

Note: The transactional processes suggested in CISCE curriculum are highlighted in grey.

### Learning Outcomes

- To understand that life is not all about winning the race
- To recognise the poet's intent to spread a message of universal brotherhood
- To note the shift in scene from general to specific
- To identify the poetic devices used

**Summary:** David Roth's 'Nine Gold Medals' is about nine athletes who won gold medals in a single event at the "Special Olympics". The special athletes came from different countries to run the hundred-yard dash event in the Special Olympics, which they had trained hard for. There was a lot of excitement as spectators filled the 'blocks', to cheer the athletes who were eagerly waiting for this moment. The race began with the sound of the gun, but one participant stumbled and fell. Interestingly, the race started only after all the contestants volunteered to help the one who fell, and holding hands they all completed the race with the spirit of togetherness. The banner, "Special Olympics" fluttering in the sky and the 'beaming' faces below, spoke volumes to the spectators who experienced an event worth more than words can express.

### Pre-reading

Discuss:

Allow students to discuss in groups of five and then share with the class.

1. Why do you think Olympic Games are special to athletes all over the world?
2. Who is your hero? Explain why you admire this person?

### READING

Note: You may give this information to the class before asking them to read the poem.

David Roth's poem "Nine Gold Medals" is set in the backdrop of a true incident in the Special Olympics held in Spokane, Washington in 1976. It was a track-and-field event where there were nine participants. One of the athletes fell down to the ground during the race. Then the other eight participants stopped in the middle of their race and returned to help the fallen one up on his feet. This incident inspired the poet to write this poem.

Students read to picturise, comprehend and analyse

Play the audio track and pause to explain the poem in parts. / Read the poem aloud.

Go through the vocabulary with students so that they will be able to picturise the scene clearly.

Ask students:

#### Stanza 1

What was the aim of the athletes who came to participate in the sprint running event? (To win the gold, silver or bronze medal) How did they get ready for this event? (Months of training)

## Stanza 2

Pick out words from the stanza which helps to visualise the scene. (Old field, excited spectators, final event) What is the shift in the description from the first stanza? (The first stanza describes the athletes, while the second depicts the venue of the event.)

## Stanza 3

Is there a shift in focus in this stanza? (Yes, from the gallery to the blocks) Which line builds up a sense of tension in the poem? (Poised for the sound of the gun...)

## Stanza 4

What are the two actions that occur in this stanza? (The first action is the race began, the second is the smallest of them stumbled, staggered and then fell down) In real life what does the boy represent? (The weaker sections of society)

## Stanza 5

How does the athlete who fell react after falling? (He had been waiting for this event and had worked hard for it. His fall took everything away from his eyes and filled him with utter frustration and anguish.) Why does the poetic persona directly appear in the last two lines of this stanza? (The poet is so impressed by what actually happens at the race that he wants to prove the authenticity by vouching that this is what he experienced on that particular day.)

## Stanza 6

What is the paradox of the race depicted in this stanza? (Interestingly, all other eight contestants, in their effort to help the one who had fallen, forgot the race and continued at a slow pace, keeping the spirit of universal brotherhood alive.) 'They came to the finish line holding hands still... What does this line express? (Compassion)

## Stanza 7

What major change has taken place in the race? (They did not run for the sake of winning the race, but walked together reminding others that compassion is an

important and essential virtue, in society.) In this stanza, what is the significance of the word 'special' in the banner, 'Special Olympics'? (It refers to the special athletes who made this a special moment in time.)

## Stanza 8

Describe the metaphor used in these lines. (The faces of the athletes holding hands and "beaming" like the sun when they reach the finish line) What was the response of the spectators? What does, ... 'nine beaming faces / Said more than these words ever will' mean? (Their gesture along with the victorious smile said much more than the words of the poem could convey)

## Literary appreciation

**Theme:** Life and sports is not all about winning; it is also about participating, sharing, contending and supplementing, and most of all about showing compassion.

**Structure:** Eight four-line stanzas, no specific rhyme scheme

## Poetic Devices

**Symbolism:** the gold, silver and bronze medals symbolise the top three positions in the event.

**Alliteration:** *stumbled and staggered, dashed in the dirt*

**Metaphor:** nine gold medals

**Imagery:** The poem is woven by vibrant images showing the flow of events from one to another, helping in the revealing of the plot of the poem. The episode begins with a description of the athletes' arrival, and "poised for the race". The images refer to movement and the real event presents the moral. The final stanza presents inspiring images which make the whole journey of the poem a rewarding adventure.

## Visual imagery:

- the depiction of the stadium
- the athletes getting ready in the track and running

- the fall of the youngest athlete in the middle of the race
- the banner of the “Special Olympics”

**Auditory imagery:** *Poised for the sound of the gun*, creates tension in the poem

### Post-reading

*Class discussion:*

1. In your opinion, what makes this an unusual race?

2. Do the contestants abide by the rules laid down for Olympic games? Support your answer.
3. Do you think the other runners were right to stop and help the one who had fallen? Why or why not?
4. Did the images in the poem help you understand the poem clearly? Explain.

