



Hidden Baseball: The Legacy of the Negro League

by Shannon McFarland, 2023 CTI Fellow
Alexander Graham Middle School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
6th grade English Language Arts

Keywords: Civil Rights, Segregation, Baseball, Negro League, Major League Baseball, Jim Crow, Point of View, Argument, Poetry, Ode, Supplemental Instruction, Extension, Latin American Sports, Socratic Seminar,

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix I](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit. (Insert a hyperlink to Appendix 1 where you've stated your unit's main standards.)

Synopsis: Students explore the legacy of the Negro League in America, the impact of segregation on American life in the 1920s and 1930s, and write poetry to celebrate the accomplishments of early Black and Latin American baseball players.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 130 student in 6th grade English Language Arts.

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Introduction

Rationale

Being from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, means I have an obligatory deference for our sports legends. I grew up crossing the Roberto Clemente Bridge with droves of fans to attend a Pirates game at PNC Park. My mother has a collection of Steelers Christmas ornaments, and depending on how the season is going determines whether they go on the front or back of the Christmas tree.

Every town has their sports giants, but there are a select few names that transcend local reverence and earn national note. One of those names is, of course, Jackie Robinson. Known in equal measure for his baseball career and for breaking the color barrier in the professional league, Robinson is a household name for good reason. However, he wasn't the first or only player of color to leave their mark on the sport. For my curriculum unit, I will explore a few African American and Latino players who deserve to be more than a footnote in sports history. We will learn about where they came from, what they were up against, and what they were able to achieve. We will compare perspectives of the league and discuss what lessons can be learned and applied to sports and culture today. Most importantly, we will celebrate their names!

School/Student Demographics

This curriculum unit is made with my current sixth grade students in mind. I teach at Alexander Graham Middle School. We serve a growingly diverse population that roughly breaks down to a third of the students identifying as white, a third as Black, and a third as Hispanic or Latino. I teach two sections of honors Language Arts, one section of standard, and one section of inclusion Language Arts. This inclusion class is co-taught with a special education teacher to accommodate our students with identified learning needs.

With this more diverse population, I am always looking for ways to engage all of my students meaningfully. Lessons focused on sports are obviously low-hanging fruit, but not without the potential for rigor! Learning about the Negro Leagues and segregated sports has shown me that there are complexities that can be discussed. Stories like Buck Leonard's and Martin Dihigo's show the dedication and versatility of players in the Negro League. All students can benefit from the conversation around success in the face of adversity, persistence in the face of struggle.

Unit Goals

Our district requires Language Arts teachers to use the curriculum called Imagine Learning Classroom, which is organized into four thematic modules that are structured around a mentor text. In sixth grade, the fourth unit of the curriculum uses the novel *Hidden Figures: the Young Readers Edition* by Margot Lee Shetterly as the mentor text. This novel tells the true story of four Black women who made integral contributions from the 1950s and 1960s to NASA's mission of landing man on the moon. As students read of their accomplishments, they also learn about the experience of living through segregation and the Cold War in the United States. The skills this unit focuses on are primarily evaluating arguments and examining points of view. One of the essential questions students work to answer throughout this module is "Why is it important

to study the accomplishments of the ‘hidden figures’ and of others whose stories have gone unrecognized (ILC Curriculum)?” Pairing this anchor text and other articles, students develop a picture of the discrimination present during the early and mid-1900s that allowed the milestones achieved by Dorothy Vaughan, Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson, and Christine Darden to go unnoticed for so long.

For this curriculum unit, students will continue to learn about some of America’s “hidden figures.” This will be an opportunity to revisit some skills with which the students traditionally need more practice. Early lessons will focus on determining the structure of nonfiction texts and discerning the author’s purpose. Students will read texts that discuss the same topic and compare and contrast the authors’ points of view.

