

Civil Rights and Sports: The Athletes Who Changed the Face of Sports

Stella Evans

Introduction

Professional Sports are a large part of our culture. We go to sporting events, we watch them on television, and we talk about them with our colleagues and friends. We want the teams we support to perform well. We want the owners and coaches to find the best players available to help our teams win. This was not always the case.

Up through the mid twentieth century, sports teams were very much segregated. African Americans were not hired to play. Owners, fans, and other players were not looking for the best player; they wanted the best white player.

This unit will examine the move from segregated professional sports teams to the ones we have today. We will look at the difficulty encountered by the players who pioneered the way onto various sports and how they made it possible for talented athletes to follow them. Students will be studying the African American athletes who paved the way.

Rationale

Highlands Elementary school is an urban public school located in Wilmington, Delaware. Highlands serves kindergarten through fifth grade students. There are approximately 380 students enrolled, with 89 percent of the students being of a minority race. Conversely, of Highlands' 32 instructional staff, 87.5 percent is white. Highlands did not meet its annual yearly progress goals.

One of the strategies Highlands uses to improve student achievement is afterschool activities. We offer an after school academics program, Lego League, Odyssey of the Mind, Girls on the Run, and the Reading Basketball Association. The most popular activity, by far, is the RBA. Sports, especially basketball, are very popular topics. Through sports, we can capture our students' attention.

I am the technology teacher at Highlands, and I see each class of students once per week for a 45 minute class. One of the areas I focus on is research skills. Students struggle with finding, using, and citing sources. They need practice in these skills. By combining research with sports, I will motivate my students to learn these important skills.

As a former member of the Building Leadership Team, I have attended many school improvement meetings. Parents are often present at these meetings. One of the topics that is often addressed is our school's lack of staff diversity and our inconsistent

addressing of multicultural issues. Parents are concerned that we ignore Black History Month. They want us to talk about civil rights issues. My participation in this seminar, and the developing of this unit, is my attempt to address some of their issues.

Part of my job is to help students become career and college ready. Research skills are necessary for all students to be successful in middle school, high school, and college. Students need practice finding, evaluating and using information they find on the internet. This unit will give my students the necessary practice in these skills, while they also learn about important figures in the struggle for racial equality.

Finally, the state of Delaware has decided to use the Common Core Standards to drive instruction. In these standards, there are many requirements that address using technology. These standards will be taught in many ways throughout this unit.

Background

Nelson Mandela once said “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than government in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all kinds of discrimination.” (Das 2013) While he was referring to his experiences in South Africa, We saw this same phenomenon in the United States. It wasn’t easy, and it certainly didn’t happen quickly. Over time sports allowed people of different races to have a common experience.

Sports have been an important part of the culture of the United States since the beginning of the country. The Native Americans were playing sports like lacrosse when the colonists settled here. It is believed it was invented during the 12th century to give thanks, praise, and enjoyment to the gods. (Mississippi Valley Archeology Center n.d.) The Puritans did not believe in playing sports as it was a sinful waste of time. (Wagner 1976) However, the southern colonies enjoyed sports as a way for men to show their strength and virility. More importantly, only the wealthy were able to participate in many of the popular sports, like horse racing and fox racing.(Batchelor and Coombs 2012)

In order for sports and recreation to become a part of society, it is necessary to have leisure time and wealth. The industrial revolution played a large role in the increase of leisure time. As less and less time was required to earn a living, people in the United States had more time to spend participating in recreational activities and watching sports. Additionally, incomes in the United States rose so that only 50 percent of a family’s income was necessary for basic necessities, leaving more money for play. (Duffus 1924) Tennis and golf first appeared in the mid to late 19th century, but were only enjoyed by the few until very recently. The game of choice for most people was baseball.

While informal games bat and ball games were played in all cultures, it wasn't until 1945 that players in the United States began playing with a formalized set of rules. At that time, there were many amateur teams in the North East that would meet and play often. As the country went through the Civil War, the game spread as the union soldiers traveled around the country. By the early 1870's, the first professional teams were formed. (Lahman 1995)

Until the late 1880's, there were a few black players on professional baseball teams. Bud Fowler, who played for the Lynn Live Oaks, may have been the first. There is a ten year history of players who played in the minors, semi-pro, and major leagues. After that period, a "gentleman's agreement" was reached and African Americans were excluded from all baseball teams. (Fatsis 2013) By the end of the 1890's, professional baseball became all white, and remained so until Jackie Robinson came to play.

