to the god. After the king defeated all the boyfriends, he killed them. But then, the father faced Pelops, a new challenger. Pelops cheated. He paid his charioteer to replace the king's wheel pin with one made of beeswax. Just as the king caught up with Pelops, the king's chariot broke apart and the king died. So, Pelops won the bride and the father's kingdom. Some say this chariot race was the very first Olympic race. And some say the island of Peloponnese was named after Pelops.

So the oracle was right, but Pelops had to cheat to win. That doesn't sound right, does it? The Olympic Games officials work very hard to prevent any kind of cheating. Cheating shows disrespect for the other athletes, for the Game organizers, and for the cheater. Cheating is no way to win!

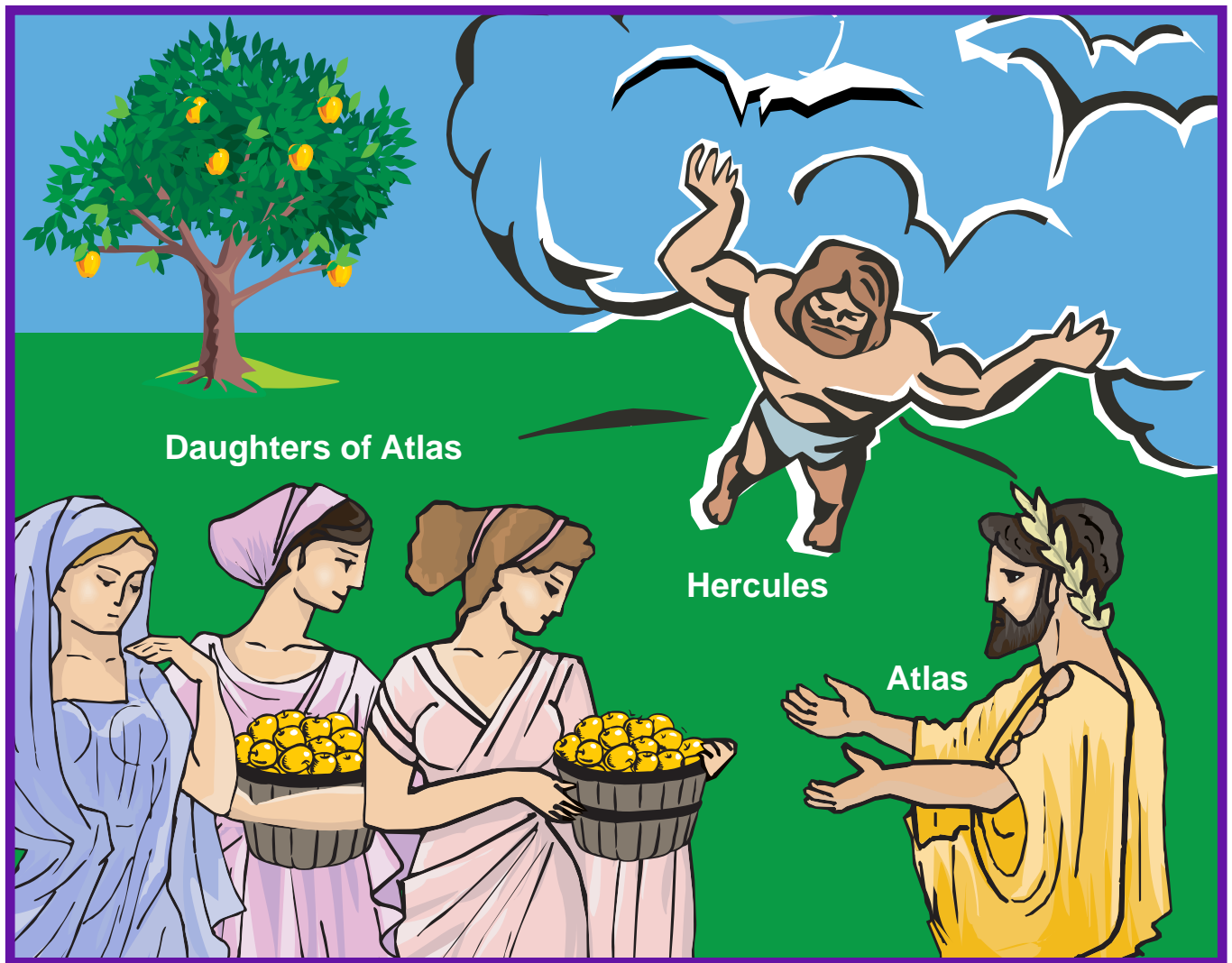


Now, let's take a closer look at one of the twelve marble metopes. It tells a tangled tale of one of the Labors of Hercules.



Hercules' eleventh Labor was to steal golden apples from the Garden of the Hesperidis (Hes- pair'i-deez), who were Daughters of the Night (also called Daughters of Atlas). Eating one of their apples would make a person live forever. But, their apples were guarded by a dragon with 100 heads.

On his way to steal the golden apples, Hercules stopped in Egypt, where he ran into a pile of trouble! The king of Egypt almost turned him into a sacrifice. But Hercules broke out of his chains, and finally reached the Garden of the Hesperides.



In the garden Hercules met the god Atlas, who was holding up the heavens on his shoulders. Hercules persuaded Atlas to steal the golden apples from his daughters for him while Hercules held up the heavens. Atlas' daughters had the golden apples.

