

A STORY OF GRATITUDE

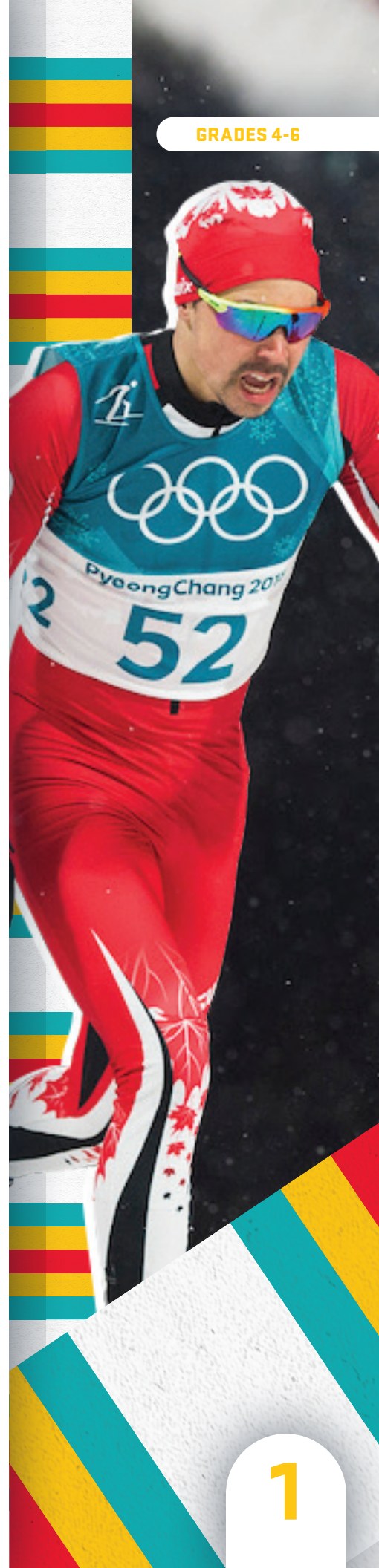
JESSE COCKNEY

Jesse Cockney was born in Yellowknife Northwest Territories on July 26th, 1989. It was only at the age of three years old that Jesse began cross country skiing. His father, Angus Cockney was a national champion in the sport as well. Jesse's father was a mentor to him not just in skiing, but also culturally.

It was through his father that he learned about traditional teachings of the Inuvialuit people. Everything Jesse learned about his culture, traditions and community gave Jesse a great appreciation and gratitude to where he was from. "Both my parents are really amazing artists and shared that love of art with my sister Marika and I." Jesse's father's art was mostly stone carvings. "So much of Inuit art is depicting life. Whether that's animal life or spirit tales of creation. That was my connection back to Inuit culture was just being immersed in art and learning culture through Dad's perspective."

At the age of seven, Jesse and his family moved from Yellowknife NWT to Canmore AB to better support Jesse's skiing. "What Canmore provided for me was a really great community to fall in love with skiing. It was very typical to care a lot about sport and to really focus and dedicate your time to try to get better."

PHOTO BY COC/DAVID JACKSON



Jesse's sport of cross-country skiing has helped him connect gratitude with the ability to get out on the land and ski. The concept of co-existence with the planet in Inuit culture and traditions has remained important to Jesse. "A big part of Inuit culture is recognizing that we are all one piece, maintaining the planet in its current state. With cross country skiing, it requires cold winters with lots of snow and consistent temperatures, coexistence is so important. For centuries, even with the harsh and cold temperatures year round, the people there were able to peacefully coexist in a harmonious system with the land, the water, the animals and nature" explains Jesse.

"We are moving away from the perspective of coexisting and there is more of a domination of the land going on now. We are all apart of the problem and there are things we can all do to work to maintain equality and harmony with the land."

Jesse knows that we need to take action now to face climate change. "If it gets too hot and we don't have consistent temperatures, that means that cross-country skiing wouldn't be able to take place."

In 2011, Jesse won three gold medals in the Canada Winter Games. Jesse's career then advanced to the Olympics. In 2014, Jesse competed in the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi Russia and again in 2018 in PyeongChang South Korea. Jesse is not only grateful for the planet, but he also carries gratitude with him to each race. "Having the opportunity to do what I love every single day is such a privilege. I felt really grateful in the periods I was actually not racing that well because at the end of the day, I'm still racing, and I still have this unbelievable opportunity to just focus on being my best. It is important to have moments of reflection and remembering it's what I love to do and be grateful I have the chance to do it."

When Jesse isn't skiing, he teaches students all over the country lessons about community, healthy living, goal setting and perseverance. "Spending the entire year with the same group of kids, you really get to see them take on challenges, struggle and learn something about themselves through it, so that was really fun." Jesse reflects on his time spent in schools. Jesse's advice to young students in school is "Know yourself, know what you love and to seek out others in that same direction of your goals. I am a big believer in teamwork. As much as someone can want something individually, I think it is so much more valuable to take on big goals and dreams together."



LEARNING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING GOAL

The purpose of this lesson is to have students think and learn critically and use their knowledge and guiding principles to help inform their thoughts and actions. By the end of the learning activity students should leave with concrete understanding and knowledge of Indigenous perspectives of our relationship with the planet.

MATERIALS

Jesse Cockney's athlete story, something to write on such as chart paper or a whiteboard where students can see the visual, research materials such as books and tablets.

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Students should have a base level understanding of how different Indigenous groups across Canada view our relationship with the land. Some current conservation examples to discuss prior to the lesson could be: DAPL, keystone pipeline, idle no more, salmon fishing in BC and non-conservation current events--melting ice caps, ozone layer degradation --the use of oil in our daily lives etc.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are the scientific and social implications of our relationship with the planet and how do they interact with each other?

Why do we have a personal responsibility to act in ways that protect our planet?

What kind of impact do we have as citizens to make a difference?

Why is it important to be aware of how your choices can have positive or negative impacts on people and our environment?



CONNECT

After reading Jesse Cockney's athlete story bring up other examples you may have covered previously regarding Indigenous activism regarding the planet.

On chart paper or on the whiteboard make a t-chart with any of the following titles (make it clear that the heading on the left relates to Indigenous perspectives and the heading on the right relates to other perspectives):

- Community ownership vs. Private ownership
- Seeing the land as sacred vs. Land for individual gain
- Recognizing that we belong to the land vs. Believing the land belongs to us
- Living in harmony and coexistence vs. Taking too much from the land

As a class, discuss examples and list them underneath the appropriate heading. Keep this visible throughout the lesson and save it so it can be referred back to.

PROCESS

Now students are ready to complete their own research project on Indigenous sustainability concepts.

Have students research independently or in small groups the following questions. Have them report their findings and make sure they are prepared to compare and contrast their findings in a clear way ex. Slideshow presentation, video, graphic organizer.

“How did different Indigenous communities use natural resources?”

“How did the use of resources differ based on different geographic locations?”

“What did the Europeans learn from various indigenous communities?”

“What were some consequences of European contact?”

“How did Europeans use natural resources?”

“How did Indigenous use of resources differ from European use of resources?”

TRANSFORM

Another way for students to demonstrate their learning instead of a research project is Students will have a choice to either write a letter to a branch of government of their choice, make a film, do a presentation or make a poster. They must explain what they are doing to protect mother earth, how they want the rest of the community to help and how the government can make a positive change and help with their environmental initiative.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Canadian Olympic School Program wishes to thank and acknowledge the contributions of the following people. Without their efforts, and creativity, this project would not have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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