Until 1946, baseball resembled the rest of American society in that it had all-white leagues and negro leagues. (The Role of Sports Upon the Civil Rights Movement 2013) While there was not law or regulation prohibiting African Americans from playing on major league baseball teams, no coach would hire them. The Major League Baseball commissioner in the early 1940's, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, stood in the way of desegregation of the league. He died in 1944, and that made Jackie Robinson's joining the league possible. (Sutton 2012)

Branch Rickey, the general manager and president of the Brooklyn Dodgers, was the first to break the color barrier. He knew that the first African American to play in Major League Baseball would have to be a special person. He would have to be better than his white teammates so that Rickey could justify hiring an African American. Additionally, this player would have to have character and integrity. Rickey knew that this player would face difficult times. He would have to be tough enough to handle it. (Robinson 2011) Branch Rickey found this man in Jackie Robinson.

From the time Jackie was young, he experienced racial prejudice. They were the only black family on their block, but that just made the family grow closer and stronger. Jackie excelled at sports from a young age and continued through college. While at UCLA, Robinson became the first athlete to letter in four sports; baseball, basketball, football, and track. The racism he experienced followed him through his college life and into his military career. While in the Army, he was court marshaled in response to a racial incident on a bus. (Jackie Robinson n.d.)

After being honorably discharged, Jackie Robinson signed to play baseball with the negro league. However, Branch Rickey learned of Robinson, and decided he was the one to break the color barrier. Rickey felt Robinson could handle the difficulties of the dealing with prejudice crowds, opponents, and even teammates.

In Jackie Robinson's contract, Branch Rickey made him agree that he would not react to the negativity that was directed toward him. Robinson kept up his end of the bargain. He stayed focused on playing baseball to the best of his ability. By doing so, he was eventually accepted by his teammates and the league. He earned many awards, including rookie of the year, league MVP, and eventually a World Series pennant. (Robinson 2011)

While Jackie Robinson is well-known for fighting racism in sports, each sport took its own path toward desegregation. It appears as though the first sport to have such a trailblazer was wrestling. In 1908, Jack Johnson was the first black man to win the World Heavyweight Championship, and was very vocal about it. When he beat the American champion in 1910, race riots were sparked across the country. He received death threats many times. He broke many Jim Crow laws including ones about being with white women. He sparked riots, incited murder, and was eventually arrested. (Monji 2013)

In 1936, Jessie Owens became a star at the summer Olympics, as he won gold medals in four different events. Hitler, embarrassed by the success of someone he thought was inferior, turned his back during the medal ceremony. When he returned home, Owens was a hero. Whites and Blacks were insulted by Hitler's behavior. African American track stars competed in every Olympic Games since. (Robinson 2011)

In 1958, the Boston Bruins were the first ice hockey team to hire a black player when they called up Willie O'Ree. He became known as the Jackie Robinson of Hockey. Fans in Boston enjoyed watching O'Ree play, but he saw a lot of racism on and off the ice when he was on the road. He would fight, as is normal in hockey, but it was because players from the other team would cross check or spear him with their sticks. He would play only two seasons with the NHL with only moderate success, but he played many seasons at the minor league level and he was successful. In 1998, O'Ree became the director of youth development for the NHL's diversity program. He now encourages children who would never have thought of hockey as a choice for them to join local teams. (Rinaldi 2008)

Today, sports have become a reflection of our culture. In an article for the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, Mark Naison uses the Super Bowl to portray American culture.

If a friend visits from another country, what better way to give a four-hour primer on American culture than by watching that game and the spectacle surrounding it? Here are classic themes in American civilization on display in dramatic form: the creative tension between individual striving and team destiny; the fascination with violence and courage in the face of adversity; the glorification of the citizen as consumer; the love of gimmicks and new technologies that highlight the nation's wealth; the use of

scantly clad women (in this case cheerleaders) to market products; and finally the nation's racial divisions, symbolized by the spectacle of a largely white stadium audience watching largely black teams play a dangerous and violent game. This is American society with all its grandeur, power, and imperfections, broadcast in a way that commands the attention of almost every person in the nation. Like many sports events throughout our history, it provides important insights into how we think and live, how we entertain ourselves, and how we gather together to celebrate and affirm who we are. (Naison n.d.)

