



Paralympic Education Program



Rising Phoenix: A Study Guide – Health and Physical Education

Introduction

Rising Phoenix (2020), directed by Ian Bonhôte and Peter Ettehadgui, is a Netflix original documentary that tells the story of how the Paralympic Games have become the third biggest sporting competition in the world. This feature-length documentary follows nine elite athletes as they reflect on how the Paralympic Games have impacted a global understanding of disability, diversity, and excellence.

The documentary is rated M for moderate course language.

Resources

- A copy of the documentary, [Rising Phoenix](#), available on Netflix.
- Internet access for research and access to the official trailer.

Differentiation

- Teachers can modify the length and detail required in students' responses.
- Teachers might scaffold learning by modelling some activities first or completing as a class.
- Teachers can provide students with additional learning, including including knowledge of disability and Para-sports.



Australian Curriculum Links

Health and Physical Education

Year 9 and 10

- Evaluate factors that shape identities and critically analyse how individuals impact the identities of others (ACPPS089)
- Critically analyse and apply health information from a range of sources to health decisions and situations (ACPPS095)
- Plan, implement and critique strategies to enhance health, safety and wellbeing of their communities (ACPPS096)
- Critique behaviours and contextual factors that influence health and wellbeing of diverse communities (ACPPS098)
- Design, implement and evaluate personalised plans for improving or maintaining their own and others' physical activity and fitness levels (ACPMP102)
- Examine the role physical activity, outdoor recreation and sport play in the lives of Australians and investigate how this has changed over time (ACPMP104)





Teaching and Learning Activities

1

Before watching the documentary

- As a class, or in small groups discuss the following:
 - a) List any disabilities or medical conditions you know that can impact a person's participation in and access to sport.
 - b) List any sporting organisations or health campaigns you know of which specifically target people with a disability. This could be followed up with a research task where students research various state and national organisations and health campaigns to improve physical activity in people with a disability.
 - c) What can groups do to ensure people with a disability are included in sports?
- Using a think, pair, share strategy, ask students what they know about the Paralympic Games.
- Students might like to research Paraspport classification and how it works in different sports. A student guide with activities can be found here.
- Use the internet to research the Paralympic Games and the athletes featured in the documentary.

Ryley Batt and Ellie Cole are two Australian athletes who appear in the documentary. Students can find out more about these two athletes by reading their profile here. The International Paralympic Committee also has some information and videos on the history of the Paralympic Games.

- Watch the trailer and/or official lyric video to introduce the documentary.

2

First impressions

- Guide students through a visible thinking routine to explore their initial impressions or summary of the film. These routines would work well for this:
 - Colour, Symbol, Image
 - Headlines
 - Word, Phrase, Sentence
- As a class or in small groups, discuss whether students agree or disagree with the following statements about the film and why. This could also be done physically by placing agree/disagree signs on either side of the classroom and having students move to the side they align with.

Statements

“There is absolutely no doubt that this film will transform every single person who watches it. This is a film that will empower so many people around the world and further bring to life the vision of the Paralympic Movement’s founder Sir Ludwig Guttmann.” – **Andrew Parsons (IPC President)**

“People are going to start supporting Paralympics, people are going to start knowing what the Paralympics are, so it’s going to be a good platform for everyone in the Paralympics.” – **Ntando Mahlangu (South African Paralympian)**

““Rising Phoenix,” stacked with hero-worship, suffers from a lack of depth. Complicated topics, like the fraught relationship between the Paralympics and the Olympics, which take place in the same facilities but can receive uneven attention, are skimmed or skirted. And the highlighted athletes — to use the Avengers metaphor — appear far too much as Spiderman, rarely as Peter Parker.”

