



9

NINE GOLD MEDALS

Sports is not only about winning medals. They are also about learning the values of cooperation, sharing, competing and complementing. In this poem 'Nine Gold Medals', the poet, David Roth has presented the idea of empathy and how human values are as important as the spirit of competition. The poem presents the situation of a race, where the contestants leave aside their desire to win the medal to help a smaller and weaker contestant. They all go hand-in-hand to the finishing line.



OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson you will be able to:

- state the central idea of the poem;
- state how the players displayed their sensitivity towards one another;
- pick words relevant to certain ideas presented in the poem;
- sum up the incident described in the poem;
- pick lines from the poem where a sound has been repeated;
- pick words from the poem that often go together in pairs;
- give the meanings of the metaphors used in the poem;
- use words that can be used as verbs and nouns in sentences of your own;
- explain the significance of the title of the poem, and
- enjoy reading poetry and say how it is different from prose.



9.1 LET US READ THE TEXT

Have you ever taken part in a sports event? Surely you can recall the excitement during such competitions. Do you remember the effort you had put in the preparations? Didn't you want to win the medal? This poem describes a very similar scene here. Read the poem aloud and answer the questions that follow.

NINE GOLD MEDALS

The athletes had come from all over the country
To run for the gold, for the silver and bronze
Many weeks and months of training
All coming down to these games.

The spectators gathered around the old field
To cheer on all the young women and men
The final event of the day was approaching
Excitement grew high to begin.

The blocks were all lined up for those who would use them
The hundred-yard dash and the race to be run
These were nine resolved athletes in back of the starting line
Poised for the sound of the gun.

The signal was given, the pistol exploded
And so did the runners all charging ahead
But the smallest among them, he stumbled and staggered
And fell to the asphalt instead.

He gave out a cry in frustration and anguish
His dreams and his efforts all dashed in the dirt
But as sure as I'm standing here telling this story
The same goes for what next occurred.

The eight other runners pulled up on their heels
The ones who had trained for so long to compete
One by one they all turned around and went back to help him
And brought the young boy to his feet.



Notes

spectators: (here) persons watching esp. an event or sports without taking part

block: the two starting blocks on the ground that runners push their feet against at the beginning of a race

resolved: determined

poised: ready

pistol: (here) a starting pistol used to signal the start of a race

stumbled: (here) hit his foot against something when he began to run and almost fell

staggered: lost balance

asphalt: black tarred road

anguish: pain and disappointment

dashed: destroyed



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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.

That's how the race ended, with nine gold medals
They came to the finish line holding hands still
And a standing ovation and nine beaming faces
Said more than these words ever will.

- David Roth



DO YOU KNOW



Special Olympics is an international organisation created to help people with intellectual disabilities develop self-confidence, social skills and a sense of personal accomplishment. Among their other activities, Special Olympics conducts the Special Olympics World Games every two years, alternating between Summer and Winter Games. Special Olympics offers children and adults with intellectual disabilities year-round training and competition in 30 Olympic-type summer and winter sports. These games are also held as national events in some countries.

Special Olympics International was founded by Mrs Eunice Shriver, sister of (late) President John F Kennedy of USA.

Special Olympics Bharat, the National Programme, based in Delhi, is accredited by Special Olympics International. It is recognised by the Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports as a National Sports Federation for development of sports for the mentally disabled.

standing ovation: (here) the spectators stood up from their seats

beaming: very happy



9.2 LET US UNDERSTAND THE TEXT

9.2.1 PART 1 (Stanzas 1 and 2)

The athletes had.....high to begin

Let us find out what happens in the poem. The brief explanation below would help you understand the poem better.

You must have heard the term ‘Olympics’. Well, Olympics are held once every four years. Athletes from all over the world train hard to participate in this event. Winning a medal in the Olympics is the ultimate goal of every athlete of the world. However, the setting or the scene of this poem is that of ‘Special Olympics’. Have you ever heard of the term ‘Special Olympics’? In these Olympics, differently-abled persons, who have some problem/s in a particular part of the body, participate in various sports events. The contestants put in a lot of preparation and practice. Everyone hopes to win a medal. The spectators are as excited as the contestants. They cheer and encourage the contestants. These two stanzas help to create the setting of the poem.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.1

1. Complete the statement using the correct alternative.
The event which is being described in the poem is the _____ event of the day.
a. first b. last c. second
2. Find words that are opposite in meaning to each other from stanza 2.
3. Answer the following questions in a sentence each.
 - a. What do the words ‘gold’, ‘silver’ and ‘bronze’ stand for in the poem?
 - b. Were the contestants well prepared for the event? Pick the line that illustrates this.
4. What efforts, other than training, are required to prepare oneself for a sports event? Hints are given in the picture below.





Notes



LET US DO 9.1

When a person does very well in a field of study, sports, art or work, he or she is given a prize. Mention the different kinds of things that are given away as prizes.

Do you think prizes are important? Why? Discuss with your friends. Write a brief report of your discussion (150 words).



9.2.2 PART 2 (Stanza 3, 4 and 5)

The blockswhat next occurred

Now let us read the above stanzas and find out what happens next.



Of all the events in Olympics, the hundred-metre race is the most prestigious. The athlete, who wins it, is remembered as the fastest man in the world. So, for Special Olympics mentioned in the poem this is the final event, hence the most prestigious. The hundred-yard race is about to begin. The athletes take position at the starting blocks. They begin to run immediately after the starting pistol is fired. However, one of them is unable to run and falls on the track. The action has begun and already one episode has taken place. Notice how eight

contestants are strong and run forward, while the ninth, who is the smallest, falls down. He cries out with the pain of disappointment. He has trained

hard but does not get the opportunity to show his talent. All his dreams of winning the medal are broken and destroyed. Let us see what happens next.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.2

1. Read the statements given below and write T for true or F for false.
 - a. The hundred-yard dash was a long jump event.
 - b. The athletes were a little nervous.
 - c. The athletes ran before the signal was given.
 - d. One of the athletes could not run.
2. The word ‘exploded’ is used for the firing of the pistol. What does the phrase ‘so did the runners’ in line 2 of stanza 4 mean?
3. How were the dreams of one of the contestants ‘dashed in the dirt’?
4. Notice how the words ‘stumbled and staggered’ in line 3 of stanza 4 go together. Find a similar pair of words in stanza 5.
5. Complete the following statement using the correct option from those given below.

The line ‘the same goes for what next occurred’ creates

 - a. understanding
 - b. confusion
 - c. suspense
6. Suppose you were the contestant who fell down at the beginning of the race. What would you have done ? Discuss with your friends and write in a few sentences.



LET US DO 9.2

1. Find out for which positions the bronze, silver and gold medals are awarded in the Olympics.

Name any two Indians who have participated in the Olympics.
2. Have you or anyone you know faced a major disappointment? How did you/he/she deal with it? Discuss using the following key questions:
 - What was the event?
 - What had happened?
 - How did I/he/she feel?





Notes

- What did I/he/she do?
- Was my/his/her behaviour appropriate?
- Could I/he/she have done something better in that situation?

9.2.3 PART 3 (Stanzas 6, 7 and 8)

The eight other..... words ever will.

Something unexpected happened at the beginning of the race. Now let us see how many contestants finally ran the race. The explanation below might be of help to you.

When the remaining eight contestants saw him fall, they, instead of continuing the race, came to the help of their fellow contestant. All the athletes had dreamt of winning the medal. However, they readily forgot their dream and came forward to help the boy to his feet. Then all the nine contestants walked hand-in-hand to the finish line. The audience was so moved by the exemplary behaviour of the contestants that it stood up and clapped. There were now nine winners, instead of one, and each was given a gold medal. All the contestants displayed empathy turning the Special Olympics into a really ‘special’ one. Have you ever heard the word *empathy*? Empathy is the capacity to understand another person’s experience from his point of view. Simply stated, empathy is the ability to ‘put oneself in another’s shoes’. That is exactly what the eight contestants had done. One look at the fallen contestant had forced them to think ‘what would I have felt if I had fallen?’ and they knew exactly what they had to do.

By awarding gold medals to all nine contestants, the authorities honoured their display of empathy, helpful nature and human values.





INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.3

1. Explain the following phrases in a sentence or two.
 - a. pulled up on their heels
 - b. brought the young boy to his feet
2. Explain in your own words the meaning of the line ‘the hundred-yard dash now reduced to a walk’.
3. How would the nine contestants have felt when they all reached the finish line together? Which words indicate this? Do you think they were happy because they had won the gold medal? Why?
4. How did the spectators react to this gesture of the eight contestants?



LET US DO 9.3

Your friend, Muniya has lost her English notes just before the examination. She is afraid that she will now fail the examination. She is not able to concentrate on studying and ends up crying every time she is reminded of her loss. What are the different ways in which you could help her?

Key words: Listening, empathising, boosting confidence, counselling, sharing

9.3 APPRECIATION

Alliteration

1. In a line in stanza 4, the consonant sound /s/ has been repeated in order to bring about a musical effect.

But the smallest among them, he stumbled and staggered.

This repetition of the same sound is called alliteration.

Here the sound /s/ has been repeated. Find another such line from stanza 5.
2. No specific rhyme scheme has been followed in the poem. Yet the poem has a rhythm of its own. Read it aloud to feel the rhythm. Here are a few examples.
 - a. And a banner above that said ‘Special Olympics’

Could not have been more on the mark.

(stanza 7)



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- b. And a standing ovation and nine beaming faces
Said more than these words ever will.

(stanza 8)

3. Poetry says a lot in a few words. Here too, the poet has used the technique of not expressing directly and encouraging the readers to infer meanings on their own.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

In order to enhance the quality of our life we need to develop empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and accept others who are different from us. It helps us to appreciate what the other person is going through and to offer emotional support at the time of need. Empathy works wonders when applied to relationships – our family, our friends or colleagues. It encourages positive behaviour towards people who are in need. Not only does empathy help us to resolve conflicts but it also enables us to find solutions to problems. In the process we end up making decisions to benefit us without hurting others. The poem also shows that empathetic behaviour is applauded by all.



TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- Complete the statements using the correct option from those given.
 - The poem describes a
 - school Sports Day with participants from different schools
 - national sports event for women
 - national sports event for the differently-abled
 - The contestants of the race received a standing ovation because
 - they are challenged in various ways and not used to sports
 - they thought it more important to help than to get a medal
 - they don't like competition and don't care about winning
- Who won the race and how? Explain in about 50 words.
- Do you think the title of the poem is justified? How?
- What is the central idea of the poem?
- Have you ever witnessed any event in 'Special Olympics' in real life or on television? Describe it briefly.

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6. Can you think of any other act of selflessness? Describe it.
7. What have you learnt from the poem?
8. Which is the turning point in the poem?



ANSWERS

9.2.1 PART 1

INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.1

1. b. The event which is being described in the poem is the **last** event of the day.
2. Old and young, men and women.
3. a. The words ‘gold’, ‘silver’ and ‘bronze’ stand for medals in the poem.
b. The phrase ‘many weeks and months of training’ tells us that the contestants were well prepared for the event.
4. One must try to eat healthy nutritious food, get enough exercise, have clean living conditions and get adequate rest.

9.2.2 PART 2

INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.2

1. a. False b. False c. False d. True
2. The phrase ‘so did the runners’ means that the runners ran forward immediately.
3. The dreams of one of the contestants were ‘dashed in the dirt’ when he fell on the black tarred road and could not take part in the race. This finished his chances of winning the race—something he had been looking forward to for a long time.
4. The pair of words is ‘frustration and anguish’ in line 1 of stanza 5.
5. The line ‘the same goes for what next occurred’ creates suspense.
6. Possible answers
 - try to stand up and continue the race
 - stand up and put in extra effort to make up for lost time
 - get up and leave the tracks thinking that the race is lost
 - wait for someone to come and help



Notes

**9.2.3 PART 3****INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.3**

1. a. The phrase ‘pulled up on their heels’ means that the other eight contestants stopped running.
b. The phrase ‘brought the young boy to his feet’ means that the other eight contestants helped the boy who had fallen down, to stand up on his feet.
2. The phrase ‘the hundred-yard dash now reduced to a walk’ describes the moment when the other eight contestants help their friend, who had fallen down, to stand up on his feet. Since the boy was unable to run, the others decide not to run either. All nine contestants walk hand-in-hand to the finish line. In other words, the contestants walk the distance of the hundred yards (which was to be run) at the speed of the contestant who had fallen down.
3. The contestants must have felt happy and united when they reached the finish line still ‘holding hands’. The words ‘nine beaming faces’ tell us how happy they were. The contestants get a ‘standing ovation’ which would have made them feel proud of what they had done.

The contestants were happy not simply because they had won the gold medal. They were proud of being a united group who stood by each other, understood each other’s problems and helped each other even at the cost of winning a gold medal. For this group of contestants it was more important to empathise with and help each other than to win an individual prize.

4. The spectators gave a ‘standing ovation’ to the contestants, which means they stood up and clapped and cheered for them. Each of the contestants was rewarded with a gold medal.

TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. (i) c. The poem describes a national sports event for the differently-abled.
(ii) b. The contestants of the race received a standing ovation because they thought it more important to help than to get a medal.
2. All the nine contestants won the race as they all reached the finish line together. One of them had fallen down at the start of the race. Instead of running to get their positions, they turned back and went to his help. Then they completed the race together.
They were given the gold medal because they showed the true spirit of sportsmanship by helping the smallest among them at the risk of losing the race.
3. Yes, ‘Nine Gold Medals’ is an appropriate title as all the nine contestants deserved the medal. The smallest one, for not giving up, and the others for being helpful and caring.

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4. The poet wants to convey that sharing and caring are as important as winning and achieving.
5. It is a sports programme for those who are differently-abled. Each one aims to participate and win in whatever he/she can do best.
6. Description of any experience of a person helping another without thinking of one's own interest.
7. There are moments in our life when we keep our own interests aside and help our friends who may be in a difficult situation. The value of cooperation is greater than the spirit of competition.
8. When the pistol was fired, one contestant fell down while the rest ran forward. Normally the race would finish with three of them getting the first, second and the third positions. But something else happened. All of them stopped and turned back to help their fellow-contestant. This was the turning point of the poem.



Notes