

Sports & Culture

How do sports reflect culture?

Sports competitions are part of cultures from around the world. Native nations of what would be the United States engaged in games for thousands of years. Many American Indian men played ball games similar to today's lacrosse for generations prior to contact with Europeans. The ancient Olympics began in what is today Greece more than 2,500 years ago. The first recorded Olympics were held in 776 B.C.E., but competitions likely preceded that date. The first competition was a foot race but later included wrestling, field events, and even chariot races. By the 1750s, organized cricket matches were played in the British colonies that became the United States. Whether in the past or today, sports are shaped by social and cultural factors that have determined what sports were popular and who played.

Beginnings of Sports Teams

Before the American Civil War in 1861, men organized clubs to play baseball and cricket. These clubs had constitutions and bylaws with a set of rules to reinforce ideals of the American Republic, religious mores and "healthful exercise." The rules for modern baseball and softball date to the 1840s. Baseball had spread west of the Mississippi to California, Iowa and Texas among other states before the Civil War, but the game became increasingly popular after the war. Women and Black men organized clubs before 1870, and the National League was organized as a professional league in 1876. The American League of Professional Baseball Clubs was formed in 1901. The Negro Baseball League and National Football League were founded in 1920, the National Basketball Association in 1946, and the Women's National Basketball Association in 1996. The first modern International Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece in 1896 and featured men from 13 nations in 43 events including track-and-field, swimming, gymnastics, cycling, wrestling, weightlifting, fencing, shooting, and tennis. Women participated in the Olympics in 1900 in activities of tennis, sailing, croquet, horseback-riding and golf. The first Winter Olympics were held in France in 1924 with competition in bobsledding, cross-country skiing, curling, figure skating, ice hockey, military patrol, Nordic combined skiing, Ski jumping, and speed skating. Women were only allowed to compete in ice skating as individuals or in pairs with a man. Early noted medalists included Jim Thorpe, a member of the Sac and Fox Nation, who won two Olympic gold medals in 1912. Mildred Ella "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias won two gold medals in track and field at the 1932 Summer Olympics. In 1948, Alice Coachman earned a gold medal in the high jump, the first Black woman to achieve that level of distinction.

Sports for American Youth

Youth and high school age sports became increasingly popular in the late 1800s. A state track meet was held by the late 1890s in Iowa. The invention of basketball by James Naismith in 1891 led to the creation of many community and college teams. Girls and boys from across the country played on high school teams by 1910. Boys' high school football became popular at the same time. A boy's basketball tournament was held at Iowa State in Ames in 1919. A girls' state basketball tournament was hosted by Drake in 1920. Iowa, a state known for its wrestling tradition, held a high school state championship in Ames in 1921.

Sports for American Youth

Sports proved a place for equality for Blacks before other sectors of society. High schools and colleges in states where schools were desegregated had Black athletes through the late 1800s. The boxer Jack Johnson dominated the ring and became the first Black heavyweight champion in 1908. The NFL had Black athletes since 1920, but baseball was more popular at the time in the National or American Leagues. Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers made national news in 1947 when he became the first Black in Major League Baseball since the 1890s. Title IX (nine) of the Education Amendments of 1972 opened greater equality for women in community school and collegiate sports. The act prohibited sex discrimination in any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Many colleges and universities did not offer the same number of women's programs as men's at this time. Title IX created an environment to help guarantee equal opportunity, if not always equal facilities, for women. Sports are a thriving part of American culture. Recent surveys show more than 70 percent of U.S. youth between the ages of

6-12 play a team or individual sports. Millions of Americans follow professional, college, high school, and youth sports. Television contracts for college and professional teams and leagues. Nearly everyone in the U.S. is touched by sports in their lifetime.

Supporting Questions

How do sports connect us to our past?

- [Ball-Play, 1844 \(Image\)](#)
- [Colosseum, Rome, Italy, c. 1890 \(Image\)](#)
- [Athletics at Fair, 1904 \(Document\)](#)
- [Times haven't changed much, after all., 1919 \(Political Cartoon\)](#)
- [U of Md. & Lehigh, Lacrosse, 1925 \(Image\)](#)
- [Nationals Park, baseball stadium, Washington, D.C., 2008 \(Image\)](#)

How do sports unify communities of people?

