

OLYMPICS ENQUIRY

Play this video to the class, first providing the following context:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9e6Cfq_YchM

This is a clip of the 100m men's final at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. The two fastest sprinters were Carl Lewis, an American sprinter, and his longtime rival, Canadian Ben Johnson [point out which lanes Johnson and Lewis are in]. Although Johnson held the current world record, he had suffered a number of injuries that year and Lewis had beaten him in their most recent race, making Lewis the favourite to win.

Play the clip.

So, against most people's expectations, Johnson won; beating his own world record and running the 100m faster than any man ever had at 9.79 seconds. He was awarded the gold medal and overnight became a national hero back in his home country of Canada, with the Canadian Prime Minister even calling Johnson to personally congratulate him.

However, three days later tests showed that Johnson had taken a banned drug to improve his performance. He was stripped of his gold medal and his world record time was revoked.

Task Question:

- ✓ Should have Johnson's gold medal and world record been taken away?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ Did Johnson run the fastest any man ever has?
- ✓ If yes, then should he have kept his world record?
- ✓ If no, then who or what ran 9.79 seconds?

After Johnson was banned, he admitted that he took the drugs, but his coach complained that there were lots of other athletes taking banned drugs – Johnson had just happened to get caught. He also said that Johnson had only started taking the banned drugs so that he would be on an equal footing with the other sprinters that were taking them – [implying that] otherwise it wouldn't have been fair on Johnson.

Task Question:

- ✓ If everyone was taking banned drugs, should Johnson have been stripped of his gold medal?

Nested Questions

- ✓ Was the coach right to say that it wouldn't have been fair on Johnson if he hadn't taken the drugs while everyone else was, because he wouldn't have been on an equal footing with them?
- ✓ Is it wrong to take performance-enhancing drugs? If yes, what makes them wrong?
- ✓ Is it ok to take performance-enhancing drugs if everyone else is?
- ✓ What is cheating? Is it ok to cheat if everyone else is?
- ✓ What makes something right or wrong? Whether other people are doing it? Or something else?
- ✓ Is fair being on an equal footing with everyone else? What if someone trains more than everyone else? What if someone eats better food? What if someone has greater 'natural ability'? (Links to Pete's Olympics session).

Extension activity

The Ancient Greeks founded the Olympics in 776 BC. Since then there have been many developments in how athletes train and prepare for the games. Top athletes follow rigid, scientifically-researched diet and training regimes in order to improve their performances – and world records keep on getting broken.

Imagine that a modern-day sprinter races against an Olympian from ancient Greece. The modern-day sprinter prepares for the race by training 3 times a day, following an exercise routine that's been specially designed by sport scientists, and by eating a high protein diet, which the scientists also recommend. The Olympian sticks to his normal diet and trains by lifting rocks and going on runs. The two race, and the modern-day sprinter wins.

Task Question:

- ✓ Did the modern-day sprinter cheat against the Olympian?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ Was it a fair race?
- ✓ If a sprinter training today beats a world record set by someone running 100 years ago, are they a better sprinter? Or are they just better prepared? Or both?
- ✓ What makes someone better at something, natural ability or effort?
- ✓ Is having a better diet and training routine the same as taking performance-enhancing drugs? Or is there a difference?
- ✓ Is it different because drugs aren't natural? If yes, then what is 'natural'? [Links to next extension activity]

Extension activity

Imagine that scientists, using plants that grow on the earth, create a new drink called 'Zing'. It's found that one of Zing's side effects is to make people run 10% faster. Some sprinters begin to use the drink to run faster and start winning all their races, while others don't drink it and start losing all the time. There's outcry from the sprinters that don't drink Zing; they say it's not fair and that the Zing-drinkers are cheating. The Zing-drinkers say it's not cheating because anyone can drink it if they want to. A meeting takes place for the people in charge of banning substances in athletics to discuss Zing; they have to decide whether athletes should be allowed to drink Zing, or if it should be banned.

Task Question:

- ✓ Should they ban Zing?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ If no, then should other banned drugs be allowed?
- ✓ Is drinking Zing the same as taking performance-enhancing drugs?
- ✓ Does the fact that Zing is made with plants mean that it shouldn't be banned?
- ✓ What is natural?
- ✓ Should everyone be made to drink Zing, or just given the choice?

Extension activity

While Johnson admitted to taking banned drugs, his coach insisted that the drug he was caught for wasn't in fact the one that Johnson used. He said that Johnson would never have let himself get caught; like the other athletes he knew not to take any drugs too close to the time of the test. Johnson later said that he thought another sprinter might have put the different drug he was caught for in his drink before the test, so that he'd be caught out.

Task Question:

- ✓ If Johnson was caught for a drug that he didn't take, should he have had his medal and world record taken away?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ Was it right for the other sprinter to place the drug in Johnson's drink so that Johnson would get caught?
- ✓ What if the sprinter did it because he knew Johnson was cheating and wanted him to get caught? Would it be right then?
- ✓ What if the sprinter did it to give himself a better chance of winning a medal because he knew Johnson would be disqualified? Would it be right then?
- ✓ Do the ends justify the means?

Extension activity

Imagine that tomorrow the people in charge of the Olympics say that all previously banned drugs are no longer banned.

Task Question:

- ✓ Would it now be ok to take the previously banned drugs?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ What about Johnson, would what he did in the past be ok now? Was it ok then (when he took them)?
- ✓ Who or what decides what is ok and not ok/right and wrong/ good and bad? Are these distinctions the same?

