

The Marathon

The marathon is a long-distance running event that is held in countries across the globe. Although the first marathon was held in 1896, the event's origins go back thousands of years to the time of the ancient Greeks. According to legend, an ancient Greek messenger ran approximately 25 miles from the Battle of Marathon to Athens to deliver the news that the Greeks had been victorious. This story inspired the marathon that we know today.

Nowadays, the marathon's distance is set at 26.2 miles. This exact distance was first run at the 1908 Olympic Games, when the race started at Windsor Castle and finished directly in front of the royal box at the Olympic stadium. This extended the course from 25 miles to 26.2 miles, which became the official marathon distance in 1921.

It is not only professional athletes at the Olympic Games who can compete in marathons; these races are often held on public roads in cities, where amateur athletes can also compete. Common reasons for running a marathon include raising money for charity or simply for a sense of achievement.

One of the world's most famous marathons is held annually on the streets of London and was first organised by athletes Chris Brasher and John Disley. They were inspired by the New York City marathon to create their own marathon event. The first London Marathon was held in 1981, when over 6000 people completed the race. Its popularity has grown massively since then, with tens of thousands of people now running each year. The total number of race finishers in London now stands at over one million.

Many variations of the marathon have been developed over the years. Runners can choose to make the event even more gruelling by running further than the marathon distance in an ultra-marathon, or they could instead opt for a shorter 13.1 mile course: a half-marathon. Athletes can also complete a marathon as part of a triathlon, where they swim, cycle then run.

There are some less traditional marathons held around the world. The Big Five Marathon has a course that winds through the habitat of rhinos, buffalo, lions, elephants and leopards. There is also a marathon held in China where athletes run part of the course on top of the Great Wall of China.

Training for a marathon requires dedication. It can take months for an athlete to build up the fitness needed to run such a long distance. But whether a runner completes an ultra-marathon, a regular marathon, or races alongside lions and leopards, they will no doubt find it a rewarding experience.

The Marathon – Comprehension questions

Name _____ Date: _____

1. Look at the first paragraph.
Find and copy a word which means 'old'.

1 mark
2. What does the word *legend* tell you about the story of the Greek messenger?

1 mark
3. Where did the marathon get its name from?

1 mark
4. Where did the marathon at the 1908 Olympic Games start?

1 mark
5. According to the text, what are the **two** common reasons someone might want to complete a marathon?

2 marks
6. Look at the paragraph beginning *One of the world's...*
Find and copy a word meaning once a year.

1 mark
7. How can you tell that the London Marathon has become more popular over the years?

1 mark
8. Look at the paragraph beginning *There are some less traditional marathons...*
How do you think the 'Big Five Marathon' got its name?

2 marks

9. What is an *ultra-marathon*?

Tick **one** box

A run that is half the distance of a marathon.

A run that is longer than a marathon.

A run that is combined with a swim and a cycle.

A marathon that is completed in London.

1 mark

10. What makes the marathon held in China unique?

1 mark

11. Why does training for a marathon require *dedication*?

1 mark

12. Read each sentence and tick one box to show whether it is a **fact** or an **opinion**.

| Sentence | Fact | Opinion |
|---|------|---------|
| Chris Brasher and John Disley set up the London Marathon. | | |
| The London Marathon is famous. | | |
| The most spectacular marathon on the planet takes place in China. | | |
| People will find running a marathon rewarding. | | |

2 marks

13. Describe how the paragraphs are sequenced, explaining why the author has chosen to sequence them in this way:

2 marks