



BEIJING 2022

**CYNTHIA APPIAH**  
CANADIAN OLYMPIC SCHOOL PROGRAM AMBASSADOR

## EXPLORING PERSEVERANCE WITH CYNTHIA APPIAH



Photo by Bobsleigh Canada Skeleton

Ask any Olympian and they will tell you all about the difficult situations, injuries, disappointments, and frustrations they have endured. In spite of endless challenges on the road to excellence, they have found a way to keep going and not give up. This is perseverance.

Life can throw some difficult things our way, and we all need to have perseverance. This week we will learn about three Olympians and hear their stories of perseverance. Each will emphasize a different part of perseverance, and together it will inspire you to look at the challenges you face in a different way.

We have all experienced challenges over the past two years with COVID-19. Rules have restricted our movement, forced us to wear masks, limited our sports and activities, and cancelled some of the events we enjoy. For many Canadians, we have had to endure the loss of loved ones. This has been a difficult time. A time where perseverance has been even more important than normal. Today, we will start by exploring the value of perseverance with the help of our Canadian Olympic School Program Ambassador, Cynthia Appiah. She is an Olympian at bobsled.

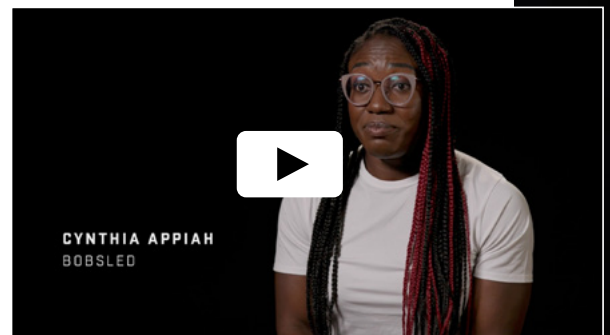
# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

# 1

**On a piece of paper, write down three things that describe what perseverance means to you. When done, share and discuss these with a partner. As a class, share and discuss these.**

**Show the Cynthia Appiah perseverance video to the class.**

Cynthia shares that all of us face challenges in life, and it's important to have support to share the good times and help us



# 2

**Journal about a challenge that you have faced over the last year.** Perhaps it was something you struggled to do, a disappointment, a loss, or an injury or sickness you had to overcome. Describe what it was like and how you are persevering through the challenge.





BEIJING 2022

**ELISABETH MAIER**  
SKELETON



**PERSEVERING IS  
FINDING SUPPORT IN  
TIMES OF LOSS**

Photo by David Jackson / COC

Just ask Elisabeth Maier, life isn't always easy. She competes in the skeleton, a sliding event where the athletes ride a small sled head-first down a steep frozen track. It is a dangerous sport where the smallest mistake can lead to serious injury.

Heading into the PyeongChang 2018 Olympics, she was in amazing shape. She had finished third in the World Cup standings the year before, and a medal performance was expected. She would do four runs over the next two days, and her combined time would hopefully win her a medal.

We all make mistakes, and hers was not lying in her sled as she prepared her sled the night before the race. Had she lay in it, she would have realized that adjustments still needed to be made so that her hands would be in the right position to steer the sled. By the time she realized this error, she was flying down the track in her first run, unable to control her sled. She had botched the run, and likely placed herself out of contention for a medal.

How could she have made such a disastrous mistake? She had little time to get over the disappointment and ready herself for her next run. Devastated, she turned to her supporters to help her get her thoughts right for the race.

*"One the Korean coaches and my strength and conditioning coach helped me get refocused after my horrible first run,"* Elisabeth recalls.

Their encouraging words helped her to her best time in the next run. But the damage had been done, and Elisabeth finished ninth. She was crushed.

Her fiancé, Ben Maier, was on the Austrian bobsleigh team, and met to console her from the pain of defeat. Her mother, who regularly traveled to her races, rallied to her side.

