

OLYMPIC LESSON PLAN IDEAS



SUITABLE FOR PRESCHOOL AND BEGINNER GYMNASTS



By Jeannie McCarthy

Time for the influx of excitement to begin! The Olympics in Athens will bring visibility to gymnastics. Let's get our students wrapped up in the thrill of it all! Host a themed Olympic lesson or run Olympic theme birthday parties. Need ideas? Read on. Be sure to save this document for implementation in 2008 during the Olympics in Beijing, China or why wait until 2008 – have your own Olympic themed lesson plan for classes annually!

Wouldn't the parents of your students be impressed when their child pipes up about understanding the march-in of the various countries' flags? Or the child remarks, "Hey Dad, that swimmer just did a Flip Turn. It is like the Forward Roll I learned at gymnastics." The father then asks the child how he knows that it's called a 'flip turn.' Of course, the proud student replies, "My gymnastics teacher told me!"

Gymnastics is the basis of ALL sport! The most highly viewed summer Olympic sport is gymnastics! We can capitalize on all of the publicity. Share the following ideas with your staff. Use these ideas as a launching pad for additional creativity.

An Olympic themed lesson has so many exciting possibilities. This article contains ideas in the areas of:

- Entering the gym: Flag March In
- Pre-Warm-up: Marathon run
- Roll Call with the torch
- Four Olympic style warm-ups
- Fifteen stations for use in a circuit with an Olympic flare
- Three eye-hand coordination ideas
- One transition idea (from one area of gym to another)
- Ending idea

NOTES TO GYM INSTRUCTORS

A number of the suggested ideas are elaborate to prepare for, while others are simple to incorporate into the gym environment. Choose the items that best suit your facility.

You, as the Instructor, will set the tone for this special event. During the Olympic themed lesson wear red, white and blue clothing. Or don sports clothing such as swim wear, tennis outfits, or biker's shorts. If you speak a foreign language, do so periodically during the lesson. Okay you crazed Preschool Instructors, you can make up your own silly language!

Set the mood for the Olympics with decorations. Hang flags all around the gym and in the lobby. Hang posters of athletes. Build an awards stand. Display gold, silver and bronze medals. Play music from past Olympics during class or softly throughout the lobby. The Olympic Fan Fare music from 1984 and 1996 stand out distinctly as Olympic music.

Let's look at options for starting class with an Olympic twist.

FLAG MARCH IN

Enthuse the students and parents out in the lobby prior to class. Announce, "It's Olympic Week in the gym!" Begin your lesson at the entry door to the gym. Have available rhythmic ribbons or flags from various countries. (Out of respect, do not let flags touch the ground. The flags can be stored in a bin.) Gather the students together and quickly describe how different countries compete in lots of fun sporting events. The gathering of each of the countries top athletes is called the Olympics. Show the children a ribbon/flag. Tell them, "We are going to pretend that these are flags from around the world." Call out a few country names, plus a fantasy country like Flipaly. See if they catch you!

Tell the students that each of them will have their own flag to hold. Demonstrate how to hold it up high, with a straight arm. Also, demonstrate how to march and wave with your free hand. If you feel the need to warn the children about not poking one another, do so at this time.

Hand out the flags. Cue up some grand marching music. The Olympic Fan Fare music from the 1984 Olympics is very motivational. Let the games begin! Lead the children through a slow march around the gym. Encourage them to wave to the parents or older students in the gym. At the end of the march, collect the flags and prepare for a pre-warm up, the marathon run.

PRE-WARM-UP: MARATHON RUN



Quickly explain to the children that one of the events in the Olympics is a Marathon run. The runners travel over 26 miles! "Can you run that far? Let's try!" Lead your children on a jog through far away places in the gym. Be sure to have the jogging path unobstructed. It's a blast to run out into the lobby, past the offices and rest rooms, through the birthday party room, back into the gym, down the vault run way, and all around the equipment. Be sure to have additional Instructors on hand to keep the stragglers moving.

An enjoyable manner for ending the Marathon run is to allow the kids to run into a winner's finish line 'tape.' Ask two Instructors or parents to hold an elastic ribbon at the designated finish line. (Flaghouse sells the Co-operband.) The children can be directed to simply run into the springy ribbon and shout, "I won!"