- [Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus: During the Reigns of the Emperors Constantius, Julian, c. 360 \(Document\)](#)
- [Take Me Out to the Ball Game, 1908 \(Audio\)](#)
- [Buxton Wonders, c. 1900 National Sports, 1911 \(Document\)](#)
- [Olympiad is Opened at the Coast, 1932 \(Document\)](#)
- [Concurrent Resolution Honoring the Lifetime Achievement of Jackie Robinson \(Document\)](#)
- [Report on the State of the Union Delivered to a Joint Session of Congress, 2014 \(Document\)](#)
- ["We're All Iowans": Iowa State football fans help elderly Iowa fan into Jack Trice Stadium. 2017 \(Image\)](#)

How have sports contributed to the cultural identity of Iowa?

- [Champion of Iowa, 1915 \(Document\)](#)
- [Drake Relays, 2008, Lolo Jones \(Image\)](#)
- [Iowa Girls 6-on-6 Basketball Players Tell Their Stories, 2008 \(Video\)](#)
- [Finishing RAGBRAI, 2008 Proclamation, 2012 \(Document\)](#)

[*Printable Image and Document Guide](#)

Additional Resources

*Links to additional resources available in the [Sports and Culture set](#).

McComb, David G. Sports in World History. Routledge: New York, 2004.

This book provides an overview of the history of modern sports. It takes a look at multiple different sports and diversifies between western and non-western sports.

Hall, Stephanie. "Traditional Sports for Unity." 27 July 2020.

This blog examines how sports have brought diverse groups of people together worldwide.

McGuiggan, Amy Whorf. " 'Take Me Out to the Ball Game' - Edward Meeker (1908): The Story of the Sensational Baseball Song." Library of Congress Guest Post.

This article depicts the significance of the famous tune "Take me Out to the Ball Game." It helps to paint the picture of the song's impact in American culture.

Bryant, Nick. "The Shared Language of Sport and Politics." BBC News. 27 Sept 012.

This magazine article from the BBC discusses the influence sports have had in the realm of politics.

Dash, Mike. "Blue versus Green: Rocking the Byzantine Empire." Smithsonianmag.com. 2 March 2012.

This article from Smithsonian Magazine traces organized sports back to the early days of the Byzantine Empire. It examines the role sports played in early cultures and the influence it had on the development of these empires.

"Caray Leads 'Take Me Out to the Ballgame' " Major League Baseball. 22 Apr 2014.

Obama, Barack. "2014 State of the Union Address." 28 Jan 2014. C-SPAN.

Social Education, September 2017..

Ball Play, 1844



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Catlin, George, Artist. Ball-Play.

Description

Artist George Catlin painted many scenes of American Indian life. This painting depicts a game similar to modern lacrosse. The event is played in a large, open field with many players.

The people of the Iroquois Confederacy, also known as the Six Nations, refer to themselves as the Haudenosaunee (pronounced "hoo-dee-noh-SHAW-nee"). It means "peoples of the longhouse," and refers to their lengthy bark-covered longhouses that housed many families. Theirs was a sophisticated and thriving society of well over 5,000 people when the first European explorers encountered them in the early 17th Century.

Source-Dependent Questions

- List some games you have played on a large field. What similarities do you see with those games and the play in the painting? What differences?
- Compare the action you see in this painting with the source U of Md. & Lehigh, Lacrosse. What elements of the American Indian game do you see in the U of Md. photo of lacrosse?

Citation Information

Catlin, George, Artist. Ball-Play. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, Library of Congress

Colosseum, Rome, Italy, c. 1890



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Colosseum, Rome, Italy

Description

The Flavian Amphitheater, more commonly known as the Roman Colosseum was an engineering marvel when it was built. Since AD 79, the Colosseum has been the role model for sports stadiums that could be used for multiple types of events and seat thousands of fans. During the time of the Roman Empire, fans were given tickets which directed them to certain sections, rows and seat numbers showing how practices from the ancient world are still present today.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Study this photograph for two minutes. What are three things that stand out in your mind?
- Based on the other buildings you see around the Colosseum, what inference can you make about the importance of the Colosseum in the city of Rome?
- Compare the Colosseum with the source Nationals Park. What connections do you observe between the early sports stadium, the Colosseum, and the modern sports stadium, Nationals Park?

Citation Information

Colosseum, Rome, Italy. [Between 1890 and 1930] Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, Library of Congress

Athletics at Far, 1904



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Twice-a-week plain dealer. (Cresco, Howard County, Iowa), 23 Aug. 1904. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*

Description

This newspaper article from 1904 describes the upcoming Olympic games. The events of the games are detailed in the article. The Olympics were part of the culture of ancient Greece and were revived in the late 1800s. This article helps link the ancient games with the modern ones.

