

Books and Baseball

America's Favorite Pastimes

by Nancy J. Johnson and Cyndi Giorgis

Preschool through middle school

As spring training ends and hopes for a World Series season begin, it's time to invite readers to step up to the plate with literature that echoes the spirit, the grace, the drama, and the history of America's favorite pastime. Whether the classroom or library is filled with baseball fans or not, books that revolve around elements of the game offer suspense, insight, and inspiration—and every emotion imaginable.

Books about baseball (and all sports) hold immediate appeal for many readers. There's an inherent "home field advantage" for bringing this literature into the classroom and library for an all-star reading experience. Baseball stories can ignite questions, help readers develop empathy, identify options and strategies for taking action, and gain insight into people—real and imagined.

Readers who are introduced to books about a time when women played a significant role in baseball may find new inspiration to follow their dreams. Those who read about ball players who endured unwarranted obstacles to prove that there was a place for them on the field will experience the complications of human nature. Readers immersed in baseball stories about strikeouts and home runs, about Little League and the Major Leagues, about legend and

lore, will create new understandings and perhaps gain an appreciation for the nuances of the game, without ever taking the field.

So, dust off home plate, warm up your pitching arm, stock up on Cracker Jack, and . . . play ball with some of our "fan favorites"!

Marcenia steals home in *Catching the Moon* by Crystal Hubbard, illustrated by Randy DuBurke.



Batter Up! Negro Baseball Leagues

Cline-Ransome, Lesa. *Satchel Paige*. Illus. by James E. Ransome. 2000. 40p. Simon & Schuster, \$16.95 (0-689-81151-9); Aladdin, paper, \$6.99 (0-689-85681-4).

Gr. 2–5. Leroy “Satchel” Paige was one of the greatest baseball players in the Negro Leagues, the first black pitcher in the major leagues, and the first black inductee into the Baseball Hall of Fame. This read-aloud is punctuated by rich oil paintings that capture the determination of an amazing athlete.

Curtis, Gavin. *The Bat Boy and His Violin*. Illus. by E. B. Lewis. 1998. 32p. Simon & Schuster, \$16.95 (0-689-80099-1); Aladdin, paper, \$6.99 (0-689-84115-9).

Gr. 1–4. In this story marked by evocative watercolors, Reginald practices the violin in spite of his father’s lack of interest in his “fiddling.” Papa is manager of the Dukes, the worst team in the Negro Leagues, but when Reginald begins playing his violin in the dugout, his music inspires the batters to have a near-winning season.

Green, Michelle Y. *A Strong Right Arm: The Story of Mamie “Peanut” Johnson*. 2002. 128p. Dial, \$15.99 (0-8037-2661-9); Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (0-14-240072-6).

Gr. 4–7. Using a first-person narrative, Green shares the story of Mamie “Peanut” Johnson, who pitched for the Negro Leagues’ Indianapolis Clowns from 1953 to 1955. Short, entertaining chapters tell of the discrimination Johnson faced from being both black and a woman, and her eventual triumph playing baseball.

Hubbard, Crystal. *Catching the Moon: The Story of a Young Girl’s Baseball Dream*. Illus. by Randy DuBurke. 2005. 32p. Lee & Low, \$16.95 (1-58430-243-7).

Gr. 1–3. As a girl, Marcenia dreams of playing baseball, but her parents suggest that she play with dolls and focus on school. Fortunately, unique circumstances enable her to play, eventually leading her to a spot on the team roster of the Negro Leagues Indianapolis Clowns. Hubbard’s inspiring story is based on the childhood of Marcenia “Toni Stone” Lyle Alberga,

racial discrimination, and the players, and feature oral histories from the surviving Negro Baseball League players.

Myers, Walter Dean. *The Journal of Biddey Owens: The Negro Leagues*. 2001. 192p. Scholastic, \$10.95 (0-439-09503-4).