## STUDENTS’ BOOK ANSWER KEY

### Nine Gold Medals

#### Comprehension

- A.**
1. A race in the Special Olympics is the setting of this poem.
  2. We know that the event was important as the athletes had come from all over the country and they had trained for many weeks and months. Many spectators had also turned up to watch the event and cheer on the athletes.
  3. After the race started, the smallest runner stumbled and staggered and fell down. He was very upset about it, and cried out in frustration and anguish since his fall meant that all his training and hopes would now come to nothing.
  4. When one of the runners fell down, the other eight runners stopped running, turned back and all of them went back to help the unfortunate boy get up. Then the nine runners joined hands and walked—not raced—to the finishing line together.
  5. The poem is called *Nine Gold Medals* because all nine runners reached the finishing line together, and although they had not run or won the race in the usual manner, they had done something (helped a fellow-runner instead of leaving him behind when he was down) which was even more praiseworthy and deserved a gold medal.
- B.**
1.
    - a. The athletes participating in the competition had spent weeks and months in training.
    - b. They had been training to run well. They would want to win the race.
    - c. They began the race as usual, but when one of the athletes fell down, the others stopped, turned back and helped him to get up. Then, instead of continuing the race, they walked to the finishing line all together, without worrying about winning.
  2. Yes, these lines do imply that what next occurred might be difficult to believe. That is because what occurred next was that when one of the boys fell down, the others stopped, turned back and went back to help him. None of them tried to ‘race’ again; all of them walked to the finishing line together. This is not something that happens often, because in a race, people are usually only bothered about getting ahead of others, whereas here, although all the athletes had trained and hoped to win,

they dismissed the idea of racing others and focussed on helping the person who needed help. It was a rare and beautiful sight.

3. a. There was a standing ovation because the spectators were amazed and delighted to see the athletes helping their fellow-runner. They clapped and clapped to show how much they appreciated and respected the gesture.
- b. There were nine beaming faces because all the athletes were as happy as if each of them had won the race. The one who had fallen down was happy because he had received help and had not been left behind. The others were happy because they had been able to help and support him, and that made them feel better than winning the race.
- c. *Suggested answer (accept any logical answer):* The applause and the smiles could express more than this poem because the people who applauded and the people who smiled were right there, at the spot, and they were the main actors or the direct viewers of what happened. So, they got a first-hand experience of the incident while this poem is only a description of it. Those people could have noticed more details of the event than can be narrated in the poem.

**C.** The banner said 'Special Olympics' because that was the name of the event. The race was a part of Special Olympics. But the event was special for other reasons too, because something rare and wonderful happened at the race. When one athlete fell down, the others—his competitors or rivals—gave up their effort to win the race in order to help him. This showed a kindness and selflessness which were extremely moving and inspiring. That gesture made the event very special.

### **Appreciating the Poem**

1. a. The first three stanzas describe the setting of the poem and the preparations behind the big event—the race. It describes who were involved in the event, where they had come from or what they had done and why.
  - b. The fourth and fifth stanzas describe the beginning of the race and an unfortunate accident that happened soon after the race began, where one of the athletes stumbled and fell down.
  - c. The last three stanzas describe what happened after one of the runners fell down—how the others helped him and how the race finally ended on a very happy note for everyone involved.
2. The third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth stanzas have rhyming lines (the second and fourth lines).
  3. b

*Sample answer:* This poem describes a race, but actually inspires us to be better human beings because it describes how some athletes in a race, after training hard and dreaming of winning, stopped running in the middle of the race just so that they could help someone who was also running the race but had fallen down. They did not worry about winning or losing—they knew that it was more important to help the other person who was down and upset, and they did just that. This was an extraordinary example of compassion and brotherhood, as opposed to competition and selfish ambition.

### **Vocabulary**

Stronger words: 1. resolve    2. explode    3. charge (ahead)    4. train    5. beam

## QUESTION BANK

### Nine Gold Medals

**A. Answer in brief.**

What was the aim of the athletes who came to participate in the sprint running event?

**Ans:** Each participant aimed to win the gold, silver or bronze medal.

**B. Answer in detail.**

What is the shift in the description from the first stanza?

**Ans:** In the first stanza the speaker describes the athletes, while the second depicts the venue of the event. The third shifts from the gallery to the blocks and the final moves to the field and the participants of the race.

**C. Choose the correct answer.**

*In real life what does the boy who stumbles and fall represent?*

- The weaker sections of society
- A typical athlete's victories and failures
- The constant failures in life

**Ans:** a

**D. Read the lines and answer the questions.**

*Then all the nine runners joined hands and continued*

*The hundred-yard dash now reduced to a walk*

*And a banner above that said 'Special Olympics'*

*Could not have been more on the mark.*

- What major change has taken place in the race?
- In this stanza, what is the significance of the word 'special' in the banner, 'Special Olympics'?
- What made this an unusual race?

**Ans:** a. The special athletes did not run for the sake of winning the race, but walked together reminding others that compassion is an important and essential virtue, in society.

b. It refers to the special athletes who made this a special moment in time.

c. All nine runners held their hands and ran together towards the finish line, surpassing the rules of a race and giving supreme importance to empathy and not the race in itself, though they had trained for a long time.

**E. Answer in brief. (Think and Answer)**

What is the theme of the poem?

**Ans:** Life and sports is not all about winning; it is also about participating, sharing, contending and supplementing, and most of all about showing compassion.