



SCHOOL PROGRAM

ATHLETE STORIES

Clara Hughes —
Healthy Choices // Grade 6+

About Clara

BORN September 27, 1972

BIRTHPLACE Winnipeg, MB

SPORT Cycling – Road and Speed
Skating - Long Track

OLYMPIC GAMES London 2012,
Vancouver 2010, Turin 2006, Salt
Lake City 2002, Sydney 2000,
Atlanta 1996

FAVOURITE HOBBY Bird watching



Clara Hughes — Healthy Choices

Clara Hughes takes a deep, long, hungry breath. She has just won yet another Olympic medal, a bronze in the grueling 5000-metre speed skating race at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games. The cool air of the Richmond Olympic Oval fills her lungs. This is her farewell race and the patriotic Canadian crowd is going crazy. Clara is one of our most successful Winter and Summer Olympians. Skating her victory lap around the Richmond Olympic Oval, Clara smiles and is flooded with memories of all the decisions that have led to this moment.

“When I was younger I made a number of bad decisions. I smoked. I drank. I ran away from home a few times and I certainly didn’t try so hard in school. It’s amazing that I made it as an athlete.”

Then her life changed. She remembers sitting on her floor and watching speed skating legend Gaetan Boucher on the TV.

“I was 16. This looked so cool, gliding around the ice and going really fast. Somehow, I knew right away that I wanted to do that. My mother called the local club in Winnipeg and within a couple of days I started turning my life around.”

Clara started working out instead of hanging out. She started paying attention in school, becoming a straight-A student. She gave up the bad habits. Making good decisions isn’t always easy, but once she made the decision to turn things around she stuck with it, and grabbed the opportunities when they came. Even though speed skating was her first love, it was cycling where she first found success.

“I met a great coach, Mirek Mazur, who saw my potential as a cyclist. He pushed me even harder than I push myself. I decided to listen to him. He was tough but he was right and I started to get better and better.”

Clara went to the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta and won two bronze medals in road racing. But she still felt the call of her first love so after cycling again in the 2000 Olympic Games she decided to test herself as a winter Olympian. Her sport of choice was, of course, speed skating.

“That had been my dream since I first watched speed skating on TV. I had told my mother years before I was going to be an Olympic speed skater and I was determined to make it.”

Clara did more than just make it. She surprised everyone by winning a bronze medal in the 5000-metre race. She had only been training for a few months! Four years later, in Turin, she won the gold medal in that same event. But she always remembered her own childhood and, after her gold medal victory, Clara made headlines for an inspirational act of giving.

“The morning of my race I watched a documentary on the group ‘Right to Play’ and their work in Uganda.”

Right to Play is an organization that uses sport to help children in underdeveloped nations. They donate sporting equipment, for example, and send ambassadors such as Clara around the world to help kids learn about sport.

“The children lived with war, poverty and violence, yet they were so visibly happy when they were engaged in sport and play. I thought if these kids can do this, so can I during my Olympic race that same evening.”

Clara began tiring halfway through that race. Her legs ached, but she remembered those kids for inspiration.

“I had written ‘joy’ on my hand as a reminder of those shining eyes from Uganda that I saw via my TV. I looked at this word temporarily tattooed on my hand with a ball point pen as a reminder of what I was capable of.”

After winning, Clara felt she needed to say thanks to those children. With the world watching her gold medal press conference, Clara announced that she was donating \$10,000 to Right to Play.

“I wanted to give back to allow for more children of the world to know, quite simply, what it is like to be a kid and feel an ounce of the joy I experience as an athlete.”

That joy has carried through her life as an athlete and a person. She has been awarded one of Canada’s highest honours by being named as a Member of the Order of Canada. She was chosen as Canada’s flag bearer for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver and continues to raise awareness for charity, doing her best to help children. Clara grabs a Canadian flag and skates a final lap around the oval.

“Success has given me a voice and I tell people all the time that you just never know where your decisions may lead. Each and every one of us has a part in making the lives of those around us better just by our own actions.”



Clara Hughes — Healthy Choices



1. Clara admitted that she made some bad choices growing up. She turned her life around by making more positive choices that lead to her success. Working in small groups or with a friend, identify some of the choices that have helped Clara Hughes attain success.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Brainstorm more choices:



Clara Hughes — Healthy Choices



2. From your list, create a Public Service Announcement emphasizing the importance of making healthy choices (ex. not to smoke, being active every day, choosing homework over television). The Public Service Announcement may be a poster, pamphlet, slideshow, commercial or song displaying the importance of making healthy choices for your school. Work in pairs or small groups and present your Public Service Announcement to the class.

Brainstorm Box:

