

Topic Page: [bullfighting](#)

Definition: **bullfighting** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

 [pronunciation](#)

(ca. 1753) : the action involved in a bullfight

Summary Article: **bullfighting**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

national sport and spectacle of Spain. Called the *corrida de toros* in Spanish, the bullfight takes place in a large outdoor arena known as the *plaza de toros*. The object is for one of the bullfighters (*toreros*)—the matador—to kill a wild bull, or *toro*, with a sword.

A modern bullfight consists of three stylized parts (*tercios*). When the bull enters the ring, toreros wave capes to prod it to charge; then the picadors administer *pic* (lance) thrusts, which tire the animal and cause him to lower his head; in the second part, the *banderilleros* come out and, while on the run, plant *banderillas* (short barbed sticks) on the withers of the bull; these often spur him into making livelier charges. In the final segment the matador—almost always a man, although some women have entered the sport in recent decades, amid controversy—holds the *muleta*, a small cloth cape, in one hand, and a sword in the other. Daring passes at the bull work to dominate the animal until it stands with feet square on the ground and head hung low; the matador must then approach the bull from the front and kill him by thrusting his sword between the shoulder blades and into the heart. A matador's performance requires great skill and courage, and successful matadors reap immense awards in money and adulation. Fighting bulls are bred and selected for spirit and strength.

The Minoans of Bronze Age Crete practiced bull leaping as part of religious ritual, and later Greeks and Romans also had rites that involved the slaughter of bulls. The Moors, who fought bulls from their horses and killed them with javelins, probably introduced the sport to Spain (c.11th cent.). Originally the central figure in the Spanish bullfight was the mounted torero; Francisco Romero is generally credited with being the first (c.1726) to fight on foot. Bullfighting is also popular in the Latin American countries of Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador, and in S France. The Portuguese practice a style of fighting from horseback in which the bull is not killed in the ring. Critics contend that bullfighting is an inhumane spectacle of animal torture; aficionados respond that it is a complex ritual central to Spanish culture. The Canary Islands outlawed bullfighting in 1991, and Catalonia did the same in 2010 (effective 2012), but Catalonia's ban was overturned by Spain's constitutional court in 2016.

See Bollain, A. et al., *Bulls and Bullfighting* (1970);

Hemingway, E. , *Death in the Afternoon* (1932, repr. 1971);

Schoenfeld, B. , *The Last Serious Thing: A Season at the Bullfights* (1992);

Kennedy, A. L. , *On Bullfighting* (2001).

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