Gr. 4–7. Myers’ fictional journal focuses on 17-year-old Biddey Owens, who is “equipment manager, scorekeeper, errand boy, and sometimes right fielder” for the Birmingham Black Barons. Set in 1948, the last year of the Negro Leagues, this entry in the My Name Is America series offers a glimpse into the



Satchel Paige winds up for a pitch in *Satchel Paige* by Lesa Cline-Ransome, illustrated by James E. Ransome.

challenges that black ball players experienced.

who became the first woman to play professional baseball.

McKissack, Patricia C., and Frederick L. McKissack. *Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues*. 1998. 192p. Scholastic, paper, \$5.99 (0-590-68213-X).

Gr. 6–up. The McKissacks provide an in-depth look at the history, the

Weatherford, Carole Boston. *A Negro League Scrapbook*. 2005. 48p. Boyds Mills, \$19.95 (1-59078-091-4).

Gr. 4–7. Utilizing a scrapbook format, Weatherford pays tribute to the Negro Leagues with archival black-and-white photos and full-color memorabilia. This engaging historical perspective is presented through

brief text, sidebars, and quotes that highlight the accomplishments of the players (both male and female), the segregation, and the significance of the Negro Leagues.

Winter, Jonah. *Fair Ball! 14 Great Stars from Baseball's Negro Leagues*. 1999. 32p. Scholastic, paper, \$5.99 (0-439-37604-1).

Gr. 3–6. Did you know that Cool Papa Bell was considered one of the fastest baseball players ever and boasted he was so fast “he could turn off the light and be in bed before it was dark?” Winter presents this and other captivating facts about 14 memorable Negro League baseball players such as Oscar Charleston, Pop Lloyd, and Josh Gibson, using an engaging baseball card format.

A League of Their Own Women and Girls in Baseball

Adler, David A. *Mama Played Baseball*. Illus. by Chris O’Leary. 2003. 32p. Harcourt, \$16 (0-15-202196-5).

Gr. 1–4. Proving that no war could stop the great game of baseball, Amy’s mother makes ends meet with an unusual job—playing professional baseball. Basic baseball history is revealed in this heartfelt story of a young girl’s enthusiastic support for her mama, while waiting for her father’s return from World War II.

Corey, Shana. *Players in Pigtails*. Illus. by Rebecca Gibbon. 2003. 40p. Scholastic, \$16.95 (0-439-18305-7).

K–Gr. 3. Inspired by the first verse of the 1908 song “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” and the movie *A League of Their Own*, this lively picture book introduces a time when baseball was not considered ladylike. Fortunately, war allows “baseball mad” Katie Casey to pursue her dream to try out for the Kenosha Comets. Watercolor and colored-pencil illustrations depict spirited and humorous events as the Comets prepare for their first game.

Hopkinson, Deborah. *Girl Wonder: A Baseball Story in Nine Innings*. Illus. by Terry Widener. 2003. 40p. Simon & Schuster/Anne Schwartz, \$16.95 (0-689-83300-8); Aladdin, paper, \$6.99 (1-4169-1393-9).

Gr. 1–4. Alta Weiss was born to play baseball, and at the age of 17 became the first female to pitch for a semipro all-male team, the Vermilion Independents. Hopkinson’s prose highlights Weiss’ drive and ambition, while Widener’s bold illustrations dramatically depict the life of this pioneering female baseball player.

Johnson, Angela. *Just Like Josh Gibson*. Illus. by Beth Peck. 2004. 32p. Simon & Schuster, \$15.95 (0-689-82628-1).

Gr. 1–3. Legend has it Josh Gibson, Negro League player, hit a baseball hard enough that it left the stadium in Pittsburgh and landed in Philadelphia the next day. That same

day the narrator’s grandmama was born, a girl who became good enough to fill in for an injured boy cousin during a key game. This story of empowerment is highlighted by pastel illustrations and information about Hall of Famer Gibson.

Lord, Bette Bao. *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*. Illus. by Marc Simont. 1984. 176p. HarperTrophy, paper, \$5.99 (0-06-440175-8).

Gr. 3–5. After her family immigrates to New York from China in the 1940s, Shirley Temple Wong finds friendship playing stickball and becomes a Brooklyn Dodgers (and Jackie Robinson) fan. This heart-warming novel has plenty of child appeal.

