

LITTLE
BIG
LESSONS

Rick Hansen
Foundation 
School Program

PRESENTED BY



FUTURE PROSPECTS

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WHAT IS A DIFFERENCE MAKER

RECOMMENDED FOR GRADES 9-12

RESEARCH

- Watch Rick Hansen's video called [The Journey](#)
- Read the biography of Rick Hansen provided below.

ANSWER

1. What qualities do Difference Makers demonstrate?
2. How has Rick Hansen made a difference in the world?
3. Name someone else who is a Difference Maker. Describe how they are making a difference.
4. Do you have a personal dream for making a difference in the lives of others? Who inspires you to be a Difference Maker?

BIOGRAPHY

The Early Years

Rick Hansen was born on August 26th, 1957, in Port Alberni. He grew up in Fort St. John, Abbotsford, and Williams Lake, BC. A natural athlete, he was very passionate about sports. From a young age, Rick enjoyed all kinds of sports, but he particularly loved basketball and volleyball.

Growing up in “beautiful British Columbia,” Rick was also very passionate about the breathtaking environment he called his home. A true outdoorsman and an avid fisherman, he could often be seen on lakes and waterways near his home, or on camping trips with his family.



One day, on June 27th, 1973, Rick and his friend Don Alder were returning home from a week-long fishing trip, riding in the back of a pickup truck. The truck went off the steep, winding road, and Rick and Don were thrown out of the back. Don escaped the crash relatively unscathed, but Rick sustained a spinal cord injury and was paralyzed from the waist down. He would never walk again.

After seven months of rehabilitation, Rick returned home from Vancouver. Slowly, he learned how to deal with his new life. With the encouragement of his friends, family, and particularly his volleyball coach, Rick remained involved in sports. He discovered a whole new world of sports, including wheelchair basketball. Setting new goals for himself, and charting a course for the future, Rick began to dream new dreams.

An Internationally Celebrated Athletic Career

In 1976, Rick enrolled at the University of British Columbia, and was the first person with a physical disability to graduate with a degree in Physical Education. During that time, Rick met Terry Fox and invited him to play wheelchair basketball. They were close friends, shared a passion for sports, and were committed to making a difference.

During his studies, Rick was recruited by coach and mentor, Stan Stronge, to be a part of the Vancouver Cablecars (a well-known wheelchair basketball team). Stan was a pioneer in Canadian wheelchair basketball and led the BC team to win six national championships between 1976 and 1982.

Between 1979 and 1984, Rick turned his focus to track, winning nineteen international wheelchair marathons, the world title 3 times, and nine gold medals at the 1982 Pan Am Games. He won two gold medals and one silver at the 1984 Paralympic Summer Games in Stoke Mandeville, and gold, silver, and bronze at the 1980 Paralympic Summer Games in Arnhem, Holland. He also competed for Canada in the 1984 Olympic Games in wheelchair track, as an exhibition sport, and was the first person to break the two-hour time record in a wheelchair marathon.

Rick has inspired athletes all over the world and continues to have a significant impact in sport. Be it his involvement as Chair of the Commission for the Inclusion of Athletes with Disabilities, or his tireless work to achieve full-medal status for Commonwealth Games athletes, Rick has always strived to better the circumstances for all athletes.

Rick's contributions to sport are not limited to his own participation as an athlete. A staunch advocate for healthy living, and firm believe in the power of sport, Rick has also coached many teams including wheelchair volleyball, wheelchair basketball, volleyball, basketball, and softball.

Making A Difference in the Lives of Others

While Rick is a celebrated international athlete, he is also committed to making a difference in the lives of others. Combining his passions, athletic ability, and vision, Rick embarked on a journey that would make history. On March 21st, 1985, he pushes his wheelchair out of Vancouver, BC, and began his now-legendary Man In Motion World Tour. Fueled by three big dreams—to raise awareness of the possibilities of people with disabilities, to make communities for accessible and inclusive, and to raise funds for spinal cord injury research—Rick completed the equivalent of two marathons every day. He wheeled through all kinds of terrain, in all kinds of weather, battling scorching deserts, treacherous winter roads, gale force winds, and floods. He sustained severe injuries in his shoulders, wrist, and hands, suffered carbon monoxide poisoning, bouts of flu, bladder infections, and, at the start of the tour, developed sores from an improper chair fit.