ROLL CALL WITH THE TORCH



Create a large circle with the students. While they are catching their breath, show them your home made Olympic torch. Ask them to pass it to the person beside them. Explain that the torch is lit by a flame on Mount Olympus in Greece and is carried by relay runners to the site of the hosting country. The torch landed in Los Angeles in 1984 and in Atlanta in 1996. The Olympics occur every four years. This year the games have returned to the city and country where they began in 776 B.C., Athens, Greece. The Modern Summer Olympic Games began in 1896.

While you are spewing out all of this Olympic history, the kids are passing the torch. Next, stop the passing of the torch and set the torch into the top opening of a traffic cone in the center of the circle. Call each child's name for Roll. One at a time they get to hold up the torch and declare, "I am a winner!"

FOUR OLYMPIC STYLE WARM-UP IDEAS



1) Track & Field

Describe to the students how the Olympic athletes compete in Track & Field. Mention that in some competitions there are relay races. "Kids, today we will do a modified version of a relay race. We call it Boxer Short Relays!" Arrange the students into pairs. Seat them on a starting line, one standing in front of the other (ask them to sit as you demonstrate the relay action). Across from each pair of students place a hoop and one pair of boxer shorts. Train the children ahead of time, or at this moment, to listen for the cue of 'Ready, get set, GO!' Explain and demonstrate the following details. "When I say, 'Go!' the first person in your line gets to run to the hoop, put on a pair of boxer shorts, shout 'I'm so fast!' then take off the shorts, run back to the start and give their partner a high five. The second person does the same thing. When you and your friend have each had a turn to put on the boxer shorts, sit down quickly."

Teacher notes: the first run through of a relay style race with young children is best performed with each child moving on the "Go!" command. When you pair up the children and one child is required to wait, this raises the difficulty level of the Warm-up. Be sure to have extra staff on hand to control the "waiting" partner. Be willing to ease the tension by falling to the floor in frustration and say, "Can't you wait to be tagged??? My, my, my! Oh, P-L-E-A-S-E, can we try it again? I'd really like to see if we are ready for the Olympics. But we must learn how to tag our relay partner. Ready? Let's give it a go again!"

For your Beginner students, you could use lummi sticks as the baton. Also, the Beginner students could run to a target (cone, hoop), then run around the set-up to end up behind their partner in order to make a smooth hand trade off of the baton.

To Add Difficulty

To add difficulty to the relay action, change the locomotor movement to Gallop, Hop, walk backwards, Crab Walk, and the like. One notch harder would be to perform one style of locomotion to the hoop and a different one upon return to the start. Additionally, you could require that the

children perform a skill or exercise at the hoop. Such as Front Scale and count to five, do 3 Tuck Jumps, or try 6 Jumping Jacks.

2) Swimming Relays

Create swimming lanes on the floor exercise mat with chalk, jump ropes, or my favorite - Velcro beams (available from Carolina Gym Supply's Ben Edkins). Each swimmer has his/her own lane. Give each swimmer a scooter. The kids can lie on their tummies and swim (roll) to the other side of the pool. Note: many of the following suggestions can be performed without a scooter.



The proper command for swimmers to start a race is, "Swimmers, take your mark." Then a starting gun is shot. A cap gun works fine.

During your Swimming Relay Warm-up you can request that the children try to swim Free Style, Breast Stroke and Butterfly Stroke. Of course, you are simply looking for the arm motions. The legs can simply run to push the scooter forward. Your Beginner students can attempt to perform a whip kick (frog kick for Breast Stroke), and a dolphin kick (for Butterfly Stroke). The Back Stroke action on a scooter is a little difficult to control. The Advanced Beginners might be able to stay in their lanes.

If you are running a camp and you have available time to fill, explain what the IM event is in swimming. IM stands for Individual Medley. One person swims 4 lengths of the pool while performing a different swim stroke for each length. Right off of the starting block the swimmer performs the Butterfly stroke, upon touching the wall the stroke turns into the Backstroke, after contact with the wall the next stroke is Breast, and the final length is Freestyle.

After explaining the IM event to the students, get them racing! Can they remember the order? It is Fly, Back, Breast, Free. The gymnasts will swim back and forth on their scooters four passes! This should lead to a celebratory drink at the water fountain!