Moss, Marissa. *Mighty Jackie: The Strike-Out Queen*. Illus. by C. F. Payne. 2004. 32p. Simon & Schuster, \$16.95 (0-689-86329-2).

Gr. 1–4. Who would imagine a girl

ALA Notable 2006

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Booklist starred review

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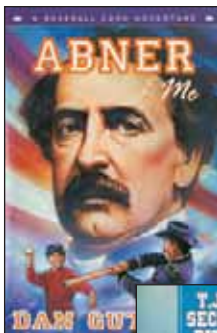
Other not-to-be-missed books and series that celebrate the game of baseball include the following titles.

- **Bowen, Fred.** *AllStar SportStories*. Peachtree. Individual books, 112p., paper, \$4.95.

Gr. 2–5. These illustrated chapter books about baseball and basketball weave sports history into engaging stories about contemporary characters playing ball. Baseball titles include *Winners Take All* (Peachtree, 2000), *T. J.'s Secret Pitch* (Peachtree, 1996), *Playoff Dreams* (Peachtree, 1997), *The Golden Glove* (Peachtree, 1996), and *The Kid Coach* (Peachtree, 1996).

- **Christopher, Matt.** *Stealing Home*. 2004. 128p. Little, Brown, \$15.95 (0-316-60739-8); paper, \$4.50 (0-316-60742-8).

Gr. 3–6. When an injury to a teammate moves Joey Gallagher from center field to pitcher, he unexpectedly becomes his team's hero. Then an exchange student arrives whose talents threaten to steal Joey's glory. Another hit in Christopher's long-running series centered on sports and life issues. See also *The Kid Who Only Hit Homers* (Little, Brown, 1972), *The Diamond Champs* (Little, Brown, 1977), *Return of the Home Run Kid* (Little, Brown, 1992), *Challenge at Second Base* (Little, Brown, 1992), and many more.



- **Gutman, Dan.** *Abner and Me*. 2005. 176p. HarperCollins, \$15.99 (0-06-053443-5).
Gr. 5–8. If he's holding the right baseball card, Joe Stoshack can travel back in time and become acquainted with key players and events in baseball history. Curious to know whether Abner Doubleday really did invent the game of baseball, Joe acquires a photo of him as a Civil War general and is transported to a time when Union soldiers played pickup games. An author's note separates fact from fiction. Other books in the Baseball Card Adventures series include *Honus and Me* (Avon, 1997), *Jackie and Me* (Avon, 1999), *Babe and Me* (Avon, 2000), *Mickey and Me* (HarperCollins, 2003), and *Satch and Me* (HarperCollins, 2006).

- **Ritter, John H.** *The Boy Who Saved Baseball*. 2003. 224p. Philomel, \$17.99 (0-399-23622-8); Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (0-14-240286-9).

Gr. 5–7. This baseball tale features ordinary folks, larger-than-life characters, a mysterious boy, and a fictional baseball legend, all of whom team up in a monumental baseball game with major stakes—the chance to save the local town and its baseball field from encroachment by big-money developers. Also see the author's *Choosing Up Sides* (Philomel, 1998).

could strike out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig? On April 2, 1931, 17-year-old Jackie Mitchell, pitching in an exhibition game against the New York Yankees, did just that. Mixed-media illustrations reflect the excitement and nostalgia of this little-known story of girl power.

Rappaport, Doreen. *Dirt on Their Skirts: The Story of the Young Women Who Won the World Championship*. Illus. by E. B. Lewis. 2000. 32p. Dial, \$16.99 (0-8037-2042-4).

Gr. 2–5. On August 16, 1946, young Margaret sits in the stands with her family watching the championship game of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. Rich watercolors capture the suspense in this fictionalized story, while actual photographs of the young women who played in the championship game grace the endpapers.

Testa, Maria. *Some Kind of Pride*. 2001. 144p. Yearling, paper, \$4.99 (0-440-41669-8).