Despite all of these challenges, Rick and the team persevered. Through 34 countries, Rick and his team continued the journey that took them around the world. They wheeled across the United States, through Britain and Europe, the Middle East, New Zealand, Australia, and the Far East before returning to North America, wheeling from Miami to New York, then back to Canada.

The Man In Motion World Tour Returns Home

In August 1986, Rick and his team returned to Canadian soil (arriving in Cape Spear, Newfoundland), ready to begin the final leg of the journey home to Vancouver. On May 22, 1987—two years, two months, and two days after he set out on the Man In Motion World Tour—thousands of people lined the streets of Vancouver to welcome Rick and his team home. Having raised \$26 million dollars for spinal cord injury research, rehabilitation, and sport, the Tour had reached its goals. Rick's journey had become a catalyst for significant change in the way people with a disability were perceived, in the realization that public buildings, streets, and playgrounds could be more accessible, and in the recognition of the immense potential of the human spirit.

The End Was Just the Beginning

Upon completion of the Man In Motion World Tour, Rick Realized that his work had just begun. He established the Rick Hansen Foundation, and today remains committed to making communities more inclusive and accelerating progress towards a cure for spinal cord injuries. Under Rick's leadership, the Foundation has generated more than \$280 million dollars for a variety of programs and initiatives aimed at creating a truly inclusive world where healthy people can contribute in a significant way.

An Inspiration to Youth

Understanding the significance of the support and mentorship he has received in his life, Rick is committed to working with young people to support the development of social responsibility and life skills. He encourages them to be the best they can be, and to believe that anything is possible if they have the courage to try.

An Ongoing Passion for Beautiful BC and A Sustainable Environment

Rick's passions for fishing and the outdoors has not diminished, and he gets out on the water as much as possible. To ensure conservation of the Pacific salmon, Rick provided his leadership to establish the Pacific Salmon Endowment Fund Society which supports the conversation and sustainable use of Pacific salmon stock. He was also a founding member of the Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society, and organization working to conserve and protect Fraser River white sturgeon and their habitat.

Additional Achievements

Over the years, Rick has received a number of awards and commendations. He was named "Athlete of the Century" by BC Wheelchair Sports Association, "Canada's Disabled Athlete of the Year" in 1979 and 1982, and in 1983, shared the Lou Marsh Award with Wayne Gretzky, as Canada's Outstanding Athlete of the Year. Rick has been inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, the BC Sports Hall of Fame, and the University of British Columbia's Athletic Hall of Fame.

Rick has received the Companion of the Order of Canada and the Order of British Columbia. He initiated National Access Awareness Week in Canada, was inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame, is honorary chair for a number of provincial and advisory councils on disabilities and holds a number of honorary degrees from Canadian universities.

In 2010, Rick was honoured to be chosen as Co-Mayor of the Olympic Village for the Vancouver 2020 Olympic Winter Games. Rick also played a pivotal role in welcoming the world to Canada as final Torchbearer—bringing in the Olympic flame to the Opening Ceremony for the lighting of the cauldron. He was also an important player in the Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Winter Games, delivering a moving and inspiring address as part of the Opening Ceremony.

In Rick's words, his greatest achievement is his family. His wife Amanda first came into his life as his physiotherapist when he was a competitive athlete, and she remained his physiotherapist throughout the Main In Motion World Tour. Upon completing of the tour, Rick and Amanda married and they now live in Richmond with their three daughters, Emma, Alana, and Rebecca.

The 25th Anniversary of the Man In Motion World Tour showcased Canada as an emerging leader in the areas of accessibility, inclusion, and research for curing paralysis from spinal cord injury. It also provided a platform to honour everyday Canadians who are making a difference in their communities.

Now, as Rick and his team embark on the next 25 years, it is clear that their best work is still to come. Rick wants to continue his work and concentrate on protecting our environment, encouraging people to lead an active and healthy lifestyle, and on making communities more accessible and inclusive so that everyone can enjoy them. He can't do it alone—he needs your help to make a difference!

To learn more, please visit www.rickhansen.com.

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