[Full Transcript of Athletics at Fair, 1904](#)

[Transcript of Excerpt Athletics at Fair, 1904](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- How does the author connect this account of the modern Olympics to the ancient games? Cite evidence from the text.
- How does the author differentiate the modern Olympics from the ancient games? Cite evidence in the text.
- Do you recognize any of the events described in the article? If so, which ones?
- How does this article show connections between today and the near past as well as the ancient past?

Citation Information

Twice-a-week plain dealer. (Cresco, Howard County, Iowa), 23 Aug. 1904. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress

Times haven't changed much, after all., 1919



Courtesy of University of Iowa Digital Library, Darling, Jay N. "Times haven't changed much, after all." 1919

Description

Ding Darling was a political cartoonist from Iowa. His cartoons appeared in newspapers throughout the country through most of the twentieth century. This cartoon compares football to medieval jousts. The cartoon appeared during a time when football safety was a national conversation following the deaths of players on the field.

Source-Dependent Questions

- List the comparisons the artist makes between medieval jousting and football. Consider the title the artist gave to this cartoon.
- Based on the list you created above, summarize your opinion of the title the artist chose for this cartoon.
- Construct an argument that answers the supporting question: How do sports connect us to our past?

Citation Information

Darling, Jay N. "Times haven't changed much, after all." Iowa Digital Library, University of Iowa, 1919, University of Iowa Digital Library.

U of Md. & Lehigh, Lacrosse, 1925



Courtesy of Library of Congress, U of Md. & Lehigh, Lacrosse. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

Description

The modern game of lacrosse is depicted in this photo from the University of Maryland in 1925. Players in this game are carrying sticks and running in an open field.

Source-Dependent Questions

- How do the players in this photo compare with the players in the Ball-play painting?
- What do you notice about the equipment and clothing?
- Find a picture of a lacrosse game from the last 10 years. What equipment and clothing are worn today? How can you account for any differences or similarities you see?
- How does the sport of lacrosse connect us to our past?

Citation Information

U of Md. & Lehigh, Lacrosse. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

Nationals Park, baseball stadium, Washington, D.C., 2008



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Highsmith, Carol M, photographer

Description

The Washington Nationals baseball team plays at Nationals Park in Washington D.C. The stadium shares similarities with many other sports venues throughout the world.

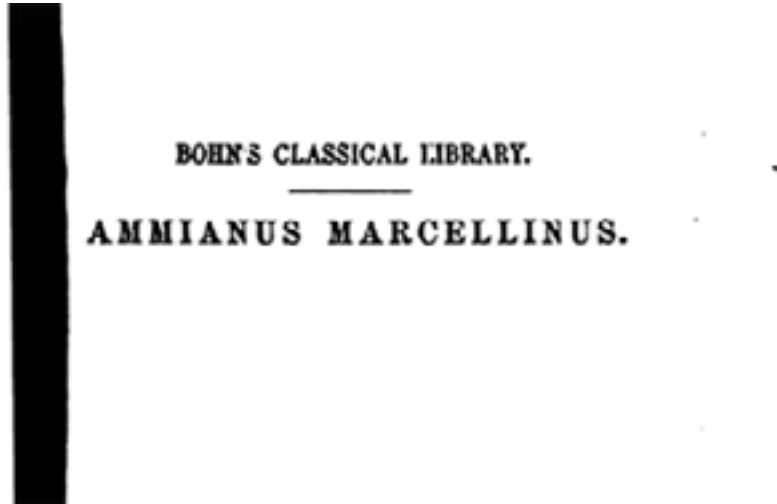
Source-Dependent Questions

- Compare this image with the image of the Roman Colosseum. What similarities do you notice?
- The Colosseum started being used for sporting events in 79AD. The Washington Nationals stadium has been used since 2008. Based on your observations of both structures, what connections can you make between the ancient and near past?

Citation Information

Highsmith, Carol M, photographer. Nationals Park, baseball stadium, Washington, D.C. May 5. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus: During the Reigns of the Emperors Constantius, Julian, c. 360



Courtesy of Internet Archives Ammianus Marcellinus. The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus: During the Reigns of the Emperors Constantius, Julian

Description

Ammianus Marcellinus was a historian in Ancient Rome. He wrote about how obsessed spectators of chariot races were. Chariot races were some of the most important sporting events in the Roman world. This source speaks to the importance of the sport in the society.

Source-Dependent Questions

- How does the author let you know the importance of chariot races in ancient Rome? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.
- The author of this text lived during the time he was writing about. What conclusions can you make about the credibility of his observations?
- According to the author, what unifies the common people in Rome regarding the chariot races? What connections can you make about the way ancient Romans felt about chariot racing and the way people today feel about their favorite sports?
- How do the actions of fans in ancient times and today unify groups of people?