Gr. 4–6. Ruth DiMarco, an 11-year-old star shortstop in a small town in Maine, is so good, *Sports Illustrated* sends a reporter to write a feature story about her. Overhearing her father ("It's all wasted on a girl") confuses her dream. Also see Kristi Roberts' *My Thirteenth Season* (Holt, 2005), about one girl's fight to stay on an otherwise all-boy Little League team.

Wolff, Virginia Euwer. *Bat 6*. 1998. 256p. Scholastic, paper, \$4.99 (0-590-89800-0).

Gr. 5–8. In 1948–49 two teams from neighboring towns await the annual sixth-grade girls' softball game. This year both teams include a new player—each carrying a secret and a burden. Told in 21 voices, this novel begs to be discussed.

Field of Dreams Baseball's Past Times

Curlee, Lynn. *Ballpark: The Story of America's Baseball Fields*. 2005. 48p. Simon & Schuster/Atheneum, \$17.95 (0-689-86742-2).

Gr. 4–up. Curlee traces the history of baseball and the landmark ballparks that were built beginning in the mid-1800s. From "wooden palaces" to "concrete doughnuts," each ballpark is unique both in its structure and to the athletes who play there. Stylized, full-page acrylic paintings complement the book's narrative.

Mochizuki, Ken. *Baseball Saved Us*. Illus. by Dom Lee. 1993. 32p. Lee & Low, \$16.95 (1-880000-01-6); paper, \$7.95 (1-880000-19-9).

Gr. 1–4. This poignant story, illuminated with sepia-toned illustrations, tells of a young Japanese

American boy who found respite and joy playing baseball in an internment camp during World War II.

Stewart, Mark, and Mike Kennedy. *Long Ball: The Legend and Lore of the Home Run*. 2006. 64p. Millbrook, \$22.60 (0-7613-2779-7).

Gr. 4–7. This fascinating photo-essay offers a look at baseball history through the lens of the home run, or “long ball.” Readers learn how Babe Ruth made the home run what it is today, and a chapter on “Ten Great Long Balls” tells of groundbreaking homers in baseball history. Stewart and Kennedy conclude with a chapter discussing the impact of steroid use on the game. Period photos appear throughout, and related baseball memorabilia is featured in sidebars.

Tavares, Matt. *Mudball*. 2005. 32p. Candlewick, \$15.99 (0-7636-2387-3).

Gr. 1–4. In 1903, Little Andy Oyler, the shortest player on the Minneapolis Millers, is up to bat, bases are loaded, and the Millers are losing by three runs. Suddenly the rain begins to pour and Andy’s bat makes contact with the ball—but no one sees where it goes. Baseball lore credits Oyler with the shortest home run in baseball history.

Uhlberg, Myron. *Dad, Jackie, and Me*. Illus. by Colin Bootman. 2005. 32p. Peachtree, \$16.95 (0-56145-329-3).

Gr. 2–5. It is 1947, and Jackie Robinson has joined the Dodgers team line-up. A young boy is surprised when his deaf father, who never seemed to care about baseball, brings home tickets to a game. The boy soon realizes that the connection his father makes with the legendary player isn’t about baseball, but rather with the struggle for respect and acceptance.

Winter, Jonah. *¡Béisol! Latino Baseball Pioneers and Legends*. 2001. 32p. Lee & Low, \$16.95 (1-58430-012-4); paper, \$7.95 (1-58430-234-8). Also available in Spanish.

Gr. 2–5. One-page biographical

sketches of 14 players are presented through fascinating facts and career highlights. Featured are José Méndez, the “first Latino baseball legend ever”; Martín Dihigo, who could play every position on the team; and Roberto Clemente, “The Pride of Puerto Rico.” Winter’s stunning full-page portraits, resembling baseball cards, accompany the information.

Little League Books for Younger Readers

Buckley, James. *Baseball ABC*. 2001. 24p. DK, board book, \$5.99 (0-7894-7338-0).

Buckley, James. *Baseball 1-2-3*. 2001. 24p. DK, board book, \$6.99 (0-7894-7339-9).

Preschool–Gr. 1. These two board books introduce young fans to the world of baseball. In *Baseball ABC*, history (*Y* is for Yogi Berra), basics (*H* is for home plate), and legendary places (*G* is for Green Monster) are revealed. *Baseball 1-2-3* offers a straight read through the number 10. Both books feature full-color photographs that will appeal as well as inform.

Gibbons, Gail. *My Baseball Book*. 2000. 24p. HarperCollins, \$5.99 (0-688-17137-0).

Preschool–Gr. 1. This small, square book is ideal for baseball’s youngest readers. Clear labels and colorful illustrations feature boys and girls playing the game and accompany some of baseball’s basic facts—in understandable terms and easy-to-read sentences.

Isadora, Rachel. *Luke Goes to Bat*. 2005. 32p. Putnam, \$15.99 (0-399-23604-X).

K–Gr. 3. Too young to join his brother’s game of stickball, Luke is overjoyed when the team needs a substitute. But his first game results in two strikeouts. Luke’s grandma’s encouraging “Not everyone plays like Jackie Robinson all the time. Not even Jackie Robinson” will reassure young players. Warm watercolors extend the story’s action.

Mayers, Florence Cassen. *Baseball ABC*. 1994. 32p. Abrams, \$12.95 (0-8109-1938-9).

Gr. 1–up. This glossy, eye-catching collection showcases baseball trivia, facts, lore, and a sprinkling of quotes from baseball legends. Many of the letters are taken from professional teams’ logos (Chicago Cubs fans will be familiar with *C*), and corresponding full-color photos include vintage pictures that will appeal to baseball buffs of all ages.

Murphy, Frank. *Babe Ruth Saves Baseball!* Illus. by Richard Walz. 2005. 48p. Random, paper, \$3.99 (0-375-83048-0).

Gr. 1–2. In 1919, fans’ excitement about baseball was tempered by the reality that some players cheated. But 1920 reenergized baseball, when Babe Ruth became the first player to hit a home run in the brand-new Yankee stadium, which gained the nickname the House That Ruth Built. This Step into Reading book offers a spirited glimpse into baseball history for younger readers.

Seventh-Inning Stretch

Extra Innings: Baseball Poems. Edited by Lee Bennett Hopkins. Illus. by Scott Medlock. 1993. 48p. Harcourt, \$17 (0-15-226833-2).

Gr. 3–up. Nineteen reliable baseball treasures—some well-known poems, others less so—are accompanied by Medlock’s colorful impressionistic oil paintings. The poems feature players of a variety of ages and experience levels, all enthusiastic dreamers who love the game. For more baseball poetry, see Paul B. Janeczko’s *That Sweet Diamond* (Simon & Schuster/Atheneum, 1998).

Katz, Alan. *Take Me Out of the Bath-tub and Other Silly Dilly Songs*. Illus. by David Catrow. 2001. 32p. Simon & Schuster/Margaret K. McElderry, \$15.95 (0-689-82903-1).

K–Gr. 2. Outlandish illustrations partner with parodies to 14 traditional tunes and amusingly suggest how

Web Connections

These and other Web sites about baseball may be found on the **Book Links Web site** at <http://www.ala.org/BookLinks>. Click on the “Web Connections” link to access the list.

- **San Francisco’s Exploratorium Museum Web site** at <http://www.exploratorium.edu/baseball> features the “Science of Baseball,” with information on finding the sweet spot, embarking on a baseball time machine, and more. Find out why curveballs curve and what’s behind a home run swing.
- **The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences** features a peppy version of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” set to music by Albert Von Tilzer, at <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/lyrics/basegame.htm>.

children might change familiar lyrics. For “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” a boy wearing roller skates claims he has been soaking so long in the tub that he “used one, two, three bars of soap” to get clean.

Norworth, Jack. *Take Me Out to the Ball Game: A Pop-Up Book*. Illus. by John Stadler. 2005. 16p. Little Simon, \$12.95 (0-689-85917-1).