We still see racial barriers in sports today. Few African Americans participate in sports that are provided by private institutions, like golf, swimming, skating, and tennis. Gymnasts like Dominique Dawes are rare, and we have not yet seen an African American Olympic medalist in skiing. Further, in team sports, African Americans tend to take positions where size and strength are important, rather than thinking and leadership.

If we look at the organizational level, African Americans are underrepresented among coaches, owners, trainers, referees, and so on. We need more diverse voices at all levels of sports so that all players and fans are represented. (Eitzen 1999)

Objectives

Students will learn about the struggles African American experienced as they tried to integrate all areas of their lives. Through the use of sports, students will explore the difficulties some athletes faced. They will learn that being good at his or her sport was sometimes not enough. They will learn about the determination these African American athletes displayed as they crossed race barriers to pursue their passion.

Through the use of this topic, African Americans integrating professional sports, students will learn skills that are part of the technology curriculum. They will use search engines to find information about the athlete they choose. They will practice research skills necessary to be intelligent consumers of online information. They will create Power Point presentations to show what they have learned.

Finally, they will work on language arts skills as complete their projects. Reading and writing are integral parts of research projects. The topic is interesting to most students at the elementary level, and this should be motivating to the students as they work on their reading and writing skills. Additionally, oral speaking is something fifth graders should be working on. They will be presenting their Power Point work, and through this exercise will practice oral speaking skills.

Strategies

Students will use many different tools to engage with the topic of civil rights. I have incorporated many strategies to motivate and inspire students to do their best.

I have chosen to use sports as the focus because the students in my school are very interested in sports. While basketball seems to be the most popular sports with my students, they are interested in most sports. This seems to be the hook that will keep the attention of the fifth graders.

Using the “Research Notes” graphic organizer will focus the research of the fifth graders. When elementary students attempt to do research without a graphic organizer, they struggle to decide what is important and what isn’t. Giving them a tool and a place to organize the information will help them stay on topic.

Power Point also helps students to focus their work. Each slide can focus on an area of information. This allows students to break up their work into manageable pieces.

Essential Questions

What made this athlete successful?

How did this athlete struggle because of his/her race?

What did this athlete accomplish for his/her sport?

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5 Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

Lesson Overview

This unit will take 6 weeks of technology classes. I see students once per week, for a 45 minute block. I have selected the 5th grade students to work with on this unit. These students have some background knowledge on the civil war, and have used Power Point to create presentations.

Students will receive an overview of the civil rights movement. We will talk about the time after the civil war through the early to middle of the twentieth century. We will look at how schools became desegregated and the difficulties that students and their families went through.

Students will then examine where professional sports were in the early twentieth century. They will choose an athlete who was instrumental in desegregating the sport they excelled in. Examples are Arthur Ashe, Willie O'Ree, and Jackie Robinson. Students will use internet based research to learn about the struggles their chosen athlete went through.

Students will then use power point to create a presentation on the athlete they chose. Students will include text, images and video to create the presentation.

Lesson 1

Students will watch an interview with Ruby Bridges about her experiences with desegregation. (The PBS News Hour: A Class of One: Ruby Bridges 2012) A discussion will follow about how it must have felt to be the first and only African American student to attend a white school.

Questions:

How do you think Ruby Bridges felt?

How do you think her teacher, Barbara Henry, felt to be Ruby's teacher?

Why do you think Ruby's parents allowed Ruby to be the first African American at the white school?

Students will then be provided with a list of athletes (appendix A) who integrated his or her sport. Teacher will read and review the athletes on the list. They will then choose a sports figure from the list, or someone they are familiar with.

Lesson 2

Students will review using Google or a similar search engine to conduct research. Students will review using keywords to finding relevant information. They will also discuss using reliable sources.

Students will begin consulting their research. They will use the provided graphic organizer (appendix B) to find information on their chosen person's background, when they started playing their sport, and the difficulties they faced as a minority in that sport.

Lesson 3

A lesson on citations will be presented. Students will review how to cite the websites they use. Students will then finish conducting research on the athlete they are studying.

Lesson 4

Students will receive a short review of developing a Power Point presentation. Students will review the rubric that will be used to grade their presentation (appendix C). They will begin creating their presentations.

Lesson 5

Students will finish creating their presentations, making sure they have added design elements, transitions, animations, and citations. Students will practice presenting their slideshow.