**“LOSS IS HARD, AND YOU MOURN. FIND SOMEONE TO TALK TO WHEN THOSE HEAVY THOUGHTS COME.”**

*"I was mad at the Olympics, and it took me seven or eight months to separate myself from the experience."*

Elisabeth was overcome by a deep sense of loss. It wasn't the first time with these feelings. A few years before, she had suddenly lost her cousin. When we lose a dream, a loved one, a favorite pet, or something that is deeply important to us, it is natural to go through periods of grief. We can feel all kinds of different emotions from sadness to anger, to frustration to depression. But over time, the pain of loss will fade. There is hope.

These experiences taught Elisabeth a lot about how to handle loss. She took some time for herself and was supported by Ben, her mom, and her friends.

*"Loss is going to happen sometimes,"* she explains. *"It's okay to admit you are not doing well. It's alright to be upset and to turn to others to help you figure out a way to deal with it."*

Elisabeth is back to racing and is training for Olympic competition in 2022. Her support team is by her side, ready to help her compete at her best. With a strong support group around her, will she climb the podium this time?



# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

## 1 READ. WRITE. DISCUSS.

As a class, discuss how loss affected Elisabeth, and how she eventually overcame it. How did she do it? What other things could she have done to cope with the sense of loss?

Imagine you had a friend that had a loss. They are dealing with it as best as they can but they need some support. In your writing journal, write a letter to comfort and encourage them.

## 2 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### SKELETON SCOOTER BOARD RACE TRAIN LIKE A SKELETON ATHLETE

The luge is timed to the 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of a second, and winners can be determined by the smallest of margins. The luger has to make the most of the start and gain as much momentum from pulling themselves past the start handles at the sides of the start ramp. This activity allows the students to practice a luge race start technique.



**PARTICIPANTS:** Pairs



**SPACE:** Gym



**EQUIPMENT:** Pairs to have a scooter boards, skipping rope, pylon and hockey or bike helmet.



**SETUP:** Attach the skipping rope to one of the scooter board handles. Set out the pylons to mark the exchange at the other end of the gym. Ideally, there are multiple scooter boards, helmets, and skipping ropes, enabling more than one pair to race at a time.

#### ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

- One student puts on the helmet and lies on the scooter board on their stomach. The other member of their team grabs the tow rope and stands in front of the scooter board.
- Remind the students to keep their chin up and eyes looking forward.
- On “go” the student is towed to the turn-around pylon at the far end of the gym.
- When they reach the pylon, the student who rode the scooter board takes off their helmet, and changes places with the towing student.

## S.T.E.M.

# 3

We have all felt stress before. When we feel stress, our body reacts by getting us ready for a “flight” or “fight” response. We get a rush of chemicals that prepares us for action.

Our brain processes emotions in an area called the amygdala. When we experience stress, the amygdala sends a distress signal to our brain’s control centre, the hypothalamus. It’s there that the brain communicates with the rest of our body. Hormones like adrenaline and cortisol are released to prepare us to either get away from the threat (flight) or face the threat (fight).

Adrenaline speeds up our heart rate to get more oxygen in our blood stream. This causes us to breathe more heavily, and we get more oxygen to our brains to make us alert. Cortisol increases the amount of sugars in our bloodstream to give our muscles the energy we will need, and to deliver nutrients to repair any damaged muscles.

These chemical reactions get us revved up for action in times of stress, but sometimes they are too much to handle. We need to slow things down and get control. Activities like yoga, meditation, or deep breathing can help us quiet our bodies down. Having someone to speak to when you are feeling stress also helps. They can listen, help us see beyond the immediate circumstances, and assist us in calming down.

## 4 OLYMPIC TRIVIA

What sport is faster, the luge or the skeleton?

**Answer:** Because the position of the luger is more aerodynamic and their sled has razor sharp blades like skates, they go faster. The fastest luger was clocked at a breakneck speed of 154 km/hour. The fastest skeleton racers hit speeds closer to 144 km/hour.





BEIJING 2022

MERYETA O'DINE  
SNOWBOARD



Photo by Meryeta O'Dine

PERSEVERANCE IS  
STAYING HOPEFUL

It was no surprise that Meryeta O'Dine would learn to ski. Her parents owned the local ski hill in Prince George, BC, and had her on skis when she was very young.