3) Basketball Warm-up



To set up this Warm-up, place four basketball hoops or plastic tubs on separate edges of the floor exercise area. Set dozens of balls in the center of the floor. In front of each basketball hoop arrange 3 chalk (or Velcro Beam) lines to act as foul line shooting markers. The simple instructions would be to command the kids to start near the balls, grab a ball, run to a line on the floor, shoot a basket, then repeat the sequence. Back and forth, running and shooting.

To up the difficulty for the Beginner gymnasts, assign a score number to each line at the basket. The closest line is worth two points, the middle line is three points, the farthest line is 5 points. Allow the children to keep their score as they successfully make a basket.

The teachers will be kept occupied with returning the balls to the center of the floor. For a little fun, play music from the Harlem Globetrotters!

4) Flag Matching Warm-up

Divide the children into Group 1 and Group 2. Give Group One flags

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from various countries or use a variety of rhythmic ribbons of solid colors. Give Group Two children the matching flag. Cue up the national anthem from the USA or another country and tell the kids, "Find the person who has a flag just like yours! When you find each other, hold hands and yell, 'Yippee!'" When all the children have located their match, explain this little change. "Next, while the music plays, move around the area and wave your flag high. When the music stops, trade your flag with someone. Try to acquire a different colored flag."

Perform that sequence. After all of the children have acquired a different flag, cue up the action to locate the person who has the match.

This game can be repeated. The children remain interested because they have a different pattern of flag to look for. Also, to make the game more difficult, ask for a different locomotor movement during the musical movements segments. The locomotor movements will have to be upright ones due to holding a flag in one's hand.

15 STATIONS FOR USE IN A CIRCUIT WITH AN OLYMPIC FLARE

I Long Jump like the Track and Field athletes. Use an open panel mat with a starting mark. Demonstrate how to plie and swing the arms simultaneously front and back. Then with a huge arm swing forward perform the Long Jump. How far can you go?



II Javelin and Discus Throw using a foam noodle and/or Frisbee. Place a hoop or container on the floor. Establish a starting spot (carpet square or poly shape). Demonstrate how to stand in a giant Lunge position with the noodle in your hand beside your ear. Throw the noodle towards the target or past the target. For the Discus throw, demonstrate how to do two Full Turns before tossing the Frisbee. The Beginner gymnasts can be shown how to hold the Frisbee properly.



III Hurdles are simple to incorporate into a circuit. Use 2 parallel lines of cones with ropes draped from line to the other. Ropes are more user friendly than stiff, wooden batons. Demonstrate how to Run and Leap over the hurdles without bumping them.

IV Basketball shooting can be added to a circuit by using a variety of items to stand in as your basketball hoop. The ideal piece of equipment is the plastic child's basketball hoop sold in toy stores. Explain to the children to take a shot at the basket, retrieve their ball, and place their ball back in a container for the next athlete.

V Gymnastics on the bar. Set up a Junior Swing bar for the Preschool students or use the low bar for the older kids and select skills for them to attempt. This is typically a spotted station due to the element of height, flight, and swing. After the child has their turn at pretending to be an Olympic gymnast, ask for a Ta Da position. This is an easy station to explain to the students the meaning of the

word 'routine.' Spot the kids through a Pullover to Front Support then Forward Roll Dismount to a Ta Da. Voila! It's a routine!

VI Gymnastics on the beam. With the beams that are in your circuit be sure to emphasize that in the Olympics the girls are 3 feet up in the air! Ask your students to do beam skills that match their abilities. Explain the words Mount and Dismount. Ask for a Ta Da position after each dismount. This is also a nice station to explain to the kids the meaning of the word 'routine' Allow your Beginner gymnasts to make up their own sequences.



VII Gymnastics tumbling can easily be added to any circuit. A simple station in a circuit would be the cartwheel mat with hands and feet marked upon it. Of course numerous other tumbling stations can be included in a circuit. Natural choices are wedges for rolls, a padded wall to walk up backwards to do a Handstand, and trapezoid pieces to do balances like V-sits upon.

VIII The athlete **conditioning station** can be a station of folded panel mats in which the children are asked to do step up and step downs, similar to Step Aerobics action. Can they go up and down 15 times? Are their hearts going faster? Great!

IX Another athlete **conditioning station** can be Push-ups on a carpet square. "Olympians are strong! Let's get strong like the Olympic athletes!"

