

# A Wheelchair is Not a Handicap

Olympians Lesson 1 | Suggested Grades: 4-7

Lesson Plan

## Objectives:

Students will....

- learn about Eugene’s career achievements
- complete a Venn Diagram comparing disabled to able bodied sports
- engage in a discussion regarding the disabled athlete overcoming barriers

## Curricula Links:

- Language Arts
- Fine Arts

## Materials:

- Pencil or pencil crayon
- Blank and Lined Paper
- Overhead of appendix 1.2

## The Big Idea

Eugene Reimer’s sporting achievements and tireless contribution to amateur athletics make him a great “inspiration” to athletes everywhere. Eugene proved that a wheelchair is not a handicap, but rather, an opportunity for athletic achievement. Through Eugene’s inspirational story, this lesson will try to dispel some of the myths surrounding disabled athletes.

## Opening Motivator (10 min)

1. Orally read to your students the athletic career highlights of the mystery athlete found on Appendix 1.1. After sharing the information with your students, instruct them to sketch what they think this athlete looks like. Ensure that you do not disclose the fact that this athlete has a disability and participated in the Paralympic games.
2. After students have finished sketching, have them place their drawings on their desks. Then ask your students to quickly and quietly, circulate around the room looking at the different interpretations of the “mystery” athlete.
3. Once students have finished viewing the different interpretations, ask them to return to their desks. Once seated, display your picture of Eugene Reimer throwing a javelin from his wheelchair to your students (see Appendix 1.2).
4. More than likely, your students will be surprised to discover that Eugene was a disabled athlete. Allow students to share their surprise and personal thoughts at this point and then share the following background information with your students:

*Following a childhood bout with polio, Eugene, a long time Abbotsford resident, was left with only minimal use of his legs. (Polio is a disease that can leave people with paralyzed limbs.) In the 1960’s, when wheelchair sports were in their infancy, Eugene took to sports with a passion. He excelled in a widevariety of games, including weightlifting, archery, swimming, basketball, volleyball, and track and field events. Eugene quickly became one of BC’s top all around athletes. From 1968 until his retirement from sports in 1980, Eugene amassed over 50 national and 22 international medals, 10 of which were Olympic medals. He participated and excelled in prestigious world events, such as the International Paralympics and the Pan Am Wheelchair Games. In 1972, Eugene set new world records at the Paralympic Games in Heidelberg, Germany, by taking gold medals in both discus and pentathlon and a silver medal for the 4x60 m.*

## Teaching Tip

A complete biography of this athlete is provided in appendix 1.3. You may wish to have your students read this information independently before starting the lab and classroom activities.

### Classroom Activity: Venn diagram and Discussion (60 min)

1. In written form or orally, ask students to respond to the following questions:
  - How did you draw Eugene before you knew he was a disabled athlete?
  - Now that you know that Eugene has a disability, has this changed your perception of him as an athlete? Explain your comments.
  - Often people with disabilities are perceived differently from able bodied individuals. People like Eugene have lived their lives trying to change this misconception. Eugene was and continues to be an inspiration to thousands of disabled and able-bodied individuals. He believes that a wheelchair is not a handicap, but rather an opportunity for athletic achievement. What do you think he means by this statement?
  - Do you think that Eugene saw his disability as a barrier, stopping him from achieving success? Why or why not?
2. Once students have been given a chance to respond to the above questions, inform them that they are going to complete a Venn diagram comparing the similarities and differences of an able - bodied and disabled athlete. This activity should once again highlight the fact that the only difference between the two athletes is the disability. Both athletes are as skilled, train as hard, and make the same level of commitment to their chosen sport.
3. After the large group discussion, emphasize the point that Eugene overcame his largest barrier in life. He could have viewed his wheelchair as an insurmountable barrier, but instead, he chose to overcome this obstacle, and achieve great things. In fact, Eugene might argue that the true barrier is people's pre-conceptions. He was inspired to change that and in doing so inspired others.
4. Ask the students to independently reflect on the following statements:
  - What great things do you want to achieve during your life? (E.g. What are your personal goals for the near future?)
  - What "barriers or obstacles" are stopping you from achieving your goal?
  - What steps are needed to help you overcome the barriers?

### Conclusion and Reflections (15 min)

Eugene had a personal motto for life: "*A wheelchair is not a handicap, but rather an opportunity for athletic achievement*". As a conclusion, have students write their own inspirational motto for their life. These messages could then be displayed around the classroom for other students to view. As an alternative, student's inspirational mottos could be assembled in a class yearbook.

### Extension Ideas

- If you are interested in exploring the concept of breaking barriers, click on <http://www.rickhansen.com/language/en-CA/What-We-Do/School-Program/Lesson-Plans.aspx>. The Rick Hansen website provides lessons for elementary and secondary schools; note that registration (free) is required before accessing the material.
- The Paralympic web site contains many learning activities that would provide excellent teaching extensions for this lesson.