But deep down, she wanted to learn how to snowboard. It wasn't as popular as skiing, but in her heart, she knew she was a snowboarder.

One night, she snuck a snowboard out of the rental shop, and took to the hill to teach herself. Her parents noticed and signed her up for lessons.

*"I was so bad at it for the first year,"* remembers Meryeta. *"I hated it, but giving up wasn't an option."*

She would practice at night when there were fewer people on the hill. That way, no one would see her fall or make mistakes. She had lessons twice a week, and little by little, she improved. Within a few years, she won the Canada Winter Games at her parents' ski hill. The same year she also won the Nor-Am snowboard cross series title.

Racing on challenging courses at high speeds can be very dangerous. As a 16 year old, Meryeta was attending a training camp when she wiped out while snowboarding well over 60km/hour.

*"I was focused on what was going on beside me, and fell on my face,"* explains Meryeta. *"I stood up and felt weird. By the time I got to the top of the gondola, I felt that half of me wasn't there. Thoughts started and then just ended. I couldn't figure out how to get to the course, but it was right in front of me."*

She had a concussion, a type of traumatic brain injury. When you get a hard hit to the body or head, it can cause the brain to move violently within your skull. Concussions require time off to heal. This would be the first of seven concussions that Meryeta would suffer.



I STILL KNOW I AM ON THE RIGHT  
PATH. YOU HAVE TO HAVE FAITH IN  
YOUR PATH.



The most devastating of her concussions was at the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics. Days before her event, she was training on the challenging racecourse. The jumps were huge, and she had watched her hero wipe out. Feeling tense and stressed, her training run ended in disaster. The team doctors determined that she would have to withdraw from the competition for her own safety. She needed time to recover.

It is difficult to remain hopeful when things seem to be going wrong at the most important times. But keeping hope alive is an important part of perseverance.

As she reflected on her fall, she started to see a pattern. The more stressed she was, the more she made little mistakes. At high speeds, those mistakes were very dangerous. If she could control her stress, she could reduce the chance of another concussion.

This gave her some needed hope and confidence as she gets ready to compete at the 2022 Olympics. In spite of the concussions, Meryeta was able to pick herself up and keep going.

*"I make a plan, and keep telling myself that I can do it,"* she explains. That might just be what it takes to turn her hope into an Olympic medal in 2022.



# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

## 1 READ. WRITE. DISCUSS.

Hopeful people can reframe negative events to emphasize the positive. For example, Meryeta was able to learn from her concussions to better manage stress. Her accidents became a springboard to better performances through the lessons she learned. As a class, make a two list on the white board. In the left column, put down disappoint or discouraging things, and in the right column, list how those things could be reframed to be positive. A bad mark on a math test (left column), could be the nudge needed to get some tutoring (right column).

Journal how you can take a personal discouraging, frustrating, or disappointing event and reframe it to be hopeful and positive.

## 2 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### BALANCE CHALLENGES TRAIN LIKE A SNOWBOARDER

Snowboard success depends on many things, but balance is always key. The following challenges help develop balance while encouraging teamwork.



**PARTICIPANTS:** Various groupings depending on challenge



**SPACE:** Gymnasium or any other wide space

#### ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

- **BACK TO BACK CHALLENGE:** Students sit on the ground back to back with a partner. Partners work together to get up from a seated position.
- **SITTING STAND UP:** Students sit facing their partner with their feet next to their partners' feet. Partners grasp hands. On the count of three, they pull each other up to a standing position. Count to three and squat down sitting back into starting position.
- **BACK TO BACK STAND UP:** Students sit back to back with their partner and interlock arms. On the count of three, they stand up pushing through their legs and into partners back. Again, on the count of three, push against their partner to return to sitting position.
- **TEAM CIRCLE CHALLENGE:** Students stand in a circle facing in the same direction. Instruct the students to move closer together until it is possible for them to all sit down on the knees of the person behind them. If they sit down at the same speed, and balance one another, they can make a complete circle. Note that this may be a bit of an invasion of personal space for some students. Encourage those unwilling to participate to coach the class along to complete the challenge.