One skill that is left mostly unaddressed in the sixth grade IL Curriculum is poetry analysis. The other sixth grade language arts teachers at Alexander Graham and myself have found this to leave our students vastly unprepared for their end of grade tests. In addition, we all love poetry! This curriculum unit is allowing me to incorporate poetry analysis into our year in a way that is meaningful thematically. As a culminating task, students will write an ode to a player from the Negro League. This poem will demonstrate higher level learning, with the need to show not only comprehension of their chosen player’s life and accomplishments, but also the form and genre of ode poetry.

In the spring, our students who are identified as multi-language learners take a standardized test called ACCESS that assesses their proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the English language. This is an incredibly challenging test that students struggle to pass, and without a passing score, they stay listed as a multi-language learner, even if their skills have actually surpassed the need for extra support. Our school has a high level of ML students who should have exited the program in the years prior but are not scoring well enough on their ACCESS test. As a school, our staff is making our ML students’ growth a priority. One of my focuses in creating this unit is to offer students opportunities to practice genre specific writing and speaking skills.

Content Research

The Negro League

Decision to Segregate the League

To call baseball “America’s pass time” couldn’t be more true. Its start is somewhat contested, but baseball was a fairly common sight throughout the country in the early 1800s. Slowly but surely, teams were formed. Formal organization was slowed by the Civil War, but not halted altogether. The National Association of Base Ball formed in 1858, which voted to exclude Black players in 1867 (Seymour, 42). However, the association did not rule over all of baseball, so this decision did not impact all formally organized teams. Other governing organizations were formed, including the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players in 1870 and the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs in 1876 (Seymour, 80).

During this time of post-Civil War and early professional baseball, America struggled to enforce newfound Black freedom. Southern states began adopting what were called Jim Crow laws, which dictated social expectations for people of color. While most of these laws were enacted in the South, racial tension and violence existed across the whole country. The Equal Justice Initiative reports that at least two thousand Black people were lynched between the years 1865 and 1870 in America (EJI report).

Despite this, Black athletes were still making names for themselves for all audiences. In 1884, Moses Fleetwood Walker became first black ballplayer in organized baseball. He played catcher for the minor league Toledo Blue Stockings. Unfortunately, the talent that earned Walker a place on the integrated team was not enough to appease all members of the American Association. In an 1883 game against the Chicago White Stockings, Cap Anson very vocally refused to play against the team if they allowed Walker to play. Luckily, Anson folded, and the game proceeded, but this wouldn't be the end of Cap Anson's racist remarks and their impact on organized baseball.

In 1887, now manager of the Chicago White Stockings, Anson yet again made publicly known his feelings about sharing the field with a player of color. Moses Fleetwood Walker joined the Newark Little Giants. He and his Black teammate, George Stovey, were benched for the game after Anson shouted racial slurs and demanded they leave. The incident propelled the International League to immediately vote to no longer contract Black players. The American Association and National League make similar rulings in the following three years (Doeden, 9).

Baseball would remain segregated for almost sixty years. Cap Anson's contribution to the league's decision is not primarily how he is remembered. Anson was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1939. His plaque reads, "Greatest hitter and greatest National League player-manager of the 19th century. Started with Chicagos in National League's first year 1876. Chicago manager from 1879 to 1897, winning 5 pennants. Was .300 class hitter 20 years, batting champion 4 times (hall of fame website)."

Barnstorming

With the 1896 court case, Plessy v. Ferguson, which ruled Jim Crow laws constitutional, America was officially "separate, but equal." Black players had no prospects of joining the professional league, and Black teams were left without home fields. This led to a period of innovation. Barnstorming refers to the traveling leagues of the time. Black baseball teams would travel city to city, playing any team that would have them, and in return earning a portion of the ticket sales. Teams like the New York-based Cuban Giants created names for themselves with their unique style. Barnstorming games were meant to entertain, with performances leading up to the games even singing from the field (Doeden, 15). The barnstorming teams helped Black baseball teams stay in business despite the professional league's rejection.