Citation Information

Ammianus Marcellinus. The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus: During the Reigns of the Emperors Constantius, Julian Internet Archives

Take Me Out to the Ball Game, 1908



Courtesy of Norworth, Jack, et al. Take Me Out to the Ball Game. 1908. Audio. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, .

Description

“Take Me out to the Ball Game” is a standard song heralding the belief in the greatness of American baseball. Traditionally, the chorus is sung during the 7th Inning stretch at games. The song has been sung at baseball games since it was written.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is a bill?
- Summarize the five steps of how a bill becomes a law. Discuss why each step is important and necessary.

Citation Information

Norworth, Jack, et al. Take Me Out to the Ball Game. 1908. Audio. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, .

The Buxton Wonders, c. 1900



Description

The Buxton Wonders were an all-black baseball team that was famous for barnstorming in the early 1900s when professional sports were segregated. The team traveled around the country to play. When Jackie Robinson integrated Major League Baseball the team was sold.

[Full Transcript of The Buxton Wonders, c. 1900](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- The Buxton Wonders baseball team existed because national sports were segregated until the 1940s. Why would groups of people who were denied access to sports from their own leagues?
- What does that say about sports unifying communities of people?
- The back of this image talks about how Buxton Wonders excel at baseball. Read through the text and discuss why such effusive language was used to describe the team.

Olympiad is Opened at the Coast, 1932



Courtesy of Library of Congress, The Coolidge examiner. [volume] (Coolidge, Ariz.), 05 Aug. 1932.

Description

Part of the modern Olympic games is a parade of nations. In these parades, athletes from every participating nation march behind their national flags in celebration of the Games. This article from The Coolidge Examiner in 1932 describes the opening ceremony of the Olympics held in Los Angeles, California.

[Full Transcript of Olympiad is Opened at the Coast, 1932](#)

[Transcript of Olympiad is Opened at the Coast, 1932 ExcerptSource-Description](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- This article describes a ceremony to open the Olympic Games. What elements of the ceremony unite individual teams? What elements of the ceremony show a shared unity to the Games?
- If you are familiar with the Olympic Games, what elements of the ceremony described in this article are still part of the Olympic Games today? Cite evidence from the text. If you've never seen the opening of an Olympics, follow this link to see a brief history of opening ceremonies.

Citation Information

The Coolidge examiner. [volume] (Coolidge, Ariz.), 05 Aug. 1932. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress.

Concurrent Resolution Honoring the Lifetime Achievement of Jackie Robinson



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Marshall, John, "U.S. Reports: Marbury v. Madison, 5 U.S. (1 Cranch) 137 (1803)," U.S. Supreme Court, 1803

Description

Jackie Robinson was the first African-American to integrate the sport of professional baseball. His heroism in doing so has been admired by people for generations. This resolution in Congress was introduced in 1997 to honor Robinson's achievements in baseball and as an activist throughout his life working for equality for all Americans.

[Full Transcript of Concurrent Resolution Honoring the Lifetime Achievement of Jackie Robinson](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- Congress recognizes Americans for important achievements through documents called resolutions which are introduced by Members of Congress and then voted on by each chamber. What aspects of Robinson's career and life were highlighted in this resolution? What aspects of character are important in your community today?
- According to this resolution, how did Robinson show what it means to be a positive member of a community? Compare Robinson's achievements in sports with the achievements of Shawn Johnson who had a day named for her in Iowa. What similarities do you see?

Citation Information

Marshall, John, "U.S. Reports: Marbury v. Madison, 5 U.S. (1 Cranch) 137 (1803)," U.S. Supreme Court, 1803.
[Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Report on the State of the Union Delivered to a Joint Session of Congress on January 28, 2014



Courtesy of Congressional Record Vol 160, No. 16

Description

President Barack Obama delivered his State of the Union Address on 28th January 2014 to a Joint Session of Congress. The Constitution requires presidents to give Congress their perspective on the condition of the country and to recommend laws they think Congress should enact. In the Address, President Obama uses numerous sports references.

Full Transcript of State of the Union

Transcript of State of the Union Excerpts

Source-Dependent Questions

- Presidents deliver State of the Union addresses to Congress every year near the end of January. In the Address, they recommend laws they want Congress to pass. In the 2014 State of the Union, President Obama used a number of sports metaphors to explain the laws he was recommending. As you read the excerpts, what sports references do you recognize? List them.
- Why do you think politicians feel comfortable getting their messages to the public by using sports metaphors?
- How does this reflect unity among Americans?

