

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 helping his community and teaching others how to snowboard. He thinks it's very important to share his talent because he knows not everyone gets to experience different sports like snowboarding. When Liam first started, he had to work hard and save money to travel for his sport. He spent four months working on a farm. He even worked a long 15 hour day on his birthday just so he could go to his first International training camp.

Liam faced some challenges in school. He has dyslexia and a language processing disorder which can make learning in a classroom difficult. Liam had to be resilient to get through these obstacles. Resilience means that you don't give up when faced with a problem or a challenge. Snowboarding helped Liam build his confidence and accept himself for who he is. He used to wish that school could be as easy for him as snowboarding, so he could be the best student in the whole school! Snowboarding became his way of proving to himself that he was good at something and could be proud of himself.

Liam's sport, half-pipe snowboarding, comes with its own set of challenges. There are very few half pipes in the world. A half pipe hill looks like a U-shaped bowl that snowboarders use to do jumps and tricks. Liam was lucky because there was one only 15 minutes from his home in Calgary, Alberta. Even with that, he couldn't practice on it as much as he wanted. "I could only go a few times a year because it was often closed for other people. So, I learned that my competitions were my only chances to train in the half pipe." Despite these challenges, Liam continued to practice and during one competition, he successfully landed his first double flip after just learning his first single on the same trip. That's when he realized he had the potential to go far in this sport.

After that trip, Liam joined the National team. "It felt like I was getting closer with each month, each training camp and every competition." Liam said. He had originally hoped to go to the Olympics in 2026, but he reached his goal much faster. He competed in the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing!

Liam knows he grew up with opportunities that snowboarders in remote communities don't have. He wanted to find a way to help others get similar chances. Now that he has a bigger platform and he's seen how people connect with him, he wants to help Indigenous athletes overcome their challenges. Many Indigenous communities, especially in the north, are very remote.



PHOTO BY LEAH HENNEL/COC



This means they don't have access to the same resources as bigger places like cities. Sadly, this means not many Indigenous people have the chance to join big sporting events like the Olympics.

Liam spent a lot of time travelling to different communities in the Northwest Territories. When he visited, he saw how much kids loved snowboarding. He was amazed by how much they had improved in just a year between his visits. Then, he had an idea. Him and his family and friends worked hard and started "Liam and Friends." It is a special camp for kids from the North, many of them Indigenous. At this camp, Liam teaches them snowboarding skills. They can take these skills back to their communities and share them.

Being a role model for other Indigenous people and working closely with many communities helped Liam feel more connected to his Indigenous heritage. Seeing how his work helped others made him understand himself better. Liam keeps being a role model and inspiration for others. "I am always in nature. Snowboarding keeps me close to nature and being part of different communities helped strengthen that bond," Liam explained.

Being proud of where you come from is really important to Liam. He was the only Indigenous male athlete at the Olympics when he competed. When Liam was just starting in his sport, he didn't have anyone like him to look up to. But now, he's happy to be a role model for others like him and show them the way. He always tries to improve and learn more so he can continue to be a good role model.

Liam has some good advice for others who want to follow in his path. "Don't be scared to ask for help. Don't be ashamed of your struggles." When Liam was in school, he found it hard to tell his teachers when he needed help. Looking back, he wishes he had, but he learned something important from this. He knows how important it is now, to lean on others and be part of a group. Having resilience isn't about doing everything on your own, asking others for help when we need it is a good thing. Our challenges make us stronger so don't let it stop you from following your dreams.



LEARNING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING GOAL

The purpose of this lesson is for students to be able to identify and name at least two traditional Indigenous sports or games. They should also understand the importance of these games in Indigenous cultures and connect it to the understanding of the importance of Indigenous representation in sport. Students will also be able to participate in a version of an Indigenous game to develop team work and motor skills.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Social- emotional learning, Physical and health education

MATERIALS

- Pictures or videos depicting traditional Indigenous sports and games.
- Liam Gill Athlete story (one per student or displayed somewhere all students can see)
- Open space for physical activities
- Cones or chalk
- Ball or bean bag

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Liam talked about how important it is to ask for help when you need it. Who are some people in your life you know you can go to if you ever need help or support?
- Liam knows how important it is to give back to others. What are some ways we can give back to our community or make someone's day better? Come up with a list of kind actions we can do for others.
- Resilience means continuing to try even when faced with challenges and difficulties. Liam showed that he had resilience when he was growing up. Can you think of a time you had to face an obstacle and how you overcame it? If you didn't overcome the obstacle, what are ways you could show resilience and keep trying?



CONNECT

After reading the athlete story and discussion questions (optional), begin the lesson by gathering students in a circle. Lead a class discussion on how the story mentioned a lack of Indigenous representation in some sporting events. Explain that today we are learning about some traditional Indigenous sports and games. Show pictures or short videos of some of these games (ex. Lacrosse, hoop and pole games, traditional dance, peach stone, or snowsnake). Ask any students who would like to share what they already know about these sports or games. Explain that Indigenous people all over the world have unique games that have been played for generations that carry important cultural significance. Allow for 15- 20 minutes for the introduction.

PROCESS

Introduce the students to a basic version of a relay race inspired by Indigenous games such as toe jump relay and bear crawl relay . Please be aware of cultural appreciation vs. appropriation. If possible, have an Indigenous person visit the class to lead the game to allow for authentic learning. Remind students to always be culturally sensitive and respectful when learning about different cultures. The most important takeaways are that students are engaged in the game and are practicing teamwork and encouraging their teammates.

- Divide the class into small teams
- Set up markers (cones or chalk lines) in a zigzag pattern across the playing area
- Give each team a softball or beanbag
- In relay style, the first player from each team carries the ball or bean bag as they weave through the markers and back
- They pass the item to the next player and the relay continues until all team members have completed the course
- Emphasize the importance of teamwork and encouragement

TRANSFORM

Gather the students back together again in a circle. Have students or teams share how they felt while playing the game and how it felt to work as a team. Discuss this game and any similarities or differences they noticed between this game and games they are more familiar with. Emphasize that we are learning about Indigenous sports and games because it is so important to represent all different cultures in the realm of sports. It is also important to keep learning and be understanding and respectful of different cultures, traditions and games.



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