Rube Foster and the Beginning of the League

With the official segregation of baseball, Black teams began efforts to establish their own league, but without much success. Although barnstorming provided opportunities to keep Black

teams “in the game,” more was still dreamed of. This is where Rube Foster stepped in. Texas-born Foster made a name for himself pitching for the barnstorming team Philadelphia Cuban X Giants. He was credited with the invention of the screwball, which he taught to white Hall of Fame player Christy Matthewson. Foster took these leadership skills a step further in 1911, when he became the owner and manager of the Chicago American Giants. Foster worked to usher his team to the next iteration of Black baseball, from the theatrics of barnstorming to polished, yet captivating athletics.

Working with the Black Press, Foster sought to develop a league for teams of color that mirrored the MLB. Many owners of barnstorming teams were hesitant because of past failures, but Foster was able to bring together eight owners in Kansas City, and on Valentine’s Day in 1920, the National Negro League (Doeden, 17).

The league was a success, developing into the third largest black owned business in the 1920s, and Foster was in full control. As the president of the league, he helped create the style of play that the league was known for; aggressive and fast. He was known to fine players for not performing as expected, but also financially supported any teams in the league that struggled. Known as the Father of Black Baseball, Rube Foster was inducted into the MLB hall of fame in 1987. His plaque reads, “Rated foremost manager and executive in history of the Negro Leagues. Acclaimed top pitcher in Black baseball for nearly a decade in early 1900s. Formed Chicago American Giants in 1911 and build them into Midwest’s dominant Black team. In 1920 he organized Negro National League, headed league and managed Chicago team until retirement following 1926 season (hall of fame website).”

Black Players of Note

Satchel Paige

One name from the Negro League that is famous within the baseball community today is Satchel Paige. However, for those outside of the sport, he is not so well known, and the true span of his career is still underrepresented. Born in Mobile, Alabama, Leroy “Satchel” Paige began his professional baseball career at the age of 20. He played for the Pittsburgh Crawfords primarily, but he also played for other teams in the Negro League, as well as barnstorming teams and even teams in the Dominican Republic. He was later signed to the Kansas City Monarchs, with which he and the team won the Negro League World Series (Doeden, 51). At the age of forty-two, he was signed to a Major League team, the Cleveland Indians, making him the oldest rookie and the first Black pitcher in the Major League. At the age of fifty-nine he pitched in a game for the Kansas City Athletics.

No matter the team Paige played for, he was making a name for himself as one of the best pitchers the sport has ever seen. It is believed that at the height of his career, Paige was pitching in over a hundred games in a single season (Storied video). His different pitches, which he gave amusing names like the “bee ball,” were part of his unique performance that drew so many fans. Paige was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1971 for his impressive career. His plaque reads, “Paige was one of the greatest stars to play in the Negro baseball leagues, thrilled millions of people and won hundreds of games, struck out 21 major leaguers in an exhibition game,

helped pitch Cleveland Indians to the 1948 pennant in his first big league year at age 42. His pitching was a legend among major league hitters (hall of fame).”

Josh Gibson

Satchel Paige is quoted as saying Josh Gibson “was the greatest hitter who ever lived” (Doeden, 43), but Gibson’s name is largely left out of baseball history. Gibson was born in Georgia, but his family moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, while he was still young. This is where his professional career would begin accidentally. Gibson had already made a name for himself in his community as a baseball powerhouse from a young age. So, when a player was injured while Gibson was attending a Negro League game between the Homestead Grays and the Kansas City Monarchs in 1930, he was sought out from the crowd to take the catcher’s place. The next day, the Grays signed Gibson to a contract at the age of eighteen (Doeden, 44). Gibson played for the Homestead Grays and the Pittsburgh Crawfords throughout his 17-season career.

While Gibson performed competently at various positions on the field, he is a legend because of his ability with a bat. Records of the Negro League are unfortunately not wholly intact, but enough is known about Gibson’s career to place him among the likes of Babe Ruth. Even more unfortunate was his passing at the young age of thirty-five. Gibson was inducted to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1972. His plaque reads, “Considered greatest slugger in Negro Baseball Leagues, power hitting catcher who hit almost 800 home runs in league and independent baseball during his 17-year career. Credited with having been Negro National League Batting Champion in 1936-38-42-45 (hall of fame).”

