

# The 2008 Summer Olympics

**Curriculum links:** Current events, social studies, civics, American history, critical thinking

**Briefing:** The Summer Olympics in Beijing, which begin on Aug. 8, will dominate headlines on news and sports pages throughout the summer. Here are some of the story lines your students may want to follow:

- **Drug testing.** After a year in which several former champions were stripped of their medals because they used performance-enhancing drugs—including American Marion Jones, the star of the 2000 games—athletes this year are taking no chances. Drug testing will be stricter than ever, and the U.S. team does not want anyone disqualified for accidentally eating something that could give them a positive result. Some meat produced in China comes from animals that are fed steroids, so the American contingent to Beijing is bringing most of its own food to the games.

- **New sports.** Nearly every Olympiad, the games add some new sports and drop others. Extreme-sports fans will welcome the addition of BMX bike racing to the Olympics, and American riders will be medal contenders. On the other hand, baseball and softball will be Olympic sports in 2008 for the last time. The U.S. is disappointed that the International Olympic Committee will not offer the popular American sports at the 2012 games, and the dominant American softball team wants to leave the Olympics as champions in 2008.

- **Who will win?** At the 2004 games in Athens, the U.S. collected the most medals, 103, and the most gold medals, 35. China finished third overall with 63 medals, but second to the U.S. in golds, with 32. In 2008, China will go all out to top the Americans at least in the gold-medal count. Several experts believe China could succeed, although swimming stars like Michael Phelps could collect enough medals in the pool to keep the U.S. on top.

**Newspaper activities:** Have students scan the sports page for a week or two to find articles about the games, including pieces about drug testing, reports on Olympic trials, and profiles of top athletes. Then ask students to report to the class on what they've learned about Olympic stars, political debates, drug controversies, broadcast issues, or other topics.

**Resources:** Books: *Olympics* (DK, 2005) and David Wallechinsky and Jaime Loucky's *The Complete Book of the Olympics: 2008 Edition* (Aurum, 2008). Websites: Track every Olympic event with NBC Sports, learn more from the official Olympic site, and get the latest news of the games from *The Washington Post*.

## Classroom Debates

Do you plan to watch the Olympics? What's your favorite Olympic sport? When you watch the games, do you always cheer for American teams? Do so-called "extreme" sports like BMX bike racing belong in the Olympics? Should baseball and softball remain in the games? Have recent reports of athletes using performance-enhancing drugs changed the way you think about Olympic stars?