

Why Do Olympic Moments Make Us Cry?



Built from *Why We Cry at the Olympics* by Gawon Ryu, Psychology Editor

Grades 4–8 · About 45 minutes · ★ everyone · ★★ older readers

Name _____

Date _____

1. Before You Read

★ Have you ever felt very happy or very sad while watching a game, race, or show, even though you weren't in it? What happened?

★ When a team you like wins, do you say "we won" or "they won"? Why do you think you say it that way?

2. The Short Version

Read this first. Older readers: read the full article too.

During the Olympics, lots of people find themselves crying over sports they almost never watch, for athletes they have never met. Psychology editor Gawon Ryu wanted to know why. She found three layers.

The first layer is feeling that a win belongs to us. Psychologists call this **basking in reflected glory**. When a group we belong to wins, our mood and confidence go up, even though we did nothing. That is why fans say "we won." At the Olympics, the group is a whole country, so the feeling gets even bigger.

But people also cry for athletes from other countries. The second layer is the story. Before an event, TV shows a short video about the athlete's injuries, struggles, family, and years of 5 a.m. practices. Then we watch all that work come down to one two-minute race. Researchers call the warm, teary feeling this brings "kama muta." It also happens at weddings and reunions. Sometimes a fall moves us even more than a win, because it shows that working hard does not promise a happy ending.

The third layer is togetherness. Hundreds of millions of people watch the same moment at the same time. The name for that feeling of being part of one huge group is **collective effervescence**.

The Olympics is also a big business that sells these feelings. Gawon knows that. But she decides the tears are still honest, because what they respond to is real.

3. Word Bank

Word	What it means
identify	to feel that you belong to a group, so what happens to the group feels like it happens to you
montage	a short video made of many quick clips, used to tell a story fast
narrative	a story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end
devotion	caring about something so much that you give it lots of time and effort
dignity	acting with calm and self-respect, even when things go wrong

★ Use **devotion** in a sentence of your own.

4. Check Your Understanding

★ 1. Why do sports fans say "we won" even when they did not play? Answer in one sentence.

★ 2. What do researchers call the warm, teary feeling we get when we see deep connection or devotion?

○ reflected glory ○ kama muta ○ collective effervescence

★ 3. Before an athlete competes, TV often shows a short video about them. Name two things that video might show.

★ 4. Besides the Olympics, name two events the article says can bring on the same warm, teary feeling.

★★ 5. Gawon admits the Olympics is a business that sells feelings. Why does she still decide the tears are not fake? Use the article in your answer.

5. Gawon's Mind Map

Gawon takes a big moment, like millions of people crying at the Olympics, and breaks it into its psychological parts. She also writes down what the evidence shows, even when it surprises her. Map the three big ideas from the article, then connect each one to your own life.

Idea from the article	What it means, in your own words	A time I felt it
Basking in reflected glory		
Kama muta		
Collective effervescence		

★ One thing in the article that surprised me:

6. Think Deeper

★ Gawon writes about an athlete who falls but still waves to the crowd. She calls this "dignity without the prize." What do you think she means? Have you ever seen someone show it?

★★ The article says the TV videos about athletes are made on purpose to make viewers feel something. Gawon still says the tears are real. If you know a feeling was planned by someone else, is it still a true feeling? Explain.

7. Write Your Report

Write a short report answering this question: **Are the tears people cry at the Olympics real feelings?**

- **My answer:**
- **Reason 1 (from the article):**
- **Reason 2 (from the article):**
- **One thing the other side would say:**
- **My conclusion:**

For Teachers and Parents: Answer Key

Word bank sentence: Answers vary; check that the student uses devotion to mean caring about something enough to give it lots of time and effort.

1. They identify with the team, so its win feels partly like their own (psychologists call this basking in reflected glory).
2. Kama muta.
3. Any two: an injury, money (funding) struggles, a parent in the stands, years of 5 a.m. practices.
4. Any two: reunions, weddings, acts of sacrifice.
5. Gawon says that knowing how a feeling is made tells us very little about whether the feeling is true. The things underneath the tears are real: people showing devotion, high stakes, strangers we briefly get to know, and the whole world watching together.

Mind map (sample answers): Basking in reflected glory: feeling proud and happy when your group wins, as if you won too (e.g., your school team wins a game). Kama muta: a warm, teary feeling when you see people deeply connected or giving everything they have (e.g., a family reunion or a wedding). Collective effervescence: the electric feeling of being part of one huge group sharing a moment (e.g., a whole crowd cheering at once). Surprise: answers vary; possible answers include that falls can move people more than wins, that hormone levels can change after a team you support wins, or that knowing a feeling was planned does not make it fake.

Think deeper: Open answers. For the ★ question, strong answers explain that the athlete stays proud and kind even after losing what they worked for. For the ★★ question, strong answers take a side and use the article: Gawon argues that the way a feeling is produced does not decide whether it is true; a student who disagrees might say planned feelings can be used to sell things.

Report: Look for a clear answer, two reasons taken from the article, a fair statement of the other side (for example, that the Olympics is a business that sells these feelings), and a conclusion that matches the answer.