James “Cool Papa” Bell

Josh Gibson said of Cool Papa Bell that he “was so fast that if he hit the light switch in his hotel room, he could be in bed before the bulb began to dim” (Doeden, 40). Another underrated legend, James “Cool Papa” Bell was known for his unreal speed. Born in Mississippi, Bell moved with his brothers to St. Louis, Missouri, where he signed to the Stars at the age of nineteen. He also played with the Homestead Grays and the Pittsburgh Crawfords, earning each of the three teams three championship wins (hall of fame). After his career as a player, Bell went on to be a manager and scout for the St. Louis Browns.

While not a power hitter like Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell made a name for himself with speed. If he hit the ball, more than likely he would get a run. Bell was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1974. His plaque read, “Combined speed, daring and batting skill to rank among the best players in Negro Leagues. Contemporaries rating fastest man on base paths, hit over .300 regularly, topping .400 on occasion. Played 29 summers and 21 winters of professional baseball (hall of fame).”

Walter “Buck” Leonard

Buck Leonard was another league favorite who deserves better representation for his contribution to the sport. Born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, Leonard was only able to attend school to the age of fourteen. At the time, his hometown didn’t offer schooling past the eighth

grade for African Americans, so Leonard got a job at the railroads and later playing semi-pro baseball. Leonard signed on with the Homestead Grays as a first baseman, and there he stayed for 15 years. His dedication to a single team was not common in the Negro League, and he holds the record for the longest term of service with one team.

Leonard was often called the “Black Lou Gehrig.” He mimicked Gerhig’s batting and field work, and he was well liked by many in the league. He was even considered for a time to be the player who would break the color barrier, but he did not want to “ruffle feathers.” He was officially offered a major league contract in 1952 at age 45, but he turned it down. However, he never truly left the league. After retiring from the field, Leonard served as an ambassador for the Negro League until he passed at the age of ninety. During that time, he also returned to the classroom, earning the high school denied to him earlier in life at the age of 52. He was elected to hall of fame in 1972. His plaque reads, “First baseman of the Homestead Grays when team won Negro National League pennant nine years in a row, 1937-1945. Teamed with Josh Gibson to form most feared batting twosome in Negro baseball from 1937 to 1946. Ranked among Negro home run leaders, won Negro National League batting title with .391 average in 1948 (hall of fame).”

Latino Players in the League

Alex Pompez

There wouldn’t be Latino players of the Negro League to note if it weren’t for Alejandro “Alex” Pompez. Born to Cuban Immigrants, Pompez entered the baseball scene in 1916, but not as a player. He was the owner of New York Cuban Giants, a Black baseball team that eventually joined the Negro National League. Pompez brought the first players from Latin America into the Negro League, introducing the more aggressive, fast paced game that fans found so exciting to watch. Along with players, Pompez also brought a field. In 1935, Pompez renovated the Dyckman Oval. In the age of barnstorming, owning a field was huge for the Negro League.

After the integration of the league, Pompez continued to progress with the sport, working for the New York Giants as a scout and bringing Black and Latino players into the MLB. Pompez was inducted to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2006, his plaque reading, “A flamboyant team owner and shrewd talent evaluator, renowned for introducing Latin American players to the Negro Leagues, and eventually the Major Leagues. Helped create and organize the Negro Leagues World Series in 1924, won by his New York Cubans in 1947. Served as Vice President of Negro National League from 1946-1948. Concluded 7-decade baseball career as a scout for the New York and San Francisco Giants (hall of fame).”

Martin Dihigo

According to Buck Leonard, “He was the best ballplayer of all time, black or white (Hall of fame).” Martin “El Maestro” Dihigo was a Cuban baseball player who could do it all. Brought to the Cuban Stars by Alex Pompez in 1923, Dihigo joined the Negro League at the age of eighteen. He began his career as a notable second baseman, but as time passed, he became an accomplished outfielder, pitcher, batter, and everything in between. Dihigo played all nine

positions, sometimes multiple positions during the same game. He logged over 260 wins as a pitcher and could throw an out from the outfield at home plate.

