

Sophie Skates

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Sophie started skating when she was three years old, on the pond behind her house. Now Sophie is eight years old. She dreams of becoming a professional ice skater, but she knows there will be many years of hard work ahead. Sophie watches ice skating on television, but most of all she likes going to ice skating shows. There she gets to see the skating up close. She claps hard for the performers and can't wait for the day when the applause is for her. Sophie takes lessons five mornings and three afternoons a week. Her morning class begins at five o'clock! When she arrives, some of her friends are already warming up. She says hello to Mr. Simon, the coach. Everyone is dressed warmly. The ice rink can be very cold, so the skaters wear layers of clothing that they

take off as they warm up. Skaters choose clothes that are easy to move in but still fit close to the body. Boys wear short leg warmers, warm-up suit, short leg warmers, thin socks, and pants with stirrups, gloves, and mittens. Girls wear long leg warmers, sweater, tights, skirt, leotard, leotard with skirt. Sophie skates are already broken in. When they were new, they felt stiff and hurt her feet. She had to put guards over the blades and walk around her house to soften the leather. Sophie can lace up her skates quickly. But when she was first learning, it took a long time to do it correctly. Make sure you pull the laces tightly as you go, especially around the ankle. A snug fit gives support. When new skates are laced correctly, there should be two inches of space between the two lines of eyelets. As skates get broken in, the leather stretches and the lacing gets closer. Max tied his skates too loosely, so he doesn't have ankle support.

Pamela forgot to tuck her laces. Tuck the loops and ends between the laces and the tongue. Lace loops should never dangle! Maggie is ready to go! Perfect!

Mr. Simon begins the morning class with the basics. Young skaters do these skills over and over again. Learning to get up from a fall gracefully is always important. Mr. Simon tells his skaters, "Look where you are going, not down. Don't get your leg too high. Move your hips from side to side and pretend you're a puppy wagging your tail." Basics include different ways to stop as well as different ways to move. Some basics are practiced both forward and backward, or just the right foot and just the left foot. After basics, Sophie's class practices figures. Figures are difficult, but they help the students learn to glide with control. Everyone takes turns skating on the ice, using all four edges. Then they do basic eights, which are skated in two circles that make

the shape of an eight. "It's good we skate eights, and not fours," Pamela says and they all laugh, even Mr. Simon. At seven A.M., class is over and everyone leaves for school. After school, Sophie returns to the rink for a private lesson in free skating. She does her jumps, spins, and footwork over and over again. As her muscles get stronger, she will jump higher, spin faster, and move with more control. Sophie wants every move to be perfect. But she's been skating long enough to know that sometimes she will fall. When it happens, she tries not to be hard on herself.

Sophie also takes ballet lessons two afternoons a week. Some of her friends from ice skating class are in her ballet class, too! Ballet helps them be more flexible and graceful on the ice. Competing is Sophie's favorite part of ice skating. A big competition is coming up in three weeks. In her afternoon class, Sophie runs through her

short program with Ms. Wilkin, the choreographer. She tries on her costumes and decides on the purple one. "This brought me good luck last competition," she says, and does a super jump. Sophie is excited to skate her long program. She agrees with Ms. Wilkin on the bright green costume. It matches the happy music. "I won't have to remember to smile," Sophie says. "This program is so much fun!" It is time to go home. Before they leave the stadium, Sophie and her mom stop and watch Nick lift his partner high in the air. Sophie applauds. Suddenly Nick skates over and scoops up Sophie and lifts her high in the air, too. "I' flying!" she shouts.

After dinner, Sophie cleans and dries her skates. She sits with her dog, Henry, and does her homework. It's nice to be home after a long day. "Get your skates, Sophie! Let's go out to the pond!" her brother calls a little later. But Sophie is already asleep.