



"It's Up, and It's Good!"

Negro League Baseball and its Connection to Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune



Mamie "Peanut" Johnson of the Indianapolis Clowns. Courtesy: Negro Leagues Baseball Museum.



Team photo of the Homestead Grays, 1939. Courtesy: Negro Leagues Baseball Museum.



Cumberland Willis Posey, Jr., owner of the Homestead Grays Negro League team, with Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune in the parlor of the headquarters of the National Council of Negro Women. Photo: Wright & Riley.

Negro League Baseball Lesson Plan

Note: Please review the Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune Virtual Experience Exhibit with students before teaching the lesson plan.

Background

One might ask, what connection does Homestead, PA have with Washington, DC? Perhaps one obvious answer would be the Homestead Grays baseball team. The original members of the Homestead Grays were steel workers from the Homestead/Pittsburgh area. During World War II, the Homestead Grays decided to expand to new horizons and gain new fans by playing some games in Washington, DC. At the time, Washington, DC had a growing Black population that considered baseball a great family pastime. It was also a good way to inspire interracial interaction between communities. Families would often get dressed up and spend an afternoon watching luminaries like Satchel Paige, James “Cool Papa” Bell, and Josh Gibson, who were phenomenal baseball players.

The Homestead Grays collaborated with Mrs. Bethune’s National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). Every year, right around the time of Mrs. Bethune’s birthday on July 10, the NCNW would sponsor baseball games to help in the fund-raising efforts for the Liberty ship S. S. Harriet Tubman. Harriet Tubman was an African American freedom fighter and hero who was active with the Underground Railroad for escaping slaves before the Civil War. This would be the first Liberty ship to be named after a woman. The goal was to raise 2 million dollars, and a portion of the baseball tickets would go to fund this cause. Eventually, the NCNW met their goal and successfully had the S. S. Harriet Tubman built to support overseas missions in World War II.

Introduction of Lesson Standards

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies:

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands>

Common Core State Standards

L.6.7.

RIT.6.7.

SL.6.1d

SL.6.6

W.6.2a

Assistance With Common Core Integration:

<http://www.inspiration.com/lessonplans/kidspiration#reading-and-writing-lesson-plans>

Program of Studies - VA

<http://www.fcps.edu/is/pos/esyearataglace.shtml#g6>

Virginia State Standards

<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/>

Oral History Videos

- Mamie “Peanut” Johnson – female player for the Clowns Baseball Team [click here](#) (QuickTime mov file)
- Homestead Grays: Gone But Not Forgotten [click here](#) (YouTube video with advertisement at start).

Lesson Overview:

Time required: 80-120 minutes (1 or 2 days)

Lesson objective:

This lesson will explore the powerful relationship between the National Council of Negro Women and Negro League Baseball. Students will discuss the important contributions, struggles and triumphs players experienced. Students will also understand the meaning of patriotism, and observe documented oral histories while using multi-media devices (Photo Story, PowerPoint, VoiceThread etc.) to demonstrate learning.

Lesson Expectations:

Students will identify with the elements of “patriotism and purpose” by analyzing why communities were motivated to see players in the Negro Leagues.

Students will learn how economics has historically impacted communities.

Students will create digital stories from their perspective retelling the history of The Homestead Grays and their relationship with Mrs. Bethune. (Suggested technology: Photo Story or Voice Thread.)

Students may research through comparing and contrasting how Negro League Baseball players were treated in various parts of the United States but also celebrated by many races at their baseball games. <http://www.nlbm.com/>.

Students will work in collaborative groups to present their research findings.

Warm Up Activity

Through the direction of the teacher, students will do light exercise to stimulate the brain for analytical thinking. Some suggested exercises are as follows:

- Running in place
- Jumping Jacks
- Windmill stretch

Whole Class Partner Activity

- Discuss with a partner: Why were the Negro Leagues created?
- Discuss with your partner: How many of the baseball players played the game because they loved it, and how many played the game because they needed to earn a living?

One person from the partnership shares out and summarizes the discussion.

Whole Class Group Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Mrs. Bethune chose baseball as a way to galvanize participation and patriotism?
- What characteristics and qualities do Harriet Tubman, Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, and Mamie “Peanut” Johnson have in common? Can all three be identified as pioneers? Explain your thinking.

Assessment

Write a letter to Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune explaining how you can build community by bringing people together for a good cause.

- 1 to 2 pages

- The writing must include a title, introduction and closing statement.
- Students must reference historical facts from the lesson in the writing
- Students must interpret patriotism in their own words.

Lesson Extension

Moses Fleetwood Walker and John W. Bud Fowler were amongst the first players in professional baseball, playing in the 1870s and 1880s. Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. By the early 1960s, most of the Negro League baseball teams had dissolved. What is Jackie Robinson's connection to Moses Fleetwood and John W. Bud Fowler? You may find your answer at the Negro League Baseball Museum. <http://www.nlbm.com>.

Additional Helpful Links

The INSPIRATION software is a useful tool to help you begin the writing process:
<http://www.inspiration.com/freetrial/index.cfm>

Teacher's Kit from the Negro League Baseball Museum:
<http://www.coe.ksu.edu/annex/nlbemuseum/resource/toolkit.html>

Information on various Negro League Baseball Players:
<http://www.nlbpa.com/>

Additional information for teachers to use regarding the Negro Leagues:
<http://www.ala.org/programming/pridepassion/ppssn32>

Additional Research Practice In African American Culture

1. Bethune Cookman University
www.cookman.edu
2. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
www.nypl.org/locations/schomburg
3. Schlesinger Library
www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/schlesinger-library
4. Amistad Research Center
www.amistadresearchcenter.org
5. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University
www.howard.edu/msrc/