Martin Dihigo played for several teams in the States and abroad in the Caribbean. He also managed a team in the Dominican Republic. Wherever he went, Dihigo was well liked. He was one of the few players at the time to be fully bilingual, meaning he could interact with teammates and coach players in both English and Spanish. He was always one to share his wealth of knowledge about the game with anyone he worked with. Not only was Dihigo elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1977 in America, but he also belongs to the Halls of Fame in Cuba and Mexico, the only player to be honored in all three. His bronze plaque here in the states reads, “Most versatile of Negro League stars, played in both summer and winter ball most of career. Registered more than 260 victories as pitcher. When not on mound he played outfield or infield, usually batting well over .300. Also managed during and after playing days (hall of fame).”

Cristobal Torriente

Called the “Cuban Babe Ruth,” Cristobal Torriente was another multi-league, -multi-country champion. Coming over to America in 1913 to play for Pompey’s Cuban Giants, Torriente showed skill in several positions. Not long after, he joined the Chicago American Giants and helped the team claim the first three championships of the Negro National League. He continued to play for teams in America like the Kansas City Monarchs and Detroit Stars, as well as teams in Cuba like the Almendares. While with this Cuban team, he played in a nine-game series against the New York Giants, whose roster included Babe Ruth. During this series, Torriente scored more runs than the Great Bambino himself, and topped him for home runs as well!

Torriente was known for his skill and his showmanship. He often flashed a red bandana and jangled bracelets as he stepped up to the plate (Winter). Cristobal Torriente did not play for the Major Leagues but was inducted to the Hall of Fame in 2006. His plaque reads, “A compact and powerful five-tool player with tremendous extra-base power to all fields. Played 17 seasons overall and ranks among all-time Negro Leagues leaders in doubles, triples, slugging percentage, total bases and RBI. Led Chicago American Giants to three successive Negro National League titles, 1920-1922. Exceptional speed and range allowed him to cover center field with great ease. Prior to the formation of the Negro Leagues, starred in his native Cuba. Famed for outplaying Babe Ruth during a nine-game barnstorming series in 1920 (hall of fame).”

Instructional Implementation

Teaching Strategies

Annotation

Annotating a text is a common strategy used in language arts classrooms that encourages students to interact with the text. There are many versions of annotation guides that can be used, but most typically students annotate for key ideas, personal connections, points of confusion, and

unfamiliar vocabulary. In the lessons outlined below, annotation is used with a few articles and poems. I would encourage teachers to keep the process simple, outlining one or two elements for students to mark. This will help the teacher to accurately monitor student understanding because it will be much more apparent which details students probably should or should not mark.

Question Trail

A question trail is an engagement strategy that works well with any set of multiple choice questions. This activity is set up mostly in the formatting. For each multiple choice answer, students are directed to move to a specific question next. For example, while answers “A” for the first question, the student would be directed to “move to question 7.” Students know they’ve answered all of the questions correctly, if they visit every question once.

For this curriculum unit, I have designed a question trail using an article that details the broad history of the Negro League. If students answer all of the questions correctly, they will effectively have a timeline.

Jigsaw

A jigsaw is a reading strategy that is also fairly common in language arts classroom. This strategy is helpful when trying to read a longer text in a short amount of time. To organize a jigsaw, students are designated an “expert group” and a “home group.” In their expert group, students work together to read an excerpt of a text and answer questions, summarize, or generally discuss to make meaning. Then, students move to their home group, which consists of one person from each expert group. In their home group, students are responsible for reporting out on their learning. This strategy engages students by holding them accountable with one another. This strategy also offers opportunities to scaffold and challenge groups of students at the same time. A teacher can choose to intentionally assign students who struggle to a shorter excerpt, while pushing their more accomplished readers with a longer or more rigorous excerpt.

