



TED Connection: An Olympic why

Overview

Mensa for Kids' TED Connections are short, easy to use guides that help teachers, parents and youth use TED talks in a classroom or home setting. Rather than a lesson plan format, they have a list of discussion questions, all at higher levels of thinking.



Olympian Jeff Olson (alpine skiing, 1988 & 1992) encourages us to find our personal excellence and the role that physical health plays in helping individuals and nations get their game on.

WATCH THE TED TALK AT:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49IGHIe2Tis>



Think about it

1. Jeff Olson describes people “with magnificent obsessions with brave hearts, vision and purpose.” This is easy to see in Olympians. Can you think of someone from history, literature or the arts who also embodies these traits? What was the person’s “magnificent obsession?”

ARENA	PERSON	MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION
History		
Literature		
Arts		

2. Pierre de Coubertin was called the Le Rénovateur (“the reviver”) of the Olympic games. As Jeff Olson explains, de Coubertin believed that competitive play could improve education and focused on the Greek idea of ἀρετή (arete – pronounced ahr-i-tey), which is excellence in the sense of a reaching of full potential. Olson says that competition either beats you down or brings you to life. Thinking of these two ideas, what role do you think competition has in helping people find and achieve arete, and what makes competition more likely to bring you to life rather than beat you down?

3. Baron de Coubertin got the idea for the motto “Citius, Altius, Fortius” (faster, higher, stronger) from a friend of his who was a principal who used it at a school athletics meeting. This type of phrase is called a hendiatis or triad, which is when three words stand for one idea.

Can you think of another hendiatis (hint: Julius Caesar? The Declaration of Independence?)



4. Olson argues that we are athletes in the game of life, trying to elevate our contribution to the team. In what ways does this metaphor hold true? What, then, would lead to life fitness in addition to athletic conditioning?

5. In President Obama's State of the Union Address in 2011, he stressed that we would win the future by "out educating, out innovating, and outbuilding our competitors." Of these three, which do you think is most vital? Who do you see as our competitors?

6. Olson mentions the idea of a "Sputnik moment" and said it was time to "get our game on." NASA says, "The launch of Sputnik changed everything." Think about a time in your life that was a "Sputnik moment" for you and led you to get your game on. This Russian stamp celebrated the launch. If you made a stamp of your Sputnik moment, what would the image be?



7. In December of 1960, right after he was elected to the presidency, *Sports Illustrated* published an article written by John F. Kennedy entitled "The Soft American." In it, he says: "This knowledge, the knowledge that the physical well-being of the citizen is an important foundation for the vigor and vitality of all the activities of the nation, is as old as Western civilization itself. But it is a knowledge which today, in America, we are in danger of forgetting." Discuss your agreement or disagreement with President Kennedy on both points: that a nation benefits from the physical fitness of its citizens and that America is in danger of forgetting this.



8. Olson discusses the prevalence of diseases of lifestyle that result from poor diet and a lack of exercise, explaining that the youth of today have shorter life spans than their parents because of this. Of the things he talks about, which disease do you think is the easiest to prevent? The most difficult? If people know these diseases are caused by poor diet and inactivity, why do you think they don't make changes in their lives?

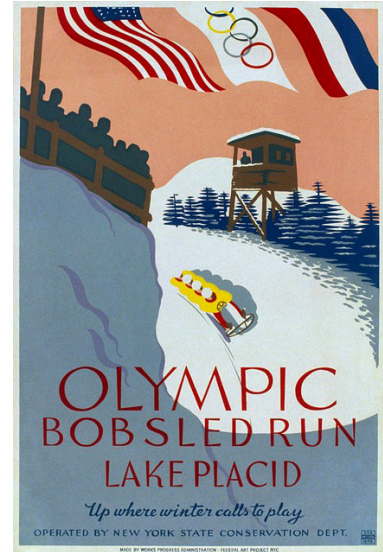
9. The Milliken study on the cost of disease looked at the seven most common diseases, most of which are lifestyle diseases. The report found that if we could lower obesity rates, we could avoid \$60 billion in treatment expenses and gain \$254 billion in productivity. Why would obesity decrease productivity? Why is it difficult for people to see their individual role in these costs? How involved should government be in the preventative health of citizens?

10. When Jeff Olson talks about speaking to a group of Mensans who by definition have high IQs, he uses this as a way to illustrate that health is a learned skill that people "must train into a habit." What is the connection between cognitive fitness and physical fitness? Do you think smart people are more or less likely to be fit?

11. To get kids involved in fitness, he advocates "romancing kids into it." What do you envision that would look like? How can pop culture make fitness cool in the same way it does, for example, fashion?



12. Olson discusses the 1994 Lillehammer games as an example of an Olympics that found its “why” or arete in the environment in a way that carries over to this day, and suggests that the United States could use an Olympics bid to help us get our game on by using the Olympics as motivation to reduce trends of chronic disease. The word he uses is “steward” – that we could steward health into the games. What does it mean to you to be a steward of something? How does that connect to health? To the Olympics? To arete?



13. Dan Jansen’s falls in two games didn’t stop him from trying again, and in his third attempt he won gold. What makes some people give up while some keep going? What is the relationship between knowing your “why” and trying again in the face of failure?

14. This talk was given prior to the bid submission for the 2022 games. The United States ended up not submitting a bid for those games. The following cities did: Krakow, Poland; Oslo, Norway; Almaty, Kazakhstan; Lviv, Ukraine; Beijing, China. Of those cities, which do you think would be the best choice of a city that has an Olympic “why” and what do you think that “why” is? Is it important for an Olympics to have a “why” in addition to simply hosting the games?



Do it

- Create a hendiatis that could be used as a motto for your family, yourself or a team to which you belong. Use translate.google.com to translate it into Latin.
- Sign up for the President's Physical Fitness and Nutrition Challenge (ages 6 & up). <https://www.presidentschallenge.org>.
- Create a flier/poster on paper or digitally at www.smore.com that makes fitness look cool.
- Use one of the free printable charts at www.kidpointz.com/printable-charts to track your activity for a month.
- Find your own "why" with our TED Connection on Simon Sinek's "How Great Leaders Inspire." bit.ly/sinekinspire

Read about it

- *Eyewitness: Olympics*, DK Publishing (all ages)
- *The Complete Book of the Winter Olympics* by David Wallechinsky (all ages)
- *The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics* by Daniel James Brown (older readers)
- *Magic Tree House Fact Tracker #10: Ancient Greece and the Olympics: A Nonfiction Companion to Magic Tree House #16: Hour of the Olympics Paperback* by Mary Pope Osborne (younger readers)
- *A Passion for Victory: The Story of the Olympics in Ancient and Early Modern Times* by Benson Bobrick (10 & up)
- Read a biography of Pierre de Coubertin: bit.ly/pdc-bio.
- Read President Kennedy's *Sports Illustrated* article: bit.ly/jfk-si.



Watch it

- Watch President Obama talk about winning the future: bit.ly/outeducate.
- Watch more TED talks by Olympians: bit.ly/ted-olympians.

Surf it

- Visit these websites to learn more about the games:
Official site: www.olympic.org
United States Olympic site: www.teamusa.org
Scholastic: bit.ly/sch-olympics
- Visit NASA's history of Sputnik site: history.nasa.gov/sputnik.
- Visit the Milken Institute site (www.milkeninstitute.org) and read the study on the economic impact of chronic diseases: bit.ly/cost-disease.