

Rebuilding Broken Dreams

Olympians Lesson 2 | Suggested Grades: 4-7

Lesson Plan

Objectives:

- Students will.... learn about Karen Magnussen and her skating career
- understand the role courage plays in taking risks to reach for goals
- review the standard format of a letter and then write one or more
- reflect on strategies they could use to find the courage to overcome disappointments/setbacks in their own lives

Curricula Links:

- Education
- Language Arts
- Personal Planning

Materials:

- Lined paper

The Big Idea

Despite the crushing disappointment of finding out the day before the 1969 world championships that she couldn't compete, Karen Magnussen had the "courage" to comeback. Through her story, students will recognize the admirable qualities of a champion that make comebacks possible. They will then develop strategies to help them overcome future personal setbacks.

Opening Motivator (10 min)

1. Ask students to close their eyes, and to imagine that they are a well-known, competitive figure skater in the following situation:

It has been a long road from the day you first skated at the age of six, as a performer in the winter carnival at the Kerrisdale Arena in Vancouver. You have just turned 17, and you have trained hard for years. Your work schedule had you on the ice practicing every day for seven hours, 42 hours a week, 40 weeks a year - plus ballet and strength training off the ice. Now, finally, all your hard work has paid off and you are at the 1969 world ice-skating championships. It is days before the competition. Suddenly, you're sidelined by extreme pain in both legs.

A doctor is called in. His diagnosis: stress fractures in both legs. The muscles you have built up in your legs are too strong for your still-maturing bones. You have no choice but to withdraw from competition and to watch the World Championships from a wheelchair with both of your legs in casts.

2. After sharing this excerpt, ask students to think about what they would do in this situation. There is no question they would be feeling frustrated and disappointed. Without opening their eyes, ask students to vote by show of hands on whether they would give up and quit skating or whether they would continue and try to comeback.
3. Have students open their eyes. Share with them the results of the secret vote. Spend a few minutes discussing reasons for both possible choices. Then share Karen's choice with them by reading aloud the following:

In 1969, Karen proved to be true champion material. Many were inclined to write her career off, but she refused to become discouraged. "Even as I sat there, I was planning for next year's competition," she said later. "I never considered giving up; I always knew I'd be back." Her legs were encased in plaster for three months.

Soon after that she was training again. “People were shocked when I came back in 1970,” she told *Chatelaine Magazine* in 1974. “A lot of people underestimate me, how gutsy I am. I’ve got this strong drive and I don’t know who I got it from or why, but I have it. It’s inside me, and I can’t stop it. People kept saying, ‘She can’t face it anymore,’ and when I came out and skated, they couldn’t believe it. I was on, really on, and I went out there, and oh, did it feel good.”

Karen went on to win the Canadian ladies’ championship title for the next four years, and a silver medal at the 1972 Winter Olympics in Sapporo, Japan. She also won a silver medal at the 1972 world championships in Calgary, and then, finally, a gold medal at the 1973 world championships in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia.

Classroom Activity: Writing a Fan Letter (60 min)

1) To demonstrate to students the level of adoration and pride surrounding Karen’s accomplishments, write the following quotes on the board or make an overhead:

“You have shown that the pursuit of excellence is within the reach of everyone in Canada...It’s a wonderful honour that you have brought to Canada.”

- Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau

I came to skate for the special thank-you exhibition “...out of respect and friendship for Karen.”

- Figure Skater Toller Cranston

“Children wait in awe, expectant groups outside their schools.”

- Writer Eve Rockett

When Karen came home with the world title in 1973, she was met with an impressive series of welcoming ceremonies and exhibitions. She was honoured in many ways, from a government award fund established in her name, to an ice arena named after her. She came home to a dining room table piled high with letters and telegrams from around the world. The mail spilled over onto the sofa and the living room tables.

2) Ask students to imagine that one of the thousands of letters to Karen was from them. Inform students that they will now actually write that letter. Have them think about the following questions:

- Why do you think Karen received so much fan mail?
- What personal qualities did people admire about her?
- What do you admire most about her story?

3) Students will then use these ideas to write a fan letter to Karen. The letter should express their admiration of her courage to comeback after her big setback, as well as mention other qualities that made Karen such a well-liked champion. Students should also include any questions they have for Karen.

4) Review standard letter format with the students, if necessary.

1. In the Lab (40 min)

Direct students to the Karen Magnussen lesson icon. Here they will be able to view Karen's historical skate, as well as a photo gallery of her greatest moments. Students will also be able to listen to a recent personal interview with Karen.

Conclusion and Reflections (10 min)

Karen's courage to come back when faced with a crushing setback was immediate and unwavering. Remind students that they will also face disappointments throughout their lives. Ask them to think of some strategies they could use to gather the courage to go on, should they ever feel like quitting. Have students generate ideas in small groups or individually in their "Hero in You" journal.

Here are some ideas, if needed:

- Look to the people close to you for support.
- Do some positive self-talking and make sure you believe in yourself.
- Set goals that are realistic, and that fit with your life. Review goals often.
- Visualize yourself reaching the goal and plan out new steps to get there.
- Rehearse in your mind how you will behave and what you will do.
- Celebrate small successes along the way.

Extension Ideas

- The citizens of North Vancouver were such big fans of Karen that they named an ice arena after her. Plan an alternative environment fieldtrip for P.E. and take your students ice skating at the Karen Magnussen Arena.
- Skating is a judged sport, rather than a time sport. The current controversy about the fairness of this system dates back to the early years of skating. In 1973, the weighting of the three different areas in skating was redistributed to even it out. Some would argue that these changes allowed Karen to win the 73 title, as she was an excellent all-around skater. Have your students complete a PMI (Plus, Minus, Interesting) on the judging aspect of competitive figure skating.
- Karen's fans admired her incredible courage. Have students choose a current hero of theirs and identify the qualities that they admire in them. (It could be a singer, an author, an athlete, a parent, a teacher, a friend etc.) Students can write these individuals a letter and mail it.

Web Links

www.skatinginbc.com

Figure Skating BC