For this curriculum unit, students participate in a jigsaw to learn about the Negro League players individually. In the lessons below, I suggest using a baseball field, if possible, to add extra flair to the activity!

Academic Discussion

There are many modes for an academic discussion, but in my own practice, I have found the most success with the “fishbowl” discussion. For context, an academic discussion’s purpose is for students to engage in a conversation centered around a text or group of texts. Fishbowl refers to the organization of how students sit. The teacher organizes the seats so that there is an inner and outer circle. The inner circle, or “fishbowl,” is the group that participates verbally in the discussion. This is where the dialogue happens, where students offer their ideas and have a chance to agree or disagree with one another. Students seated in the outer circle serve the role of observer, listening and taking note of how their peers respond to questions. The teacher can choose to have the groups swap seats, the outer taking a place in the fishbowl and the inner

becoming observers, or the teacher can assign observers to support fishbowl participants by passing notes.

For this curriculum unit, students engage in an academic discussion to analyze a poem as well as synthesize and connect ideas from all of the texts they've interacted with in the prior lessons. It's an opportunity for students to find thematic connections between poetry and the experiences of the Negro League players.

Classroom Lessons/Activities

The lessons and activities for this unit are designed to supplement the fourth module of the sixth grade Imagine Learning Classroom curriculum, required by the district to be used in language arts classrooms. The lessons offer a chance to reteach standards that were assessed earlier in the curriculum through an extension project that looks at the "hidden figures" of baseball. Several lessons could also be paired with the third module of the curriculum, which centers around a novel that takes place during the Great Depression. This curriculum unit could be taught in conjunction with the third module of the fifth grade curriculum, which focuses on athlete leaders for social change. This unit could also be taught completely separate from the required curriculum, possibly as a cross-curricular opportunity in a social studies classroom.

Lesson 1	
Lesson	<p>Introduce this extension unit to students by showing a picture of Jackie Robinson. Ask students who he is and what he is known for. After students respond, confirm that Robinson is famous for being the baseball player who broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball. Then discuss with students that before, Robinson, there was a league that led to his ability to integrate the MLB.</p> <p>Read the article "Before Brooklyn: The Secret Heroes who Helped Break Baseball's Color Barrier."</p> <p>Introduce the Negro League and the next activity.</p>
Independent Practice	<p>See Appendix II for resources. Students will learn about the early days of baseball through a question trail. Students can complete this activity digitally, or slides can be printed and placed around the room to provide a movement opportunity in the classroom. If available, questions could also be placed around a baseball field for added engagement.</p>

Lesson 2	
Lesson	<p>Begin with students engaging in a Quick Write: "What was the</p>

	<p>most surprising fact you learned yesterday?” After giving time to write, ask students to share with a partner, then share as a whole class.</p> <p>Discuss the difference between facts and opinions with students. Consider providing examples of both to students to sort to ensure understanding.</p> <p>Continue this lesson with a discussion of point of view, or perspective. Consider having students take notes on the definition and the way an author will assert their point of view in nonfiction writing.</p>
Independent Practice	<p>See the Student Resources list below for links to the articles. Students will read both the Baseball Hall Of Fame’s biography of Cap Anson and Kevin Blackistone’s article for <i>The Washington Post</i>. Students will annotate the articles for facts and opinions, ultimately identifying the authors’ contrasting points of view about Anson.</p> <p>Consider pulling excerpts from both articles for struggling readers or to condense the time of the activity.</p>

Lesson 3	
Lesson	If teaching this unit after reading <i>Hidden Figures</i> , reintroduce students to the history of the Jim Crow Laws. Read a list of some of the laws that were enforced at the time. Have students share what they notice and what they wonder about the laws.
Independent Practice	Students will explore the PBS collection of videos called “Bases Divided: Racial Segregation in Major League Baseball” to continue their understanding of how the political and social circumstances of segregation impacted baseball. Students should continue to note what they notice and what they wonder. Their understanding of these videos can contribute to their classroom discussion in lesson 5.