X Another athlete **conditioning station** can be created by using a low bar with a large mat in front of it. The child holds the bar, places their feet up on the large mat, and performs Chin-ups. Note that with the feet elevated it is easier for the child to successfully chin up.

XI Soccer dribbling can be set up by arranging two low floor beams parallel to one another to create an alley. The objective is to dribble a soccer ball down the alley using only your feet. Note: remind the children to return the ball to the start of the alley for the next soccer player to use.



XII Boxer training can be added to a circuit by simply leaving a pile of jump ropes on a panel mat. Instruct the children to select a rope and attempt to do the jump rope action 10 times. (Ten is the perfect score a gymnast can attain from the judges!)



XIII The **wrestler's** escape can be practiced on a soft, flat skill cushion. Demonstrate that a Log Roll is often how a wrestler escapes his opponent.

XIV Equestrian station can be added by simply creating an alley with jump ropes or Velcro beams. Ask the kids to Gallop like a horse down the alley. Additionally, you could add obstacles for the children to hurdle over to simulate the Steeple Chase event.

XV "You be the **judge**" station can be a fun one! Set out pieces of cardboard with individual numbers on them. The numbers should range from one to ten. When the child arrives at this station, they

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should seek out the number 10 (perfect score), move over to a trapezoid piece, put a medal around their own neck, stand up on the trap and throw their arms up in the air! To make this a tad more challenging, turn all of the numbers upside down so that the children have to flip the cardboard pieces over to find the number ten.

THREE EYE-HAND COORDINATION IDEAS

Volleyball Ideas

Set up a space with a low barrier. It can simply be panel mats with a raised folded portion (accordion), or two large cones with a rope draped from one to the other. Arrange the children into teams on either side of the barrier. Use a balloon as the volleyball. Allow the kids to bop the balloon back and forth across the barrier. To make this activity simulate Badminton (yes, it is an Olympic sport), give the children rackets to use. Beginner gymnastics can use true badminton birdies.



Field Hockey Ideas

Establish a goal area across the gym from a starting line. The goal can simply be one folded panel mat sitting astride two panel mats leaving a space to knock a bean bag or ball in. Carefully explain the safety guidelines of using hockey sticks (keep the stick face down on the floor). Demonstrate how to guide the bean bag or ball across the floor towards the goal. An optional method for this set up is to create the goal in the center of the floor exercise area. All of the students begin on perimeter of the floor exercise mat and work their bean bags or ball towards the center of the floor.



Cycling Ideas

Have available a large number of tricycles or Big Wheels. Ask the parents to donate these items for one week. Create a race track through the gym. Be mindful of the changing floor surfaces. Lead the children on a walk-through of the course. Put the children into pairs. Stagger the start times of the pairs. Remind them that this is not bumper cars! We are cycling to the finish line. Set up props along the way to create a life like outdoor environment.

ONE TRANSITION IDEA

Moving One From Area Of Gym To Another

When it is time to move to a different Olympic event in the gym, tell the students that it is Equestrian Time! First ask the children to stand in a line, one behind the other. Next, demonstrate with another teacher how to kneel down on hands and knees, one behind the other. The second person holds onto the first person's ankles. The two horses are connected now! The lead person simply begins to crawl

and the second person follows while holding on tight. Aid the children to get into formation and giddy up to the next rotation!

To make this transition easier, simply hand a few foam noodles to the line of students. Each child holds the noodle beside them. "Hold the reigns as we gallop to our next event!"

If you do not have foam noodles, use jump ropes or Velcro beams for the children to hold onto.

ENDING IDEA

By the end of class the athletes should be tired! Arrange four folded panel mats in a square shape on the floor. The mats are now your benches. The center is a pretend basketball court. Ask the kids to sit on the benches. Explain that some athletes have to catch their breath and sit on the benches to rest during a basketball game. Take a few long breaths.



Next, explain that the fans of the athletes sit in the stands on chairs. "Let's pretend we are fans watching an exciting game. Let me hear how loud you can cheer!" Let the kids have fun yelling at the top of their lungs. If you like, begin a gym cheer or start a stand up sit down wave!

Thank the children for being such good sports. Review any key topics regarding the Olympics. Tell them one more tidbit: soccer is the most popular participation sport in the world. Send the athletes home!

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