Preschool–Gr. 1. When the Growlers and the Howlers take the field in this baseball pop-up, readers will delight not only in the players’ fur, fangs, and feathers but also in the illustrated story that follows this favorite baseball song. Clever paper engineering offers readers a press box view of the game.

Thayer, Ernest L. *Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic Sung in the Year 1888*. Illus. by Christopher Bing. 2000. 32p. Handprint, \$17.95 (1-929766-00-9).

Gr. 3–up. This Caldecott Honor Book’s visual interpretation of a now-popular baseball ballad echoes

the nostalgia of the late 1800s. Bing’s sepia-toned pages assemble realia on pen-and-ink illustrations, and fascinating back matter creates context for this legendary poem.

All Stars—Memorable Players

Adler, David A. *Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man*. Illus. by Terry Widener. 1997. 32p. Harcourt, \$16 (0-15-200523-4); paper, \$6 (0-15-202483-2).

Gr. 2–4. Lou Gehrig, nicknamed the Iron Horse, was considered one of the New York Yankees’ greatest players. An unexpected slump in 1939 that set folks talking was diagnosed as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (now called Lou Gehrig’s disease), and took this great player’s life at age 37. Rich acrylics illuminate Gehrig’s belief that he was “the luckiest man.”

Burleigh, Robert. *Home Run*. Illus. by Mike Wimmer. 1998. 32p. Harcourt/Silver Whistle, \$16 (0-15-200970-1); paper, \$6 (0-15-204599-6).

Gr. 3–6. Babe Ruth brought a whole new meaning to the term *home run*. Spare text captures the power and majesty of this legendary Yankee’s feats and creates a feeling of sitting in the stands for that very moment when “the ball and the bat become one.” Facts and accomplishments in baseball card format appear underneath the text, and Wimmer’s detailed oil paintings feature the Babe from every perspective on the field. For more on Babe Ruth and his influence on baseball, see Dan Shaughnessy’s *The Legend of the Curse of the Bambino* (Simon & Schuster, 2005).

Golenbock, Peter. *Hank Aaron: Brave in Every Way*. Illus. by Paul Lee. 2001. 32p. Harcourt, \$16 (0-15-202093-4); paper, \$6 (0-15-205250-X).

Gr. 1–4. Born during the Depression into a loving family, Aaron was encouraged “to be the best.” In 1974, while playing for the Braves, he was determined to break Babe Ruth’s home run record despite the racist

hate mail and threats he received. Golenbock’s biography, complemented by Lee’s rich acrylics, is both informative and inspiring.

Lipsyte, Robert. *Heroes of Baseball: The Men Who Made It America’s Favorite Game*. 2005. 96p. Simon & Schuster/Atheneum, \$19.95 (0-689-86741-7).

Gr. 4–7. Lipsyte showcases some of baseball’s greatest players—Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, and the McGwire-Sosa rivalry—in narrating the sport’s history in this attractively designed, oversize photo-essay featuring pull quotes and boxed insets, as well as a glossary, index, and time line.

Mandel, Peter. *Say Hey! A Song of Willie Mays*. Illus. by Don Tate. 2000. 32p. Hyperion/Jump at the Sun, \$15.99 (0-7868-0480-7).

Gr. 1–3. Willie Mays, known as the Say Hey Kid because of his youthful enthusiasm, is still considered one of the greatest baseball players ever. Mandel uses the “Say Hey, Willie” refrain throughout the rhyming text to depict Mays’ childhood in Alabama and his triumphs playing center field for the Giants and the New York Mets.

Winter, Jonah. *Roberto Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates*. Illus. by Raúl Colón. 2005. 40p. Simon & Schuster/Anne Schwartz, \$16.95 (0-689-85643-1).

Gr. 2–5. This inspiring picture-book biography features the life and career of one of the greatest Latino ball players. Winter details Clemente’s achievements on the field and his humanitarian efforts beyond baseball, including his attempt to bring aid to earthquake victims in Central America, which resulted in his death in a plane crash. Colón’s striking illustrations grace this tribute.

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