Lesson 4	
Lesson	Students will begin to prepare for a classroom discussion that takes place during the next lesson. This discussion will require an understanding of the resources examined so far. As a class, ask students to share a few facts that they found shocking or interesting from the PBS videos.

Independent Practice	<p>Students will independently read the article called “Before Brooklyn: The Secret Heroes who Helped Break Baseball’s Color Barrier.” Have students annotate the article. A possible annotation guide is linked in the Teacher Resources below but use the version most suited to students.</p> <p>Consider pairing this article with other articles linked under Teacher Resources if supplementing the sixth grade ILC curriculum to compare the perspectives of Margot Lee Shetterly with Ted ReinStein.</p>
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Lesson 5	
Lesson	Students will engage in an academic discussion. See the Teacher Resources for links to facilitation suggestions. Review with students the expectations of the discussion.
Independent Practice	<p>Provide students with the poem “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dunbar. Students should read the poem as a group and discuss their initial reactions.</p> <p>Consider providing students a brief biography of Dunbar that describes his impact on poetry before the Harlem Renaissance, allowing students to draw parallels between his impact and the impact of the Negro Leagues.</p> <p>Students should use texts read and annotated in lessons leading up to discuss how this poem may mirror the perspective of Negro League players during segregation, as well as what the themes of the poem may be.</p> <p>To scaffold for groups of struggling readers, this poem could be read and analyzed as a class the day before to allow students to apply their understanding more thoroughly to the historical context of the Negro League.</p>

Lesson 6	
Lesson	Students will look into individual players’ accomplishments in the Negro League. Teachers are encouraged to use the players who are researched in this unit, but more players may be added if desired. Provide students with the graphic organizer that is available in Appendix II. Explain the jigsaw protocol to students

	and organize them into groups. Fewer groups may be organized if it is not possible to participate in the activity on a baseball field.
Independent Practice	<p>Students will participate in a jigsaw in order to learn more about the Negro League players. Students will learn about each player in their expert group, then report out on their learning in their home group.</p> <p>For struggling readers, consider limiting the number of expert groups and having two members from each expert group in a home group.</p>

Lesson 7	
Lesson	<p>As a class, watch the first video linked within the article “There's No Understating Jackie's Impact” to develop a broad understanding of Jackie Robinson’s integration of Major League Baseball.</p> <p>As a class, read Lucille Clifton’s poem “Jackie Robinson” and discuss how the poem relates to Robinson’s impact on the history of baseball.</p>
Independent Practice	<p>Students should silently reread the poem and write a paragraph to summarize the meaning. In the paragraph, students should elaborate on the imagery that Clifton uses in the poem to represent Robinson’s story.</p> <p>To scaffold this activity for struggling learners, have students interpret the poem line by line. This will “chunk” the text.</p>

Lesson 8	
Lesson	<p>Review ode poetry with students. Consider having students take notes on the form and structure typical of an ode.</p> <p>Look back at Clifton’s poem to analyze it as a non-traditional form of ode. Ask students: how does Clifton praise and commemorate Robinson in the poem?</p>
Independent Practice	Provide students with the National Baseball Hall of Fame’s bronze plaques for the Negro League players they previously researched.

	Students will use the graphic organizer in the Appendix below and the bronze plaque to write mini-odes memorializing their assigned or chosen player.
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Lesson 9	
Independent Practice	<p>Students should work in pairs to proofread a peer's mini-ode, looking for clear images that relate to the athlete's accomplishments.</p> <p>Consider extending the project by incorporating an illustration. Students should use the bronze plaque to draw a representation of their athlete to accompany their poem. This is an opportunity to coordinate with art teachers to select a specific type of art as well.</p>

Lesson 10	
Lesson	Students should share their poems. Consider hanging student work around the room and having students participate in a gallery crawl, or have students stand and read their poem aloud to the class or a small group.
Independent Practice	Students should complete a reflection, by returning to the essential question: Why is it important to study the accomplishments of the 'hidden figures' and of others whose stories have gone unrecognized?

