



The Mini Page

Betty Debnam, Founding Editor and Editor at Large



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Dancing on Ice

The Art of Figure Skating

Figure skating is an awesome mix of art and athletics. It is one of the favorite events at the Winter Olympics.



Ice skating in its many forms is fun for everyone. If you skate yourself, it is amazing to see the top skaters in the world performing. It is also cool to create your own skating

performances just for fun. When people ice-skate in special patterns, or **figures**, it is called **figure skating**.

With the 22nd Winter Olympic games coming up, The Mini Page talked with a choreographer for Olympic-level skaters, Lori Nichol, to find out more about the art of figure skating. A **choreographer** (KOR-ee-AH-gruh-fer) is someone who creates the mix of steps and moves for a dance or skating performance.

Ice dreams

Top skating performances start with a dream, Lori said. "You have to work hard to achieve that dream. I remember dreaming about myself on the ice and skating. If you love it like that, you chase the dream and work as hard as you need to achieve it."



photo by Jay Adef, courtesy U.S. Figure Skating

Gracie Gold performs in the 2013 Prudential U.S. Figure Skating Championships. She is expected to compete in the 2014 Olympics. Lori Nichol is one of her choreographers.

Working for the dream

Figure skaters are serious athletes. It takes years of hard work to become a top skater. The men are especially strong. "Can you imagine vaulting yourself into the air and rotating four times and then landing on a skinny little blade?" Lori said.

"The first time they land this, you should see the joy. After hundreds of falls, they finally achieve this. It's the best feeling."

Falling for skating

In competitions, skaters must perform a certain set of movements. They need to perfect all the required moves for their routines. Skaters train for three to six hours every day.

It is normal to fall in figure skating. When she was a little girl, a coach told Lori: "You aren't improving unless you're falling. When you try really hard, you're going to fall."

Besides the actual skating training, skaters also study strength training, yoga, ballet, music and sports psychology.



photo by Jay Adef, courtesy U.S. Figure Skating

Felicia Zhang and Nathan Bartholomay compete in the pairs short program at the 2013 Prudential U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Omaha, Neb.

Music Is the Key

Skating to the right music

Most of the time, choreographers choose the music for a performance. Lori, a music researcher and the skater listen to different styles of music for many hours until they find just the right fit for the skater.

In competitions, skaters are not allowed to use music with **lyrics** (LEAR-iks), or words. After the 2014 Olympics, this will change, and singles and pairs will be allowed to skate to music with lyrics. Ice dancers have been allowed to use music with words for years.

A lot of thought goes into choosing the correct music. For example, some skaters skate too fast when they get nervous. The choreographer might choose a piece with a slower **tempo**, or speed. When the beats are further apart, the skater can relax and complete the routine.

Other skaters slow down under pressure. They skate better with faster music.



Max Aaron competes in the 2013 Hilton Honors Skate America. Max is expected to be a 2014 Olympic contestant.

Special music

When choosing music, choreographers look at the skater's style, skills, body type and personality. For example, skating champion Michelle Kwan was 12 years old when she started working with Lori. The music needed to work for the young Michelle, but needed to be a good fit as she grew up, too.

Lori wanted music that let Michelle be both powerful and feminine and helped her tell a story through her skating. Lori and the music researcher thought Michelle would be a good fit for music they loved. (The mixture was based on "Salome" by Richard Strauss.)

About four years later, in 1996, Michelle's skills and personality had become a good match for that music. That year, she won the World Championship.



Michelle Kwan

Ready Resources



The Mini Page provides ideas for websites, books or other resources that will help you learn more about this week's topics.

On the Web:

- bit.ly/1czg2ri
- bit.ly/19fzAQH
- bit.ly/1DBWP8

At the library:

- "Figure Skating School: A Professionally Structured Course From Basic Steps to Advanced Techniques" by Peter Morrissey and James Young
- "Figure Skating" by Claire Throp



Figure Skating TRY 'N' FIND

Words that remind us of figure skating are hidden in the block below. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally. See if you can find: ART, BALLET, CHAMPIONSHIP, CHOREOGRAPHY, COMPETITION, DANCING, EXERCISE, FALL, FIGURE, FUN, ICE, JUMP, LAND, LYRICS, MUSIC, OLYMPICS, PRACTICE, RINK, ROTATE, SKATING, TEMPO.



