

WANEK HORN-MILLER

Waneek Horn-Miller is a Mohawk Olympian in the sport of water polo. She is from Kahnawake Mohawk Territory where she lived with her parents and three sisters. Over time, she has gone on to excel in other careers within sports. She has coached the women's water polo team in Ottawa, broadcasted, been a motivational speaker, activist, and this summer she was a CBC host for the Olympic Games Paris 2024. Waneek is a role model when it comes to innovation, strength and using your power for good.

Waneek still remembers the first time she thought about being an Olympic athlete. "I remember watching a fellow Mohawk Olympian Alwyn Morris win gold in 1984. I was a kid back then and my mom made me sit down and watch that. It was a pivotal moment because I had never seen anybody like me that was the best in the world, or even best outside the community. He really blew that glass ceiling off my world and it was the first time I said I want to go to the Olympics, this is what I want to do."

Although this was the first time Waneek saw a fellow Indigenous person winning gold on TV, her mother raised Waneek and her three sisters to always strive for excellence in whatever they chose to do. "I am lucky because my mother is an Indigenous rights activist, she was all about showing me aspects of being Native that the world was not showing me. She started to fill my world up with stories about Alwyn Morris and Billy Mills, Sharon Firth and Shirly Firth-Larsson, Angela Chalmers. All these people who were Olympians and had excelled. That experience really made me believe that it was possible."

We can learn from Waneek the importance of innovation and using our own strengths and power to keep improving and living a life of excellence. She wants you to remember that excellence and achieving your goals doesn't happen overnight. "Real things like dreams and goals, they take years and you may work your whole life getting there, and you may not get it. You may be considered a failure because you missed the Olympics by half a second, but are you a failure? What did you learn along the way? Who did you become? And that's living a life of excellence."



Waneek is a powerful representation of Indigenous people within the sports world and she understands how important it is for everyone to be able to watch the Olympics and see themselves represented. “We need to start seeing sport as a nation building tool. We need sport now more than ever. I am really looking forward to the day when I look at the Olympic team and see it really represent the people I see walking down the streets.”

It is important to make sure diversity is everywhere. Some people have more responsibility than others to ensure a fair and diverse world. Waneek explains “If you use your privilege to help other people and give voices that aren’t there at the table, get there, then you’re using it as a superpower. Because in the end, diversity and embracing diversity is what will make this country stronger.”

Waneek reflected back on what the most meaningful moment was for her in her athletic career. “It was the opening ceremonies of the Pan Am Games in Winnipeg in 1999 and we were marching into the stadium and we were being escorted by fancy dancers and jingle dress dancers.” Then she looked up into the stands and saw all the regional chiefs from Manitoba sitting there. “It was like coming home. To be there, to be able to make them proud, then we went on and won gold.”

Waneek wants to keep sharing her message of strength and inspire you to keep making the world a better place. She has important advice for anyone reading this who wants to improve and make a positive change. “Think of it this way, what type of ancestor do you want to be? When your descendants look back in their lineage looking for someone that can inspire them, be that person. Be that person and make your story that is told to this descendant full of acts of courage, full of acts of love, fun of acts of selflessness and humanity. Be that great ancestor.”

Waneek has gone from being an athlete competing in the Olympics to many other careers within the sports world. She says, “You can be immersed in the sporting world and be very well known and never really have played a sport. Just being one of those people that’s passionate about it.” Even if you don’t enjoy playing sports, the sports world has a spot for everyone. Keep chasing your dreams because the world needs people like you in it! “Canada has the potential to be a first of its kind (it isn’t yet) where no matter what religion, race, identity, geographic location, or economic level, you can achieve your greatest potential, but it will take all of us to make that happen.”



LEARNING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING GOAL

Students will learn what innovation means and how it applies to sports. Students will learn about and research alternate careers in sports besides being an athlete (broadcaster, coach, journalist). Students will make personal connections between their own strengths, skills and interests and how it could possibly lead to a career in sports.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Social Studies, Phys. Ed, cross curricular Writing

MATERIALS

- Waneek Horn-Miller Athlete story (one per student, per group or displayed somewhere all students can see)
- Research materials for students to use. Preselected books or links to websites are recommended to help students with the process
- Student research graphic organizer below

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- There are many possible careers within sports. Using examples from the story or your own ideas, brainstorm 3 or more careers within sports besides being an athlete/ player.
- In the story, Waneek talks about how she has used her strength and power as an athlete and activist to keep getting better and living a life of excellence. Why do you think it's important to keep trying to get better at things, like a sport or a school subject? How can working on improving yourself help you achieve your goals and feel proud of your progress?
- Choose one of the sport careers you talked about in Question 1. What kinds of skills do you think you would need to be successful in that career? Now, think about your own strengths, skills and interests. Write down 3-5. Think to yourself what kind of career these skills would be important for.
- In the story it was mentioned that some people have more of a responsibility than others to ensure a fair and diverse world. Who do you think this might apply to? Can you think of an example of someone having more privilege over someone else? How might this affect someone's day to day life?



LESSON PLAN

- 1. CONNECT:** Write the word “innovation” on the board and ask students what they think it means. Lead a class discussion with examples from Waneeks story, other examples in sport or examples outside of sport (education, science etc.) Explain that innovation means continuing to create and make things better for the future. Innovation can look very different depending on what you are learning about, but it is important that we all are innovators in our own ways.
- 2. PROCESS:** Tell students they will be researching 1 chosen career field that is different from being an athlete or player. Some examples to get them started could be ex. Sports marketer, coach, broadcaster/ commentator, sports psychologist, or trainer. Tell students that they can choose any career they are interested in learning about. You can have students later present their findings in an informal discussion setting, show their understanding in a comic strip, video, powerpoint presentation or visual poster. An example research graphic organizer has been provided.
- 3. TRANSFORM:** To extend this activity, have students make connections between their research topic and their own skills and strengths. For example, if a student chooses a coach, some strengths that might relate to that career could be: good communication skills, caring and supportive.



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**WANEEK HORN-MILLER
LEARNING ACTIVITY**

GRADES 4-6

NAME: _____

I AM RESEARCHING: _____

I KNOW	I WANT TO KNOW	I LEARNED	SOURCES (BOOK, WEBSITE, ARTICLE)



WANEEK HORN-MILLER
EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITY

GRADES 4-6

NAME: _____

I AM RESEARCHING: _____

I ALREADY KNOW:

SPECIAL SKILLS YOU NEED FOR THIS CAREER:

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF SOMEONE WITH THIS CAREER:

THIS CAREER DEMONSTRATES MY PERSONAL STRENGTHS BECAUSE:

INTERESTING FACTS:

