



## Kathleen(Katy) Sullivan

Katy Sullivan knows all about obstacles, the ups and the downs and the how to get arounds. She also knows about being different. You see, Katy was born without legs.

Katy's parents didn't make her lack of legs a big deal. They never compared her to anyone else or found her lacking. Instead, they had her in the swimming pool at an early age and enrolled her in gymnastics.

"I was raised in Alabama and spent my early years trying to be just like my siblings," admits Katy, "practicing three times a week with the local swim team." She also loved gymnastics and was quite good at the uneven bars thanks to her upper body strength.

"I never realized I was different," Katy explains. "I wasn't treated differently from my siblings or friends. I believe I didn't have problems with other kids thinking I was different because I was always honest, not ashamed of it."

Sometimes people stared. Anyone else might have become shy or withdrawn, but not Katy. Instead, she viewed the curiosity as an opportunity.

"If I noticed kids staring at me, I would go up to them and answer any questions they had. I would just tell them about it. I do that today, too. It's all about educating people," adds Katy.

She not only welcomed the attention, she took it to a whole new level when she chose to study acting at Webster University in St. Louis and pursue a career that would put her in front of thousands. Upon graduation, Katy Sullivan accepted an opportunity at the prestigious Goodman Theatre in Chicago, then worked at theaters throughout Chicago before deciding to relocate to Los Angeles.

Her performing career has taken her all over the country. She's worked on stage in Chicago, in movies in New York and on television series in Los Angeles (including *My*



An innovative project that provides themed activities and allows classrooms around the globe to connect and share learning.

## The Paralympics

### Background

“The Paralympics first started in 1948 when Ludwig Guttman organized a sports competition which involved World War 2 veterans that had spinal injuries. The Paralympic Games are a multi-sport event for athletes with physical, mental and sensorial disabilities. This includes mobility disabilities, amputees, visual disabilities and those with cerebral palsy.

The Paralympic Games are held every four years, following the Olympic Games, and are governed by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) - (The Paralympic Games are sometimes confused with the [Special Olympics](#), which are only for people with intellectual disabilities.)”

Information from Paralympic Games- <http://www.disabled-world.com/sports/paralympics/>

**Guiding Question:** In what ways are the Paralympics like the Olympics?

### Lesson Sequence

\*Teacher can print copies of the Paralympic athlete article for students, or show it whole group. As students read the article, have students write down questions they would like to ask Katy about the Paralympics.

\*Use the [SOS Snowball method](#) after students have read the article and written their questions. Now, it's time for a SNOWBALL FIGHT to share your questions with the class!!

### Activities

\*Use the S.O.S VENNy method <http://blog.discoveryeducation.com/blog/2013/01/03/s-o-s-get-venn-y-with-it/> while showing the picture of the Olympic schedule [http://sochi2014.blob.core.windows.net/storage/games/schedule\\_sochi\\_en.pdf](http://sochi2014.blob.core.windows.net/storage/games/schedule_sochi_en.pdf) and the Paralympic schedule [http://sochi2014.blob.core.windows.net/storage/games/paralymp\\_winter\\_en.pdf](http://sochi2014.blob.core.windows.net/storage/games/paralymp_winter_en.pdf) and create a Venn Diagram comparing the sports of each.

\*Review the virtues of the Olympics and the Paralympics. Students write about what Olympic values they have and create a [Wordle](#) or [Tagxedo](#).

### Want More?

<http://www.disabled-world.com/sports/paralympics/>

<http://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/warm-up-for-the-games/competition-theme-2>

[http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en\\_report\\_670.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_670.pdf)

<http://www.paralympic.org/the-ipc/about-us>

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/bi4l-theme1.pdf>

Special Olympics- [http://www.specialolympics.org/SlideShows/What\\_We\\_Do\\_Slideshow.aspx](http://www.specialolympics.org/SlideShows/What_We_Do_Slideshow.aspx)

*Name is Earl, Dirt and Nip and Tuck*). As a singer, she participated as a member of a group that sang in the opening ceremonies at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.

Watching the world's finest athletes file into Olympic stadium that day, Katy stood proudly on prosthetic legs. She had no clue that in just ten years, she'd be competing as an athlete on an international level, too. In 2004, after moving to Los Angeles for her acting career, she met Will Yule of Hanger Prosthetics. By 2006, a new chapter in her life was starting.

"Through the generous support of Hanger Prosthetics and Ossur, I received custom-made running legs built especially for my body," Katy shares. "The carbon graphite feet are very springy. It was difficult at first to get the feel for them, to physically get the hang



of it. If there had been a hopping event at track meets, I would have come in first place," she laughs.

Katy was determined. Six months later at a running clinic, everything seemed to come together. She took off running and hasn't stopped since. In fact, she's zoomed to the top of the mountain of paralympic runners, male and female, setting world records along the way, and ranks in the top 5 internationally-ranked paralympians.

Katy has broken a world record in the 200-meter distance and she is the

reigning United States national champion in the 100-meter, with a personal record of 17.68.

“In the world of bilateral double amputee runners, I am the fastest person in America today,” grins Katy.

When she’s not acting or running, Katy travels around the United States and speaks to amputee support groups, schools and corporations. A recent cover girl for *Mobilita*, the largest magazine in Europe for people living with disabilities, Katy is particularly passionate about being a role model to girls who are amputees.

“I meet new amputees and encourage them to get back to the quality of life they had before their amputation. I look them in the eye and say, ‘Okay. You lost a limb. You are still incredibly feminine and sexy!’” she exclaims and shares her motto: “If you believe in what you are doing and you want to do it, go for it, and don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t do it.”

According to Katy, it’s all a matter of perspective. “Part of being successful in life is embracing who you are. Today, a disability doesn’t have to hold you back. It can open doors,” enthuses Katy. “I want young girls with prosthetic legs and cosmetic feet to know that they can still be soft, that they’re not just made of metal and plaster. They can still be girly and paint their toenails, and wear flip-flops and skirts, backless shoes and heels. They’re still perceived as beautiful. If I can provide people with hope, hope is stronger than any medicine you can take.”