## S.T.E.M.

## 3

Sometimes, a bump, jolt, or blow to your head can cause your brain to move back and forth within your skull. This is called a concussion. When this happens, there are chemical changes in the brain and damage done to the brain cells. Although doctors will refer to concussions as a "mild" brain injury, they can be quite serious.

Concussion symptoms vary and include headache, nausea, dizziness, blurred or double vision, feeling hazy, sluggish or just not "right", confusion, and memory issues. Often people will later experience sensitivity to light or noise, irritability, disturbed sleep, trouble concentrating, depression, or changes in taste and smell. The symptoms usually last two to three weeks.

If you think that you might have a concussion, stop all activity immediately. It is important to get to a doctor. They will assess your condition and determine the severity of the injury. They will make a recovery plan that includes mental and physical rest. Gradually, you will be allowed to return to being active.

## 4 OLYMPIC TRIVIA

There will be five snowboard events at the 2022 Olympics including snowboard cross. Can you name the other four snowboard events that will be contested?

Answer: Giant slalom, big air, half-pipe, and slopestyle.





BEIJING 2022

**ALYSON CHARLES**  
SHORT TRACK SPEED SKATING



C  
A  
N

**PERSEVERANCE IS  
ADAPTING TO CHANGE**

Photo by Greg Kolz

Sitting in her living room as a child, Alyson Charles watched Turin 2006 Olympics. Her eyes were glued to the short track speed skating and her hero Kalyna Roberge. It was there that the dream of speed skating in the Olympics was born.

Consistent hard work paid off. Alyson started to make junior national teams, and was soon able to compete at World Cup competitions. She became a regular member of Canada's 3000m relay team, winning a bronze medal with the team at the 2019 World Championships. Everything was going so well, until COVID-19 hit.

Everyone has a COVID-19 story. It has caused the loss of people we love, upset our plans, closed our schools, and stopped the sports and activities that give us joy. Olympic athletes have also faced hardships as their competitions and plans have been constantly changed or cancelled.

Alyson was in her final preparations for the 2020 World Championships when she got the bad news. Her training rink was closed as Montreal was locked-down. Then she was told that the Worlds would be cancelled. The focus of her whole year was taken away.

*"I was shocked, and then I was mad," Alyson remembers. "I thought it was a two week thing, and then everything would get back to normal. I felt the emptiness you get when you don't get to put all your hard work on display."*

The next few months were difficult. She had to train alone at home. Her living room became a workout room with weights and a bike for training.

*"At first it was a nice change, but when we got our training plans from our coach, it was much harder. It was hard to motivate myself without a coach and teammates to cheer each other along."*



**GETTING CONTROL OVER THINGS THAT ARE WITHIN MY POWER HELPED DECREASE THE STRESS OF THE UNKNOWN.**



It seemed everything was constantly changing. There were new rules, rink closures, and having to train off ice. Alyson was starting to struggle and reached out to the team's mental performance coach for help. Together they focused on the things that they could control.

The solution was to focus on one training session at a time, and create short term goals that were challenging but achievable. She had a notebook to keep track, and added smiley faces or stickers when she reached the session's goal.

Everyone was so happy to get back on the ice for training, but then the second wave hit and again the rink was closed. Back to training in the living room. It was so frustrating, but it was out of Alyson's control.

Coming back to skating was filled with challenges. She doubted herself and worried that she would never return to her former speed. But little by little things got better. The more she focused on the things she could control, the less worry she felt and the faster she began to skate.

Alyson is one of Canada's brightest hopes for the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games. In spite of all the COVID-19 challenges, she learned to adapt and be successful.



# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

## 1 READ. WRITE. DISCUSS.

We tend to spend a lot of time worrying about things that never end up happening and over which we have no control. Alyson had to recognize that the COVID-19 rules, cancellations, and closures were beyond her control. She had to focus on what she could control. As a class, brainstorm the things that we can and can't control. For example, we can't control the weather, but we can control how we dress for the conditions. Discuss how focusing on the things outside our control can add stress to our lives.