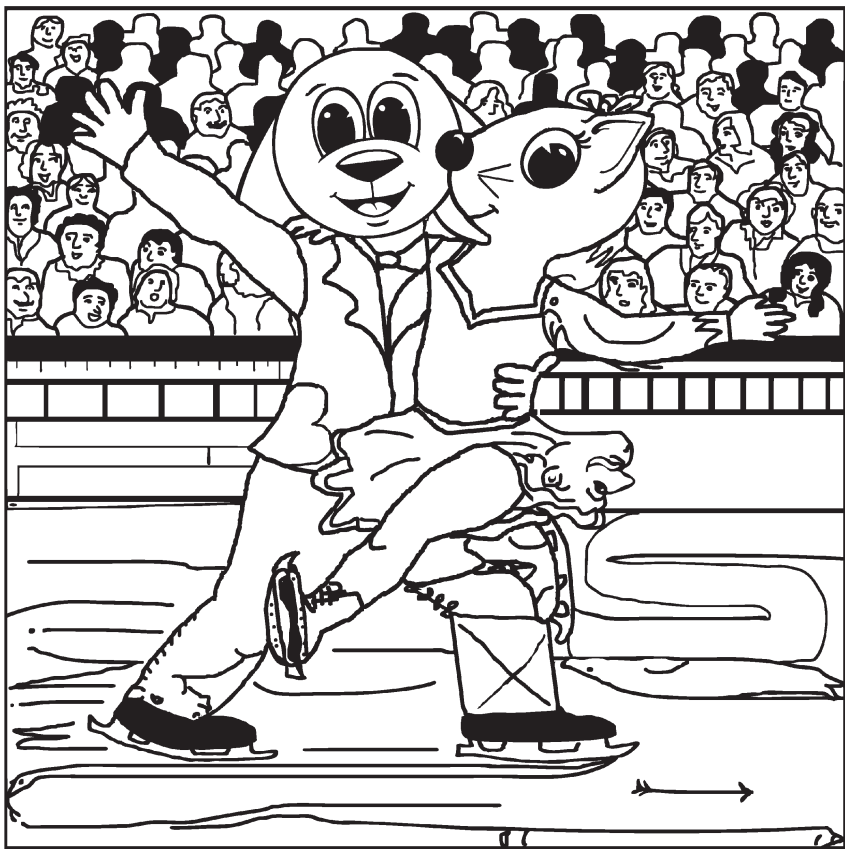
F	M	R	O	P	M	E	T	G	N	I	T	A	K	S
R	A	U	O	N	U	F	F	I	G	U	R	E	O	E
L	I	L	S	T	E	C	I	T	C	A	R	P	L	X
B	A	N	L	I	A	G	N	I	C	N	A	D	Y	E
A	I	N	K	K	C	T	S	C	I	R	Y	L	M	R
L	C	N	D	T	R	A	E	K	P	M	U	J	P	C
L	E	N	O	I	T	I	T	E	P	M	O	C	I	I
E	P	I	H	S	N	O	I	P	M	A	H	C	C	S
T	Y	H	P	A	R	G	O	E	R	O	H	C	S	E

Mini Spy . . .



Mini Spy and Basset Brown are participating in an ice skating contest. See if you can find:

- | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| • pencil | • number 3 | • hot dog | • seal |
| • letter T | • ruler | • snake | • word MINI |
| • bird • kite | • letter S | • ladder | • needle |
| • heart | • funny face | • horse | • arrow |



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Rookie Cookie's Recipe Lemon Pudding Cake

You'll need:

- 1 (15.25-ounce) box yellow cake mix
- 1/2 cup chocolate chip morsels
- 2 cups low-fat milk
- 1 1/4 cups cold water
- 2 (3.4-ounce) boxes instant lemon pudding mix



What to do:

1. Follow directions for cake mix as instructed.
2. Stir chocolate chip morsels into cake batter; pour into a greased 13-by-9-inch baking pan.
3. In a separate bowl, add milk and water.
4. Stir in lemon pudding mix; beat with a whisk for 2 minutes.
5. Pour lemon pudding mixture on top of cake batter; do not mix.
6. Bake in a pre-heated 350-degree oven for 55 minutes. Makes 8 to 10 servings.