Assessments

One form of assessment used in this unit is the Socratic Seminar. Students will use their learning from previous lessons to connect to the poem "We Wear the Mask" by Paul Laurence Dunbar. This poem was written prior to the Harlem Renaissance, a boom of Black art, music, and literature. Students will draw parallels between both this poem's relevance to an artistic movement and the Negro League's relevance to early days of integration in Major League Baseball. Students will also make connections between the point of view of the speaker of the poem and the point of view of Black baseball players and their performance for audiences.

The culminating task of this unit is to write an ode to a player from the Negro League. This poem will assess multiple areas of learning. Firstly, it will assess the students understanding of their chosen player's career. Students will spend one day researching a player and summarizing their story and accomplishments. Secondly, the ode will assess students' ability to write according to the requirements of the genre. Students will read a few poems as part of the lessons outlined

above. They will discuss the form, connotations, and themes of the poems. Students will use a graphic organizer to help them write an ode to their baseball player. Collecting and providing feedback on the completion of this graphic organizer is an informal opportunity to assess students' understanding of the genre. At the teacher's discretion, the assignment can be elevated to require certain types of figurative language or rhyme schemes as well.

Appendix I: Teaching Standards

The following standards come from the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for sixth grade language arts and are addressed through the activities outlined in this curriculum unit.

- RL.6.2: Determine a theme of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
 - Students will work to determine the theme of the poems read in this unit.
- RL.6.5: Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.
 - Students will make connections between particular stanzas of the poems they read and ideas they pull out from the texts they read prior to the academic discussion.
- RI.6.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
 - This is a primary standard for this unit. Students will continually need to support their answers with textual evidence.
- RI.6.3: Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text.
 - As students learn about the individual players, they will examine how their biographies introduce them as key individuals.
 - Students will analyze the segregation of baseball as a key event and trace its impact.
- RI.6.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.
 - Students will pay close attention to the authors' points of view when they read about Cap Anson and his role in the segregation of professional baseball.

Appendix II: Handouts

As outlined in the lessons above, the following resources were created for teacher use. The hyperlinks will create a copy in the teacher's Google Drive, and can be edited as needed to best serve students.

- [Negro League Timeline Question Trail](#)
- [Negro League Player Jigsaw Notecatcher](#)
- [Classroom Discussion Teacher Guide and Student Notecatcher](#)
- [Mini-Ode Graphic Organizer](#)

Student Resources

The following list of resources are hyperlinks to all of the articles that are outlined in the lessons above.

- [National Baseball Hall of Fame: Hall-of-Fame Explorer](#)
 - This website is used heavily to access the biographies of the athletes and the images of the bronze plaques that are used to write the mini-ode poems.
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- [PBS: Bases Divided: Racial Segregation in Major League Baseball](#)
 - This is a collection of videos from a Ken Burns documentary organized by PBS to be used educationally.
- [Negro League Baseball Museum “Storied” Series](#)
 - This collection of videos provide interesting anecdotal information about the league. Several videos are available that cover the athletes students will research.
- [“The History of Baseball and Civil Rights in America”](#) from the National Baseball Hall of Fame
 - This article was used to create the question trail activity and will serve as an answer key.
- [“Before Brooklyn: The Secret Heroes who Helped Break Baseball’s Color Barrier.”](#) by Rich Tenorio
 - If using this unit in conjunction with the ILC sixth grade curriculum, consider comparing this article with [“Pioneering Black NASA Mathematician Katherine Johnson Dies”](#) by Ben Finley
- [“It’s Time for Baseball to Acknowledge Cap Anson’s Role in Erecting its Color Barrier”](#) by Kevin Blackistone
- [“We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dumber](#)
 - This poem is used as the focus for the academic discussion outlined in the lessons.
- “Jackie Robinson” by Lucille Clifton
 - This poem is not available electronically, but can be found in Clifton’s collected work
Clifton, Lucille, et al. The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton 1965-2010. BOA Editions, 2012.

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