On the metope, we see the goddess Athena helping Hercules (in the middle) hold up the heavens.





When Atlas returned with the apples (on the right in the metope), he didn't want the heavens back on his shoulders, so he said he would deliver the apples himself, leaving Hercules holding the heavens. But Hercules tricked Atlas by asking him to hold the heavens while Hercules adjusted the padding on his shoulders. Hercules, with the help of the goddess Athena, pretended to make his shoulders ready for the heavens.



Atlas agreed to hold the heavens for just a minute, but Hercules quickly carried off the apples, completing his eleventh labor and leaving Atlas holding the heavens. That was pretty clever of Hercules, wasn't it?!



Now, look around the temple and try to imagine a statue of Zeus sitting right in the center. It was carved and overlaid with gold and ivory. It was so beautiful that it was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. We no longer have that statue, but we have a life-size drawing of it here in the museum. Let's take a look. They say the statue of Zeus was so tall that if Zeus had stood up from his throne, his head would have knocked the roof off the temple.



One story about the statue goes like this: Caligula (Ca-lig'you-la) was a Roman Emperor who liked to showoff. One time, he ordered that the statue of Zeus be moved to Rome so that its marble head could be replaced by his own marble head. But every time someone tried to remove Zeus' head to fulfill Caligula's command, the statue laughed loudly. HA! Do you believe it's true? It's a fun story that's been handed down through the years.