You will need an adult's help with this recipe.

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Meet Lori Nichol



photo by Jay Adeff, courtesy of U.S. Figure Skating

Lori Nichol is a top figure skating choreographer. She has developed programs for eight Olympic medalists and 30 World Championship medalists.

She lives in Toronto, Canada, where she works with skaters to develop their programs. She also travels to Europe and Asia, working with skaters during competitions and shows.

She began skating when she was a little girl and competed until she was 19. She also took a lot of ballet and dance classes.

She performed in a professional skating show for several years, and then began coaching and choreographing performances for other skaters. She began focusing solely on choreography when her kids were in school.

Although she no longer skates competitively, she still loves it. "I'm 50, and I can't wait to get to the rink and skate," she said.

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Goldie Goodsport's Report

from The Mini Page © 2014 Universal Uclick

Supersport: Ashley Wagner



Height: 5-2 **Birthdate:** 5-16-91 **Hometown:** Alexandria, Va.

The music starts, and Ashley Wagner glides gracefully into her routine. Then she zigs, zags, jumps and spins like a human top in a dazzling demonstration of skill and balance.

As the Winter Olympics in Sochi draw near, Wagner is a U.S. women's figure skating star to watch. She has won two U.S. national championships (2012 and 2013), a Four Continent title (2012), and currently holds a No. 3 world ranking.

Growing up in a military family, Wagner moved multiple times. But she found a permanent home on ice, where she began figure skating before starting to school.

Fans can follow Wagner online (figureskatersonline.com/ashleywagner). And they can watch her jump and spin in Sochi — and maybe glide to the medal stand.



MIGHTY FUNNY'S Mini Jokes

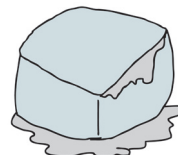
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All the following jokes have something in common. Can you guess the common theme or category?



Sally: What is the hardest thing about speed skating?

Steven: The ice!



Stanley: What is another name for ice?

Samantha: Skid stuff!



Stewart: Why is it a bad idea to tell jokes while ice-skating?

Shelly: You might make the ice crack up!



Having Beautiful Fun

Music of the world

People from different cultures see beauty in different ways. Olympic judges are from all over the world.

A Japanese judge has been raised to see what's beautiful in different ways than a Russian, American or Canadian judge, for example. It is important that judges learn to appreciate what is beautiful in different styles.

Skaters need to master the dance forms of different music. For instance, a Japanese dance style is much different than a Spanish flamenco dance.

If a skater has a new vision for a familiar piece of music, he or she has to have the skills to show that vision to the judges and audience.



photo by Paul Harvath, courtesy U.S. Figure Skating

Evan Lysacek competes in his free skate at the 2010 U.S. Championships. Because of an injury, he will not compete in Sochi.



photo by Jay Adef, courtesy U.S. Figure Skating

Lynn Kriengkrairut and Logan Giulietti-Schmitt compete in the ice dancing competition in the 2013 Prudential U.S. Figure Skating Championships.

Join in the fun

“Skating is great exercise and tons of fun,” Lori said. “It can be fun to put on a piece of music and interpret it.” When Lori was young, her mom bought a record album with 100 classical hits. Lori would take it to the rink and skate to it even though she didn't know how to do the movements.

“I was living in the dance and creating the movement. It is about jumping high and spinning and moving the body in different ways. It can be so much fun with friends to practice with.”

Preparing to perform

When creating art on ice, skaters need to be open to trying movements that might not be comfortable. “You have to play with new ideas about what the body can do and what would be great with music,” Lori said.

When they're learning a new program, most skaters feel freer dancing in private, Lori said. Once they've learned the choreography, however, “skaters can't wait to get out there and perform in front of the world.

“It is the most beautiful, fantastical feeling once you master it,” Lori said. Once you've conquered the program for the first time, “you want more and more and more.”



photo by Jay Adef, courtesy U.S. Figure Skating

Haven Denney and Brandon Frazier skate in the pairs competition in the 2013 Prudential U.S. Figure Skating Championships.

Look through your newspaper for stories and photos of figure skating.

Next week, The Mini Page is about Sochi, Russia, site of the 2014 Winter Olympics.

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