Think of something that typically causes you to worry, stress, or become discouraged. Journal about what parts of this are in your control and what parts are outside your control. Write about three actions you can take over the things in your control that might reduce your stress.

## 2 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### OVAL RELAY TRAIN LIKE A SPEED SKATER

Short track speed skating races are individual events with the exception of the relay which is a team event. It's one of speed skating's most exciting events as there are 4 teams on the ice at once.



**PARTICIPANTS:** Two groups



**SPACE:** Gym or large space



**EQUIPMENT:** 4 pylons, 12 to 16 hula hoops and/or skipping ropes, 2 agility ladders/12 to 16 floor hockey sticks, and 1 whistle



- SETUP:**
- Set up 4 pylons to mark an inner square of the oval.
  - Place 6-8 hula hoops in a zig-zag pattern for each speed skating straightaway. Position them on opposite sides of the oval.
  - Place an agility ladder parallel to one another on the floor, for each speed skating "corner". Position them on opposite sides of the Mini Olympic Oval.

#### ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

- Decide how many laps are in the race. When the whistle blows to start the first athlete starts 'skating' in a clockwise direction all the way around the oval.
- When done, they tag the hand of next person in line to go.
- The two opposing teams start at either side of the oval, and try to catch the other team. This is called "pursuit"
- Groups are finished once they are all seated in a straight line at their starting position.
- The team that has closed the most on the other team is the winner.

## S.T.E.M.

## 3

Olympic athletes like Alyson workout to build the muscles they need to be champions. But how does your body actually build stronger muscles?

Your muscles contract and release based on the messages your brain sends through your nervous system. The contracting muscles are attached to your bones and enable you to do activities. The muscles are made up of bundles of fibers, just like a rope is made up of different fibers all acting together.

When you stress your body with a hard workout, you cause microscopic damage to your muscle fibers. This causes inflammation and an immune response to repair the damage. Your body uses protein to create new muscle strands (myofibrils). This process is called protein synthesis and mostly happens when you are asleep.

This is why Olympians will not only emphasize hard training, but also rest. They make sure that they get enough sleep and that they eat foods rich in protein, vitamins, and minerals.

## 4 OLYMPIC TRIVIA

Short track speed skating is contested on a track that fits within a hockey rink. How long is each lap?

Answer: Each lap measures 111.1 metres long.





BEIJING 2022

**MIKAËL KINGSBURY**  
CANADIAN OLYMPIC SCHOOL PROGRAM AMBASSADOR

## EXPLORING PERSEVERANCE WITH MIKAËL KINGSBURY



Photo by Vaughn Ridley / COC

FREESTYLE SKIING

Over the past four days, we have discussed perseverance. We have read and discussed stories of how Elisabeth, Meryeta, and Alyson persevered through challenging times in their lives. We heard how Elisabeth found the support she needed to keep going in spite of the loss of a dream and her brother. We read about Meryeta's multiple concussions and learned how she was still remaining hopeful. Alyson shared about how COVID-19 forced her to keep adapting. In all of these stories, our Olympians had to find a way to persevere.

# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

# 1

**As a class, discuss some of the things that you have learned about perseverance this week. What stood out from the three athlete stories you read?**

For many students, perseverance is what is needed every school day. Sometimes school is not easy, and some subjects can be really frustrating. Perseverance can be what you need to learn how to understand math or learn another language.

Mikaël Kingsbury is an Olympic gold medalist at freestyle skiing. He shares his story of persevering with his schoolwork.



**Show the Mikaël Kingsbury perseverance video to the class**

# 2

Take some time to think about what the Olympians shared this week about perseverance. There were lots of lessons to learn from how they overcame their challenges and persevered through adversity. Think of the one lesson that spoke to you the most.

**Design a Perseverance Poster that focuses on that lesson. The purpose of the poster is to inspire others to learn and adopt that lesson, so think of how you can choose persuasive words and use inspiring images.**

