

The Olympic Torch of 2002!

Many people feel that the most dramatic moment of the Opening Ceremony is the lighting of the Olympic Flame. The flame symbolizes life, passion and peace among the people of the world. The Olympic Flame is one of the oldest symbols of the Games. Its history can be traced back to ancient Greece where a sacred flame was kept alive at the altar of Zeus, the ruler of the gods. In Greek mythology, Zeus lived on Mount Olympus and controlled the rain, thunder and lightning. Today, the sacred flame is still lit in the ancient stadium at Olympia, Greece. Women dressed in greek fashion, light the flame by using a mirror to focus the rays of the sun. The flame is then placed in a ceremonial cauldron and carried to the center of the stadium where it is used to light the torch specially designed for the new Olympic Winter Games.

The torch has not always been a part of the Olympic Winter Games. The tradition had been forgotten, until 1936, when organizers of the Berlin Games revived the symbol and created the first modern torch. After that, each host city designed it's own torch with symbols representing the unique features of their city, state and country.

Since the Olympic Torch is such an important symbol, much time is spent in selecting just the right design. The people hired to create the Salt Lake City torch wanted to represent the spirit of the west, the traditions of Utah and the beauty of winter. Artists found just the right design modeled after an icicle. The flame, burning from within the icicle, represents winter sports and the theme for the 2002 Games, "Light the Fire Within." The materials used in the torch are also symbolic, representing the ideals of the Olympic Winter Games. Glass stands for winter, nature, purity and ice. Highly polished silver represents modern technology. Aged silver stands for the heritage and traditions of the West. Copper represents the fire, warmth and passion of Utah's history. The torchbearer will grasp the torch at the spot where the polished and aged silver meet, representing the importance of both past and present traditions. The Olympic Flame will be seen burning through a frosted glass top symbolizing the fire that burns within each torchbearer. The torch measures 33 inches long and weighs about three pounds.



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The 2002 torchbearers are "community heroes" who inspire their neighbors and friends. Each runner will carry his or her own torch and will pass the flame from person to person. The flame, ignited in Greece, will be carried around the world and arrive at the Rice Eccles Stadium on February 8, 2002. Here it will be used to light the huge cauldron and burn brightly as a symbol of competition and peace throughout the Games.

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Read or allow students to read "The Olympic Torch of 2002! Fact Sheet"

Primary Grades:

▶ LANGUAGE ARTS: Important Symbols

Collect pictures of common symbols. (Symbols are pictures or drawings that carry meaning. The skull and crossbones representing poison, shape of a stop sign, the male and female symbols used for restrooms, school-crossing signs, etc.) Symbols are common language and can be recognized by people around the world. Read the fact sheet and explain how the torch is an important symbol to the people of the world.

▶ ART: Colors of Fire and Ice

Create a display of classroom objects. Identify the colors of each item. Colors are considered either warm colors or cool colors. Divide the objects into piles, warm like fire and sunsets (yellows, oranges, browns, etc.) and cool like ice, water and rainbows (blue, purple, green), and neutral (black, gray). Discuss how artists use warm and cool colors in art. Create artwork using the warm colors of fire and the cool colors of ice.

Intermediate Grades:

(Adapt Primary Grade ideas)

▶ SOCIAL STUDIES: Mythology

Research Greek Mythology. Learn about Zeus and the other Gods of Mt. Olympus. Why did the Greeks light the Olympic Flame in honor of Zeus? Create your own myth about Zeus and the beginning of the Ancient Olympic Games.

▶ SCIENCE: Lighting the Ancient Flame

Fire was important to ancient people. Necessary for warmth, cooking and light, it could be destructive when allowed to freely burn. Starting fire was a survival skill. Discuss fire safety and ancient fire starting techniques. The Olympic Flame is started with a mirror and the sun.

▶ ART: Design an Olympic Torch

Each Olympic Torch is unique and represents the symbols and traditions of the host city and country.

Brainstorm objects, traditions, themes and subjects that relate to your local school or community. Sketch ideas for a torch using the ideas. Collect cardboard wrapping paper roles to decorate with the torch designs. Students will design the torches separately or in groups. Share each torch and explain the symbolism. Display the torches for the rest of the school.