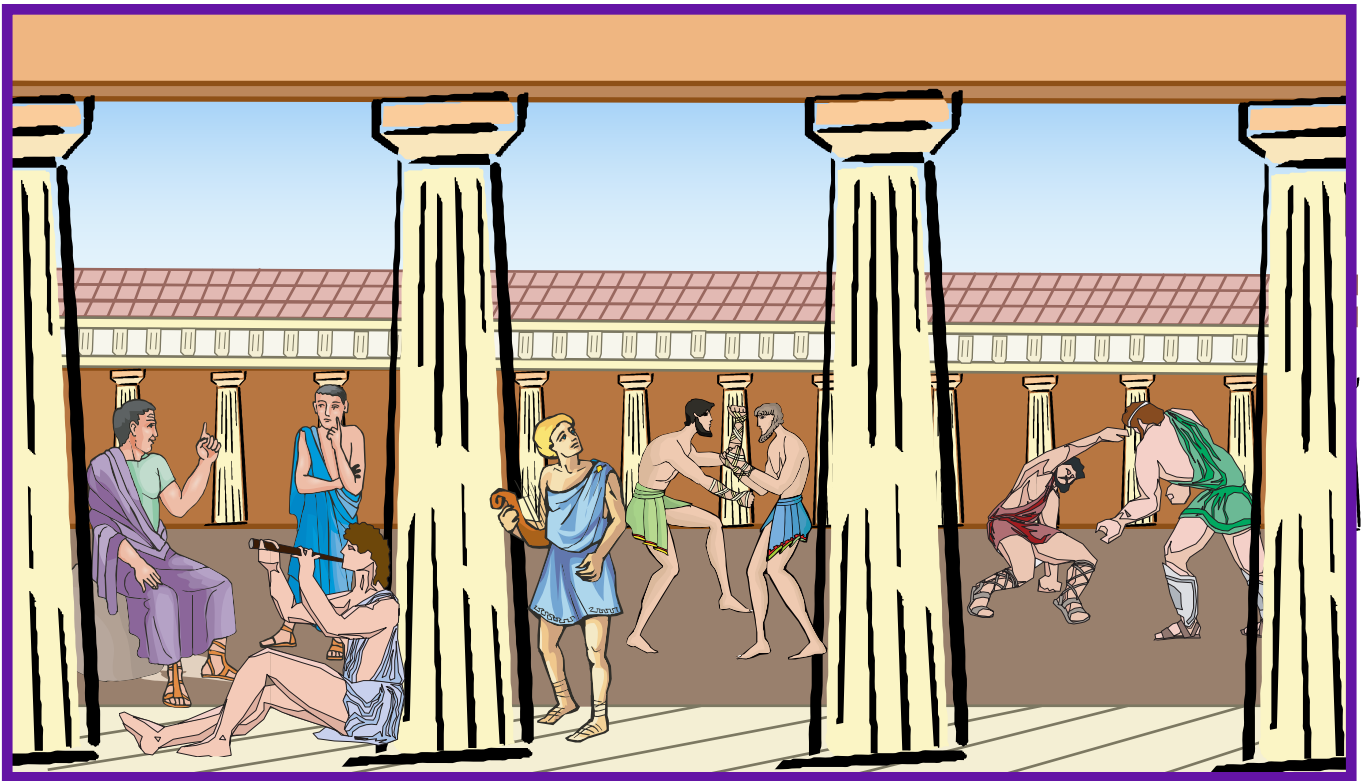


Next, we're going to visit the gymnasium – one of the first buildings we saw as we entered Olympia. Every city had a gym. You might think it was just used for sports, but in ancient times, the three basic parts of a person's education were music, dance, and exercise, which all took place in the gym.

