

# Character Action Media

## From Sun and Sand to Cold and Snow in Pursuit of Olympic Glory

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. If you choose 2 sessions you can use the discussion questions, journal writing and extended activities designated by session (A) and session (B). Instructors should feel free to use whichever activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before each session.

### Lesson Goals

Help students:

- appreciate the power of grit in defining a passion and pursuing that passion with perseverance
- see how in setting high goals for ourselves we can become a better version of ourselves
- value community by seeing how Olympic athletes often achieve greatness because of the inspiration, emotional and tangible support from others
- see how discipline is a powerful virtue and way of life that enables us to achieve our goals
- understand the power of social media in raising money for a good cause

### Primary Virtues

**Grit** – defining a passion and pursuing that passion with perseverance and discipline

**Discipline** - training that is expected to produce a specific benefit, moral or mental improvement

**Perseverance** - trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

### Secondary Virtues

**Hope**- confident expectation of the fulfillment of a goal or wish

**Humility** - modest opinion of one's own position; an honest appraisal of one's strengths and weaknesses; a lack of false pride; realizing that we don't have all of the answers and being open to learning from others

**Respect for Others** - showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of others; living by "the golden rule": do unto others as you would want done unto you

**Solidarity** - unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group

**Wisdom**- ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding in ways that are effective and good. The ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting

## Leader Introduction

The Winter Olympics are exciting to watch. Athletes stretch their talents and skills to the ultimate in speed skating, figure skating, skiing, snowboarding and more. Top athletes are usually from the United States, Canada and Europe where cold weather, and snow covered mountains provide ample opportunity for developing their expertise.

However, a small number of athletes do not come from countries where cold weather is a part of their climate. Pita Taufatofua is one of these athletes representing Tonga, a small island nation in the Southern Pacific Ocean that has never seen snow. Pita represented his country in the 2016 Summer Olympics in Taekwondo and amazingly decided that within 1 year he would learn a new sport, cross country skiing, so that he could represent his country in the Winter Olympics. Pita didn't have to compete against other athletes from his own country to represent Tonga, but he was required to complete an Olympic trial race within an exceptional time to even qualify for the Olympic Games. Let's watch what propelled Pita to participate in a sport he had never done, and in weather he had never experienced.

## Film Clips: Pita Taufatofua

Pita begins his journey:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKtaFMmZ\\_TY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKtaFMmZ_TY)

Now let's watch how Pita responded when he succeeded in qualifying for the 2018 Winter Olympics

<https://www.facebook.com/OlympicChannel/videos/1928649280782164/>

(This video is from Facebook and they may ask you to "set up an account". Please click on "not now" and you can access the video)

## Leader Summary

**Discussion Question Options** (*discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses if needed*)

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions (*included within the online lesson as a separate document*).

1. What motivated Pita's decision to participate in the Winter Olympics? ( Pita wanted to challenge himself. He said "That sounds impossible, that's where I need to be", and in another interview, "I decided to find the hardest sport possible because I needed a new challenge." - *Grit*. He also felt love for his country. He wanted his country to be better known to people around the world. He also was inspired by the Olympic spirit where diverse people came together to compete despite difficulties and obstacles. – *Solidarity and Perseverance*. He wants to inspire others to take on challenges in their lives.) (A)

2. What challenges confronted Pita as he began to pursue his dream of representing Tonga in the Winter Olympics? (Pita had to learn cross country skiing in less than a year. He fell countless times and suffered from the cold temperatures but he did not give up. Because his country doesn't have snow, he had to spend most of the year away from family, friends and his country. He failed to make the Olympic qualifying times in 7 of the 8 race trials but did not give up. – *All of the above illustrates Grit: passion and perseverance.* He did not have the financial means to spend the year learning and practicing so he turned to social media to ask for financial support. *Hope.*) (A)
3. During his 8th qualifying trial in Iceland, as far from Tonga as you can get in terms of climate and nearly as far as you can get in distance, Pita succeeded and now represents Tonga in the 2018 Winter Olympics. How did Pita feel, what emotions did he express? (He expressed gratitude, a sense of fulfillment and joy saying he was the “happiest ever”)

What did Pita also say about money in this part of the interview and what does his perspective teach us? (Pita said, “Financially I’m in the worst position ever, but the happiest ever.” Pita teaches us that money by itself won’t make us happy, but pursuing our passion and our dreams will, although it is important in life that we make enough money to provide for ourselves, and for our families.) (A)

4. Pita said, “There is nothing special about me other than I don’t quit. Anyone can be that person,” and also “Always show up, never give up.” What virtues does Pita exhibit in these statements? (*Humility* in being honest about not being especially gifted. *Grit* in his determination to pursue his passion and to persevere through the many obstacles. *Discipline* in training hard and consistently.) (A)

How does Pita’s story speak to you, what is his most important message for you? (One option – His story inspires us to dream, to have goals and to pursue them through whatever obstacles life presents.)

5. What do you think Pita’s success means to his country? (Pita’s country probably feels a sense of pride in his strength of character and his exceptional efforts so that their country is represented in the Winter Olympics.) (B)
6. Pita referred to God as “the big man upstairs” and as a source of strength and encouragement for his races. How do you think belief in God can help us to be our best?

Do you think you need to believe in God to have the strength to become your best and to achieve demanding goals? If not, how else can we find strength and inspiration? (B)

7. How does Pita live out the virtue of solidarity? (He is very grateful to the thousands of people around the world who supported him through his GoFundMe campaign. He expresses his gratitude for the many people on his support team, and even the athletes from other countries who traveled together and pooled their resources so that they could each make it to the qualifying events.) (B)
8. Let's assume Pita does not win a medal in cross-country skiing (Feb. 13 is the competition). Do you think his efforts were still worth it? (This is also a writing option below.) (B)

### Journal Writing Options

1. Write about a dream or a goal that similar to Pita's may be difficult to achieve. Describe your goal, the obstacles to achieving it and the virtues you want to focus on to achieve your goal. (A)
2. Let's assume Pita does not win a medal in cross-country skiing (Feb. 13 is the competition). Write about whether you think his efforts were still worth it. (B)

### Extended Activities Options

1. Encourage students to watch the Olympics, and to read about the Olympics, and to look for an athlete or team that has an inspiring story. Ask students at the end of the Olympics to share their favorite story with your group. Encourage each student presenting to include the virtues their chosen athlete or team lived out.
2. Given that this Olympics is during Black History Month, ask students to research black Olympians who have inspiring stories. Again ask students to share their favorite story with your group. Encourage each student presenting to include the virtues their chosen athlete lived out.

# Character Action Media

*Connecting Virtues to Our World*

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