

# LIAM GILL

Liam Gill is an Olympic halfpipe snowboarder. He is Dehcho Dene from the ŁÍÍDLI KŪ Ē First Nation in the Northwest Territories. Liam enjoys giving back to his community and teaching others how to snowboard. It is so important to Liam to share his talent with others because he knows from personal experience that snowboarding is a privilege not everyone has. When Liam started snowboarding, he worked hard to save enough money to travel for his sport. “I spent 4 months on the farm, living there and working long days. I remember I even worked 15 hours on my birthday just so I could go to my first International Training camp.”

Liam has dyslexia and a language processing disorder which can make school and classroom learning really difficult. He had to practice resilience to get through it. Snowboarding gave Liam the confidence to accept who he was. He used to wish that school came as easily for him as snowboarding - then, he would be the best student in the whole school! Snowboarding was an outlet that gave Liam a way to prove to himself that despite his struggles at school, he was good at something and he could be proud of himself.

Training in Liam’s sport, half pipe snowboarding, still came with many challenges. Half pipes are very rare to come by and there are only a handful of them in the world. Half pipe snowboarding hills are a U-shaped bowl that allows riders to move from one wall to the other by making jumps and tricks. Liam was lucky to have one 15 minutes from his house in Calgary, Alberta. Even with it so close by, Liam didn’t get to practice on it as much as he felt he needed. “I would only go on it a few times in the whole year because it would be closed for other people. I learned that my competitions were my only time to actually train in half pipe.” This didn’t hold Liam back from continuing to practice, and by the end of one of Liam’s competitions, he landed his first double after having just learned his first single that same trip.

After that Junior year, Liam was put on the National team. “It felt like every month, every training camp, every competition, every step forward it was getting closer.” Liam had originally hoped to make it to the Olympics by 2026, but he ended up reaching his goal a lot faster and competed in the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing!

Liam understands he grew up with privileges that snowboarders in remote communities don’t have. He was searching for a way to give back and give others similar opportunities.

## A STORY OF RESILIENCE



PHOTO BY LEAH HENNEL/COC



Many Indigenous communities, especially up North, are very remote which means they don't have the same resources as places that are more populated. This sadly means that not as many Indigenous people participate in sporting games like the Olympics.

Liam has spent a lot of time traveling to different Indigenous communities in the NWT. When he was there, he was so inspired by how passionate the kids were about snowboarding. Then, he got an idea on how he could help. Him and his friends and family worked hard and started "Liam and Friends". This is a special camp for children from up North, many of them Indigenous, to get the full snowboarding experience with Liam teaching them the skills and knowledge. They can then use that knowledge and bring it back to their communities and share it.

Being a representative for other Indigenous people and working directly with many communities has helped Liam connect further with his Indigenous heritage. Seeing the impact of his work reflected back in others created a new awareness in himself. Continuing to be a representation, an inspiration for others, and staying connected to his community is how Liam continues to connect with and be proud of his culture. "I am always out in nature. I've always been connected to nature through snowboarding and being involved in different communities has helped strengthen that bond."

Proudly representing his roots is more important than ever before. Liam was the only Indigenous male athlete from Canada at the Olympic Games he competed in. Liam didn't have anyone like him to look up to when he was starting the sport. But now, Liam is grateful to be that role model and pave the way for others. He is always trying to improve and further educate himself to make sure he continues to be a positive role model. The lack of representation of Indigenous peoples in sport is largely due to limited access to resources. Work needs to be done to address those barriers to increase participation.

Liam has important advice for others to lead to their own pathway to success. "Don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't be ashamed of your struggles." When Liam was at school, he found it difficult to be vulnerable and tell his teachers he needed help. Reflecting back, he wishes he had, but he learned a valuable lesson from his personal challenges. He now knows the importance of community. Having a sense of community, whether that's inside the classroom, at school, with family, friends or something else, relying on others is important and helps everyone be better. He wants others to know that resilience isn't about doing everything on your own, it's about having enough humility to see you need help and to ask for it. It's not your fault or bad to have difficulty with something. Don't let it get in the way of your dream.



# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

## LEARNING GOAL

The purpose of this lesson is for students to define and understand the concept of resilience. Students should make connections between how resilience plays a role in both Indigenous sports and everyday life. They should be able to identify and describe at least one traditional Indigenous sport and be able to explain the instructions on how to play.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Social- emotional learning, Physical and health education

## MATERIALS

- Liam Gill Athlete story (one per student or displayed somewhere all students can see)
- Books, videos, websites and articles preselected by the teacher on 4-5 different indigenous sports and games
- Any necessary sport equipment teams might need to lead the class in their game (optional)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Liam talks about having enough humility to recognize that you need help. The word humility means that you are humble and you know it is okay to not be the best at everything. Discuss a time where you showed or can show humility.
- Liam started Liam and Friends because he saw that there was a need in a community important to him and he knew what he could do to help. In what ways can young people like you give back to your community or help those in need? Brainstorm different ideas that you think would be effective and meaningful.
- Liam didn't have any Indigenous snowboarders to look up to when he was starting out in snowboarding and he was the only Indigenous male that competed at the 2022 Winter Olympics. Why do you think it's important for different types of people from various backgrounds and cultures to be represented in sports? How does it benefit both the athletes and the fans watching?



## CONNECT

After reading through Liam's athlete story, lead a 5-10 minute discussion about examples of resilience. Students can share what they think resilience means and if they have any personal experiences with it. Students should have the takeaway message that resilience means bouncing back from challenges and difficult situations and not giving up when things get tough.

Then, explain that many traditional Indigenous sports were created based out of real life necessity. Skills developed during games like lacrosse were often necessary for everyday survival like physical strength, agility, teamwork and endurance. Remind students that Indigenous sports have a long and significant history. Indigenous people were not always allowed to play their own sports and games but they have been preserved over time and are still played today.

## PROCESS

Divide the class into partners or small groups. You should have about 4 to 5 groups or partner groupings. Assign each group one traditional indigenous sport or game to research. Some examples include lacrosse, traditional dancing, hoop dancing, snow snake and hoop and pole games. Provide resources such as books, articles or websites that contain information about the chosen sports. It is recommended that you prepare these resources ahead of time so students can begin their research promptly. Encourage students to include information about the game's history, rules and the skills needed to play it. Allow for 20 minutes for teams to research and organize their information.

Have each group prepare a short 2-4 minute presentation to share with the class about their assigned sport. All the presentations should happen on the same day. You can split this lesson into two separate blocks so one day is spent on researching and preparing and then one day is spent on presenting.

## TRANSFORM

After each presentation, ask the class if they noticed any common themes in the sports they learned about.

Extend this lesson by having a few groups that are willing, guide the class through playing the sport or game they learned about. They can do this with the support of the teacher. This will help consolidate their learning about their Indigenous sport.



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