GYMNASIUM



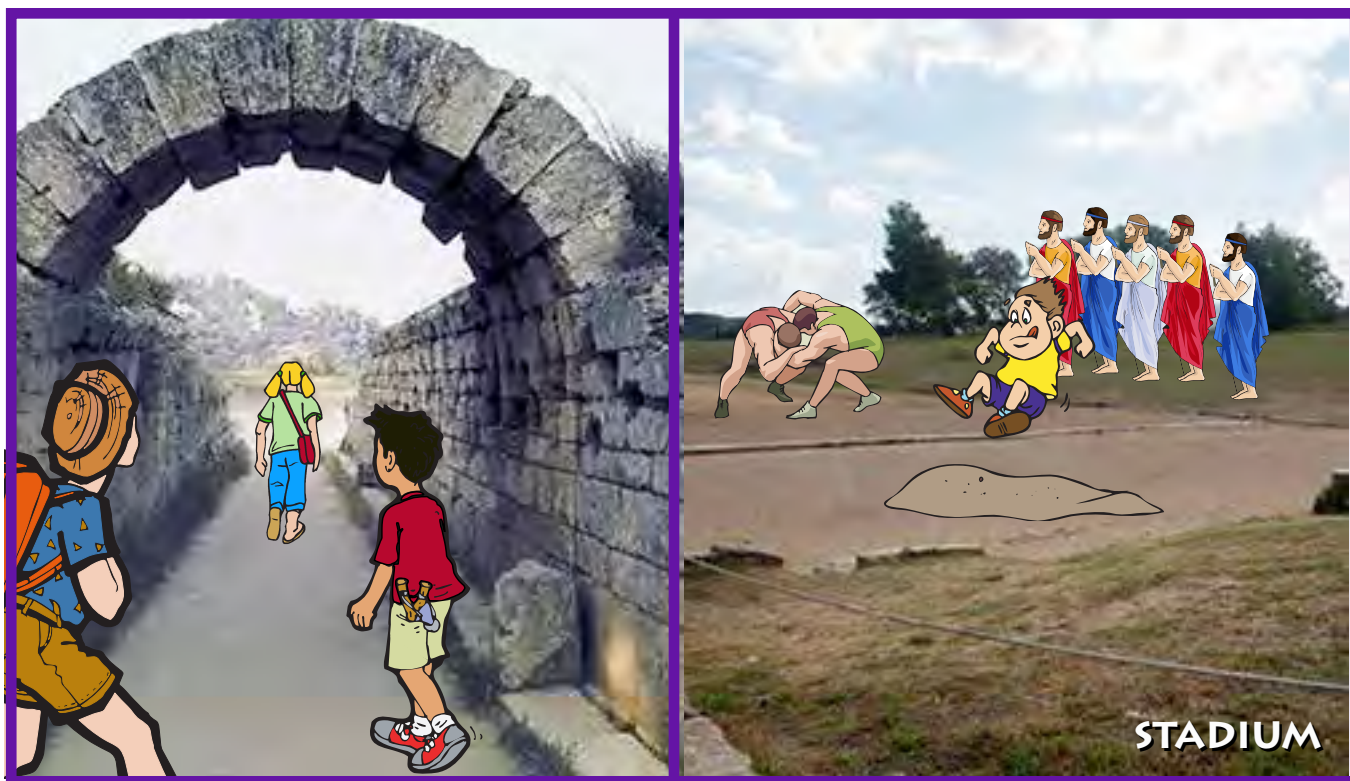
The gymnasium has crumbled away over the centuries, so we'll only see part of it today. Archaeologists have found only two rows of short columns around the outside of a huge building.



If we could peek inside the original gymnasium, what do you think we would see? Working with a physical trainer, men would be exercising, running, jumping, wrestling, boxing and dancing all to the sounds of a flute and a harp. Music helped to make movements harmonious and rhythmical while dancing connected man with the gods. There would also be a changing room, an oiling room, a dusting room and bathing room. We would see athletes scraping their bodies with “strigils” (stri’jils) to remove oil, sweat and dust.

The gymnasium was also a meeting place for philosophers, poets, city leaders, teachers and preachers. Here these speakers could find an audience. The famous philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, taught at two gyms in Athens. Those gyms became the greatest philosophical schools in ancient Greece.