Citation Information

Report on the State of the Union Delivered to a Joint Session of Congress on January 28, 2014. Congressional Record Vol 160, No.16.

'We're all lowans': Iowa State football fans help elderly Iowa fan into Jack Trice Stadium, 2017



Courtesy of the Des Moines Register, 'We're all lowans': Iowa State football fans help elderly Iowa fan into Jack Trice Stadium, 2017

Description

This photo shows Iowa State fans helping out an elderly Iowa Hawkeye fan in a wheelchair at the annual rivalry game. This annual game is called the Cy-Hawk game. It is a showdown between the Iowa State Cyclones and the Iowa Hawkeyes. This photo went viral shortly after the game was played.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Refer back to the [Comparing Three Branches of Government document](#). What branch of government does the Supreme Court represent?
- Look closely at the photo and describe the building. Why would the Supreme Court building be built across the street from the US Capitol?
- Established by the U.S. Constitution, the Supreme Court began to take shape with the passage of the Judiciary Act of 1789. Why would the Judiciary Act of 1789 be an important milestone for the country?

Citation Information

Champion of Iowa, 1915



Courtesy of Library of Congress, The Sunday telegram. [volume] (Clarksburg, W. Va.), 14 Nov. 1915. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*

Description

The football game between Iowa State University and the University of Iowa is often called the Superbowl of Iowa. The winning team has bragging rights for the year and gets to take the CyHawk Trophy. The game has been played between the two schools since the late 1890s.

Source-Dependent Questions

- The first football game between Iowa State University and the University of Iowa was in 1894. It has since become a fall tradition in the state. How can sports traditions help create cultural identity?
- What traditions does your school/town have that contribute to its identity?
- This very short newspaper account was printed in a West Virginia newspaper. What can you infer about the notice of the game being printed so far away?

Citation Information

The Sunday telegram. [volume] (Clarksburg, W. Va.), 14 Nov. 1915. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress

Drake Relays, 2008, Lolo Jones



Description

The Drake Relays have been a part of Iowa's history since 1922. Athletes from around the world head to Des Moines to compete on the famed blue oval track and high school students from across the state strive to qualify to run at the Relays. Olympic champion and Iowa native Lolo Jones has made frequent appearances at the Relays and has contributed to the cultural identity of Iowa through sports.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Lolo Jones is a world champion track and field athlete who has competed in Olympic games. Any time she competes at the Drake Relays is a newsworthy event in Iowa. Why do you think athletes like Jones and Shawn Johnson are important to the people of Iowa?
- The Drake Relays have been an important part of track and field events in the United States since the early 1900s with world champions competing every year. How do sporting events contribute to the identity of a state?

Citation Information

Drake University

Iowa Girls 6-on-6 Basketball Players Tell Their Stories, 2008



Courtesy of Iowa PBS, "Iowa Girls 6-on-6 Basketball Players Tell Their Stories," 2008

Description

Organized girls basketball in Iowa started sooner than it did in other states. It also was played with different rules than the game today. Each team consisted of six players: three guards and three forwards. Each team had three players on each half of the court and no one could cross the half-court line. Girls were also limited to two dribbles of the ball. Six-on-six basketball was played in Iowa schools until 1993.

Full Transcript of Iowa Girls 6-on-6 Basketball Players Tell Their Stories, 2008

Source-Dependent Questions

- What reasons does the video give for the uniqueness of girls basketball in Iowa? Cite evidence from the video (use the transcript).
- Girls across the country were not guaranteed the opportunity to play sports in school until 1971. Based on the video, why do you think Iowa schools offered girls basketball before then?
- Consider the five women interviewed for the documentary. How would you categorize the feelings they express for six-on-six girls basketball? Explain how the sport could be seen as a unique part of the cultural identity of Iowa.

Citation Information

"Iowa Girls 6-on-6 Basketball Players Tell Their Stories." Iowa PBS, 2008.

Finishing RAGBRAI, 2008



Description

Every year at the end of July, thousands of bicycle riders from around the world travel to Iowa to participate in the Register's Annual Bike Ride Across Iowa, RAGBRAI. Riders begin the ride somewhere on the western border of Iowa on the Missouri River and spend the next week riding across the state to reach the Mississippi River.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Based on this image where would you infer these riders are?
- At the beginning of the ride or at the end? What context clues helped you decide?
- What might draw people from other countries to Iowa to ride a bike across the state?
- Use any background information you already know to construct a theory. How do events like RAGBRAI help contribute to Iowa's identity?