Students will use the rubric to evaluate their own presentations.

Lesson 6

Students will show their presentations to their classmates.

Appendix A

Athletes to choose from

Arthur Ashe – He is the only African American Male to win the Wimbledon tournament.

Alice Coachman – She was the first African American woman to win an Olympic gold medal

Dominique Dawes – She is the first African American woman to win an individual Olympic medal in artistic gymnastics.

Althea Gibson – She broke the color barrier in tennis. She was the first African American woman to win a grand slam.

Joe Louis – He is one of the greatest heavyweight boxers of all time.

Earl Lloyd - He was the first African American signed to the National Basketball Association.

Willie O'Ree – He was the first African American to play in the National Hockey League.

Jackie Robinson – He was the first African American to play in Major League Baseball.

Bill Russell – He was a National Basketball Association player and coach. He was the first African American coach in the NBA.

Wilma Rudolph – She was the first American woman to win three gold medals in track and field at a single Olympics Games.

Jesse Owens – He was an African American track and field star who won four gold medals in front of Adolf Hitler.

Kenny Washington – He was the first African American to sign a contract with a National Football League team.

Tiger Woods – He is the youngest and first African American to win the U.S. Masters Golf Tournament.

Appendix B

Research Notes

Which Athlete are you studying? _____

Which sport is he or she involved in _____

Date of birth _____

Family life _____

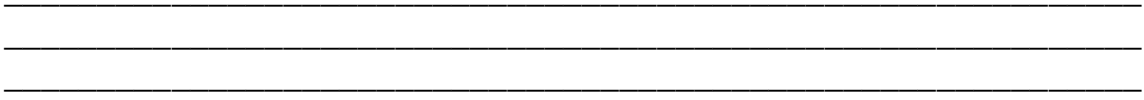
How did he or she get started in his or her sport? _____

Major accomplishments _____

Major Difficulties _____

What did he or she contribute to the African American experience in this sport?

Works Cited _____



Appendix C

Power Point Rubric

Please use the rubric below to evaluate your presentation. Do you have all of the elements needed to get the grade you want?

Element	Possible Points	Earned Points
Research notes page completed	25	
1-2 slides on each area of the research	10	
Information is correct	25	
Grammar and spelling are correct	10	
Presentation includes a design	5	
Transitions and animations are complete and thoughtful	5	
Images included are relevant to the information	10	
Works cited page included	10	
Total Points	100	

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Additional Resources

Breaking the Color Line: 1940 - 1946
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/robinson/jr1940.html>

COMPETITION V. DISCRIMINATION : How Jackie Robinson Desegregated America
<http://www.isteve.com/jackierobinson.htm>

Black History Month: Desegregating college football
http://www.lasentinel.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=979:black-history-month-desegregating-college-football&catid=110&Itemid=200

Jackie changed face of sports
<http://espn.go.com/sportscentury/features/00016431.html>

Did Sports End Racial Segregation in America
<http://voices.yahoo.com/did-sports-end-racial-segregation-america-12279065.html>

Sports in Black and White - A Study of the Civil Rights Movement Through Sports
<http://www.sportsinblackandwhite.com/2013/04/16/the-past-part-1/>

Curriculum Unit
Title

Civil Rights and Sports: The Athletes Who Changed the Face of Sports

Author

Stella Evans

KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.

Students will learn about the struggles African Americans encountered after the Civil War. Students will study the athletes who were pioneers in the integration of various sports. Students will improve technology skills such as research, MS Word, and MS Power Point.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT

What made this athlete successful?
How did this athlete struggle because of his/her race?
What did this athlete accomplish for his/her sport?

CONCEPT A

Integration of Sports

CONCEPT B

Perseverance in the face of adversity

CONCEPT C

Jim Crow Laws

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A

What made this athlete successful?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B

How did this athlete struggle because of his/her race?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C

What did this athlete accomplish for his/her sport?

VOCABULARY A

Segregation

VOCABULARY A

Struggle

VOCABULARY A

Civil Rights

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES

Breaking the Color Line: 1940 – 1946 <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/robinson/jr1940.html>

COMPETITION V. DISCRIMINATION : How Jackie Robinson Desegregated America <http://www.isteve.com/jackierobinson.htm>

Black History Month: Desegregating college football http://www.lasentinel.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=979:black-history-month-desegregating-college-football&catid=110&Itemid=200