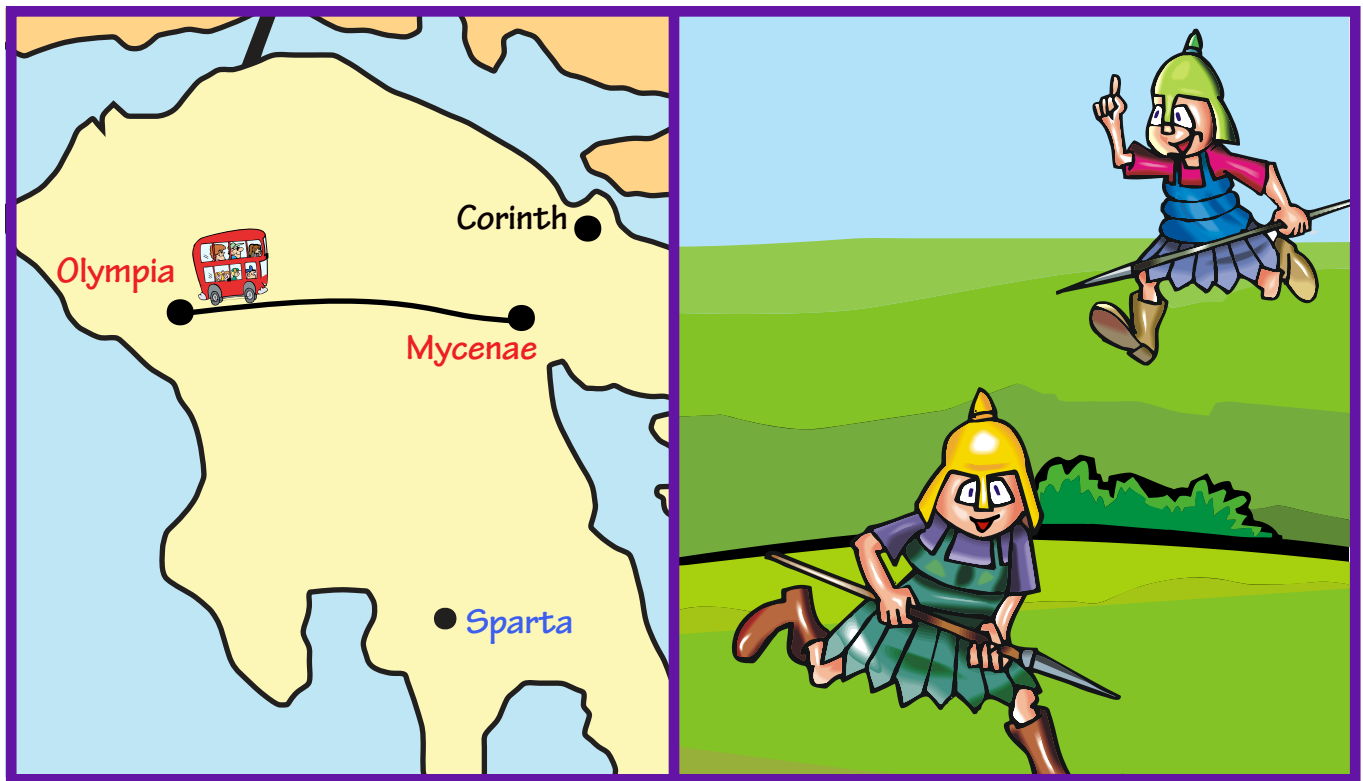


Where do you think the athletes competed? Not in the gymnasium, but in the stadium. Look at the size of the great stone arch leading into the stadium. If you're coming to watch an event here, you'd look for a seat, right? Believe it or not, this stadium never had seats! People sat on the grassy bank. Imagine the bank covered with men in their colorful togas cheering for their country's champion. What a sight!

It's time for us to leave Olympia and continue our journey across the Peloponnese. Now, when you watch the summer Olympics in August, you'll have a good idea of where the Olympic Games began, thousands of years ago.



As our bus drives out of Olympia, be sure to notice the beautiful olive groves here in the Peloponnese. They produce some of the most delicious olives in the world. To harvest them some farmers climb ladders they have made themselves, beat the tree branches with a stick, and fold up the olives that have fallen onto their blankets.



Now we're starting to see signs to Sparta — over there to the right. This may be the first time some of you have ever heard of Sparta, but it is actually well known for the unusual way the Spartans raised their children. Their goal was to produce perfect warriors. Their education taught them not only to survive, but also to be the leading Greek military power in the country. Between the years 720 BC and 576 BC, Spartan men won more than half the Olympic victory crowns.

Well, we just passed the last road into Sparta. We don't have time to stop there on this trip. Instead, we're heading on to Mycenae (My' sen-ay'a). So, sit back and enjoy the scenery!