



1971–1972

Color screenprint (poster)

Image: 34 3/8 x 25 3/16 inches (87.3 x 64 cm)
Sheet: 40 x 25 3/16 inches (101.6 x 64 cm)

JACOB LAWRENCE
American

Gift of Marla K. Shoemaker,
2002, 2002-60-1

LET'S LOOK

How many people do you see?
What are they doing?

Where are they running?
What are they holding?
What kind of race is this?

Describe the expressions
on the runners' faces. What
emotions do you see?

What else shows us that they
are trying to run fast enough to
win the race (position and size
of legs, arms, and heads;
details of muscles)?

Look at the bottom of the
picture. Can you find symbols,
some words (in German), and
a date? What do you think
they could mean?

OLYMPIC GAMES MUNICH 1972 (OLYMPISCHE SPIELE MÜNCHEN 1972)

Five runners with grimacing faces take giant strides around a large, curving track as they head toward the finish line. They hold batons (small sticks) in their hands because they are competing in a relay race. Each athlete is shown with his arms, legs, and head in a slightly different position—one has his head back and his right leg stretched forward, almost straight. Who do you think will win? Why?

The words *Olympische Spiele München* translate to “Olympic Games Munich,” and tell us that this screenprint poster was created for the 1972 Olympic Summer Games, held in Munich, Germany. The Olympics symbol, five interlocking rings, is also visible on the poster. Notice how Lawrence used bold colors to depict the runners' stylized faces and legs as well as the repeated shapes of the track.

Here, Lawrence combined the flat, simplified shapes and empty spaces of modernism with silhouetted figures—similar to those found in ancient Greek vase painting—and the rhythmic patterns and colors of Harlem street scenes. He labeled his pictorial style “dynamic cubism.” *Olympic Games Munich 1972* evokes several stories: the high drama of a relay race; African American athlete Jesse Owens's success at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany, in the face of Nazi claims of racial superiority (Owens won four gold medals, including one as part of the 400-meter relay team); the strength and the determination of African Americans to compete on the world stage after centuries of discrimination at home.

ABOUT THIS ARTIST

Jacob Lawrence was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1917 as his family traveled north, part of the Great Migration of people from the South. After his parents split up, his mother moved the family to Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City where a movement known

as the Harlem Renaissance was flourishing. Lawrence studied painting at the Harlem Art Workshop and received great encouragement from African American artists Augusta Savage and Charles Alston and art critic Alain Locke.

Jacob Lawrence achieved national recognition at the age of twenty-three with *The Migration of the Negro*, an exhibition of sixty paintings about the Great Migration. This series was so admired that both the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., wanted to buy them. Eventually, it was divided between the two museums.

During World War II, Lawrence was drafted into the U.S. Coast Guard, where he served on the first integrated ship and was promoted to a rank higher than steward's mate (the automatic rank of African Americans in that era). After the war, his career included commissions for murals and a *Time* magazine cover; teaching positions at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and the University of Washington in Seattle; and many awards.

Lawrence used a process called screenprinting to make this poster. To create a screenprint image, paper or film stencils (or a combination of tusche and glue) are used to block the passage of ink or dye through a finely woven fabric screen (made by stretching silk around a frame) onto the printing surface (paper or fabric). Silkscreen printing is also used for commercial work such as signs, posters, and printed fabrics.

LET'S LOOK AGAIN

What primary and secondary colors did Jacob Lawrence use? Which colors are bright? Dull?

Look for repeated colors and shapes in the background and in the runners. Which ones echo the rhythm of running?

Is this the beginning, middle, or end of the race? How can you tell?

LOOK CLOSELY AT OLYMPIC GAMES MUNICH 1972

What emotions do you see on the runners' faces? (Circle your choices.)

fear	concentration	joy	pain
effort	anger	laziness	ambition

Draw lines connecting the German words and their English translations:

Olympische	Games
Spiel	Munich
München	Olympic

Draw over the straight and curvy shapes that are repeated in the poster.

Circle the part of the runner that you think will break the finish line first.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS/ENGLISH

Elementary School

Discuss what sports you like to play. Do you use special clothes or equipment?

Middle School

Write a moment-to-moment description of this relay race for someone who cannot see it, similar to a radio sportscaster's commentary.

High School

Write an essay based on the following statement:

"The important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part, for the essential thing in life is not so much conquering as fighting well." —Baron Pierre de Coubertin, 1896

From Anthony Mark Ponce, "The Olympic Games: A Historical Overview," p. 10, in Karen R. Goddy and Georgia L. Freedman-Harvey, eds., *Art and Sport: Images to Herald the Olympic Games* (Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, 1992); www.aafla.org/8saa/artandsport.pdf

SOCIAL STUDIES

Elementary School

Find out about the Olympic Games. What country started the Olympics? Where will the next Olympic Games take place?

Middle School

Research the life of Jesse Owens, start of the 1936 Olympics, son of sharecroppers, and grandson of slaves.

High School

Investigate the international tragedy at the 1972 Olympics involving athletes from Israel and Palestinian terrorists, an event that Lawrence could not have known would happen when he created this poster.

MATH

Elementary School

Make a chart showing each of the colors in this poster and how many times each is repeated.

Middle School

Calculate the length of relay races in present-day Olympic Games in miles, feet, and meters. Compare these lengths with those of running races in the ancient Olympics.

High School

Create speed, time, and distance problems based on this poster. Exchange the problems with your classmates and try to solve them.

ART

Elementary School

Draw a picture of yourself playing your favorite sport. Use bright (loud) colors and dull (quiet) colors.

Middle School

Find the primary colors and secondary colors in this poster. Use two primary and two secondary colors in making a cut-paper collage showing your favorite sport.

High School

Compare Lawrence's runners with the athletes depicted on Greek vases. Explain how the figures are simplified and stylized in both.

Make a poster for the next Summer Olympics. Combine action sketches of people in your school or neighborhood playing a sport to create a composition containing three to five athletes. Add lettering that states the location and year of the games and the Olympic logo.