– **The New York Times**

Viewing questions

After watching the documentary once, teachers might like to show specific scenes again, or watch the whole film again, pausing as students answer the following questions:

- a) In the opening lines, what is the purpose of discussing superheros? How does this challenge your understanding of disability?
 - b) What were the positive impacts of the London 2012 Paralympic Games on the Paralympic Movement, disability sports and perceptions of people with a disability?
 - c) The documentary features nine athletes:
 - Bebe Vio (Italy)
 - Ellie Cole (Australia)
 - Jean-Baptiste Alaize (France)
 - Matt Stutzman (USA)
 - Jonnie Peacock (Great Britain)
 - Cui Zhe (China)
 - Ryley Batt (Australia)
 - Ntando Mahlangu (South Africa)
 - Tatyana McFadden (USA)
- For each of the following featured athletes,
- identify their sport.
 - describe their disability and how it was acquired.
 - summarise some of their main successes and challenges.
 - describe the role sport played in improving their life. Consider how it was used as rehabilitation for those athletes who acquired their disability or how it helped them come to accept their disability or even allowed them to access a better quality of life.
- d) As you watch the film, make a list of any adaptive equipment or strategies you see the athletes use to complete tasks and/or sports.
 - e) Jonnie Peacock discusses how for many years he was asked about his disability and then after London 2012 he started being asked about his sport first. Why is this important?
 - f) Who is Sir Ludwig Guttmann and how does he relate to the Paralympic Movement?
 - g) What were the Stoke Mandeville Games?
 - h) Why is sport so important in rehabilitation? Students might like to research the role sport has played in rehabilitation throughout history.
 - i) Watch the montage (starting at about 0:44:45) from the Stoke Mandeville Games to the Beijing 2008 Games. Describe how the Paralympic Games have changed over time. Consider spectatorship, participation numbers, technology and/or adaptive equipment, venues, media/sponsorship interest, name of the games.
 - j) How is disability perceived differently in various countries shown in the film?
 - k) Research the USA Fitness and Athletic Equity Law for Students with Disabilities (Tatyana's Law). What Australian policies and laws mandate the inclusion of people with a disability in sports?
 - l) Describe how the local government and public received and prepared for Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. How did this differ from the London 2012 Paralympic Games?
 - m) What have you learnt about the Paralympic Games from watching this documentary? Go back to your brainstorm, or Think, Pair, Share worksheet and add in what you have learnt.
 - n) What are some of the main messages about disability and sport in the documentary?



Further Discussion Questions

1. Ryley Batt, Australian Wheelchair Basketballer and one of the featured athletes in the documentary said: “There’s still a bit of a perception among people that ‘Oh, you’re a Paralympian. Good on you for having a go’”. What do you think he means by this and why do you think people have this perception? What can we do as a society to challenge this perception?
2. What is meant by the ‘objectification of disability’? Does this film objectify disability to inspire people without disabilities? Why or why not? How does the objectification of disability help or hinder elite Para-athletes?
3. Think about some of the language used in the film and the song featured in the end credits. You can listen to the official lyric video [here](#). Phrases such as “disabled person”, “persons with a disability”, “handicap”, “cripple” are used. Which words do you think are appropriate to use, and when, if ever? Why has the language of disability changed over time? Do you think that people with disabilities can develop a positive sense of identity by reclaiming some of these negative terms?
4. What are some unique issues the Paralympic Games face that the able-bodied sports and the Olympic Games might not face?

Some ideas:

- Less commercial sponsorship
 - Smaller audience/TV viewership
 - Access to expensive adaptive equipment
 - Misrepresentation of disability
 - Classification of athletes
 - Lack of understanding about the sports, athletes and classification
 - Smaller talent pool
5. What perspectives or who’s voices do you think are missing, or omitted, from this documentary? Why? Students might like to discuss why athletes with visible impairments were used rather than athletes with less visible impairments such as vision impairment or cerebral palsy.
 6. Research the meaning and history behind the Paralympic symbol. Students might like to discuss why the logo was changed in 1991 at the request of the International Olympic Committee.





Extension Activities

1

At school, students can participate in a range of Parasports. Teachers can find a resource which details how to teach Parasports in the mainstream classroom [here](#).

2

Pick a short physical activity. Some examples might include skipping, long jump, throwing and catching, kicking or throwing at a target, hula hooping or juggling. Now pick impairment type, for example, blindness or vision impairment, limb amputation, muscle weakness. Come up with a plan which details how you would teach and train an athlete with a specific disability to master this activity.

3

Think about sport in your own life. Select a community sporting group, or even a school sporting group and come up with a plan to make the group more accessible for athletes with a disability. How can the venue, training activities, and competition be adapted so all athletes are included? How can this be done in a way that maintains the integrity of the sport and competition?