## Web Links

### **[www.ala.ca](http://www.ala.ca)**

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a disability

### **<http://www.bcwheelchairsports.com/>**

BC Wheelchair Sports Association

### **[www.paralympic.ca](http://www.paralympic.ca)**

Canadian Paralympic Association

### **<http://www.rickhansen.com/language/en-CA/What-We-Do/School-Program/Lesson-Plans.aspx>**

Rick Hansen's Official Website and Educational Lesson Plans

# Appendices

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Appendix 1.1

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## Mystery Athlete's Athletic Achievements and Awards

- Lived in Abbotsford, B.C.
- Amassed over 50 National and 9 International Gold medals
- Excelled in a diverse selection of sports from weightlifting, archery, swimming, basketball, volleyball, and all track and field events.

1968 - Tel Aviv, Israel

- 2 Gold Medals
- 1 Silver Medal

1972 - Heidelberg, Germany

- 2 Gold Medals
- 1 Silver Medal

- 1972 Canadian Outstanding Male Athlete of the Year
- 1974 Awarded the Order of Canada for being an inspiring example to athletes
- 1994 The B.C. Sports Hall of Fame and Museum presented this athlete with the W.A.C. Bennett award in special recognition of this athlete's contributions to sport.
- 2002 Inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame
- 2003 Presented with the Paul Harris Fellow Award

# Appendices

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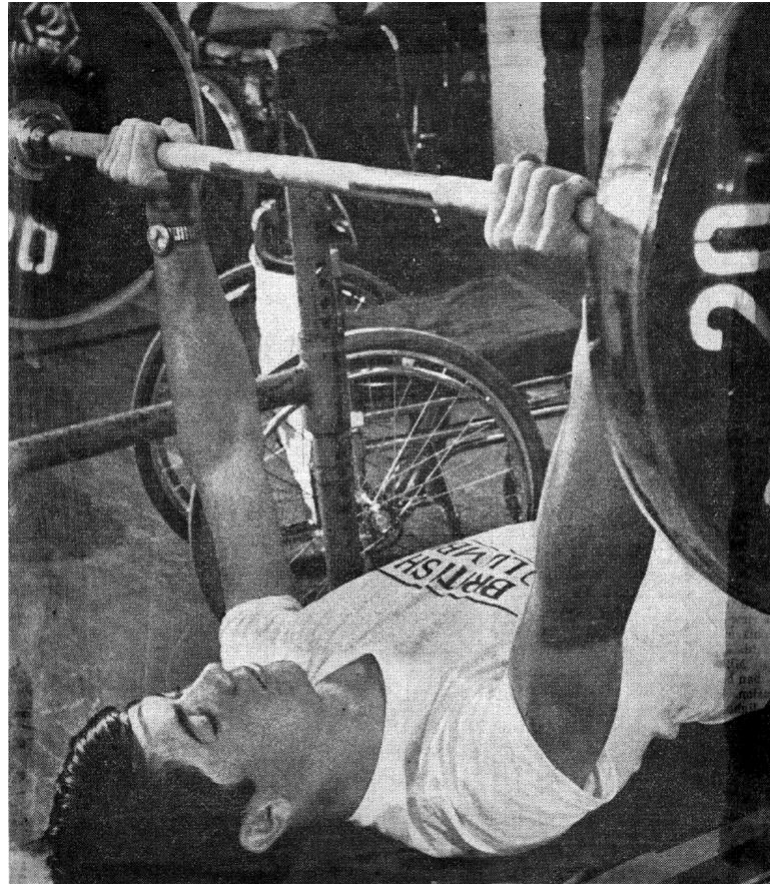
Appendix 1.2



# Appendices

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Appendix 1.3



“A wheelchair is not a handicap but rather an opportunity for athletic achievement”.

International wheelchair games are some of the most intensely competitive events in the world of sport. B.C. athlete Eugene Reimer dominated this field for over a decade. In the late 1960's, when wheelchair sports were in their infancy, Gene took up sport with a passion, for the first time in his life. With only minimal use of his legs since polio had left him a paraplegic (a person with paralyzed lower limbs) at an early age, he soon become one the province's top all round athletes in the 1970's. Not content with perfecting a single sport, Eugene excelled in a diverse selection: weightlifting, archery, swimming, basketball, volleyball, and all of the track and field events. He even gave acrobatics a shot!

From 1968 to his retirement from sports in 1980, Eugene brought home a prolific number of gold, silver, and bronze medals from such prestigious world events as the International Paralympics (held jointly with the Olympic Games every four years) and the Pan Am Wheelchair Games. In addition, he was a perennial winner at the B.C. wheelchair Games and the Canadian National Wheelchair Games.

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Appendix 1.3

During his twelve year athletic career he amassed over 50 national and 9 international gold medals. In 1972, Eugene was named Canada's "Outstanding Male Athlete of the Year". This was the first time such a level of recognition had been awarded to an athlete with a disability.

In 1974, Eugene was awarded the Order of Canada medal for his "inspiring example to the disabled" and for the first time in four years, the B.C. Sports Hall of Fame and Museum presented the W.A.C. Bennett Award in special recognition of his contribution. In 2002, Eugene was inducted in the Terry Fox Hall of Fame. Later that same year the Eugene Reimer Award was established. This award is presented annually and recognizes a British Columbian who makes an outstanding contribution in the field of sport, recreation, or physical education for persons with disabilities.

On May 2, 2002, Eugene was inducted into the B.C. Sports Hall of Fame. An inspiration to thousands of disabled individuals, Eugene Reimer has proven that a wheelchair is not a handicap, but rather an opportunity for athletic achievement.