



Classroom Guide for
¡BÉISBOL! LATINO BASEBALL
PIONEERS AND LEGENDS
 Written and illustrated by **Jonah Winter**
 Introduction by **Bruce Markusen Rodriguez**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grade 3

Interest Level: Grades 1–6

Guided Reading Level: R

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Baseball, Sports, Prejudice, Excellence, Latino Heritage

Synopsis

This book is a series of “baseball card” portraits and profiles focusing on 14 remarkable Latin American players who were trailblazers in opening the game to Latinos in the major leagues of the United States. These players were all active in part between 1900 and the 1960s. They came from places where baseball was (and still is) wildly popular—Cuba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico. Readers learn about players ranging from José Méndez, the great Cuban pitcher who was secretly hired to coach in the United States, and Martín Dihigo, the only player ever elected to the Hall of Fame in four countries, to Roberto Clemente, the legendary Puerto Rican outfielder, and Felipe Alou, the first full-time Dominican star in the major leagues. The book includes an introduction by Bruce Markusen Rodríguez, Manager of Program Presentations at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York.

Background

Today, major league baseball in the United States is populated, indeed some would say dominated, by Latin American players. Latinos such as Sammy Sosa, Alex Rodriguez, Bernie Williams, Carlos Delgado, Manny Ramirez, Wilson Alvarez, Pedro Martínez, Orlando Hernández, and Javier Vazquez, to name just a few, bring delight to fans all

over the country with their amazing skills. In many impoverished towns in the countries of Latin America, baseball is the game of choice. Youngsters sometimes play with broomsticks or tree branches for bats and with fruit or rolled up socks for balls. For a few exceptional young men, baseball is a ticket out; they are invited to join a professional team in the United States. More than forty Latino players have become millionaires from the salaries they earn playing major league ball in the U.S.

However, the story of Latin American baseball players in the United States was not always so successful. Many of the first Latino players had to overcome numerous obstacles. Most of these players faced a language barrier. Dark-skinned players were often the victims of racism, and like blacks, they were treated as second-class citizens. As a result, some of the best early Latino players never made it to the major leagues. Instead, they played in the Negro Leagues in the U.S. or in winter leagues in Latin America.

Teaching Tip

This is the perfect book to use in the fall, when World Series fever is heating up and everyone is rooting for his or her favorite major league team.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

Before introducing the book, you may wish to have students discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. What is your favorite sport to play? to watch? Why do you like them?
2. What is your opinion of baseball? Do you like to play? Do you watch major league games on television?
3. Have you ever been to a major league game? What was it like? Who are your favorite major league players? Why?
4. Why do you think fans look up to sports figures?
5. What is a legend? Can a person be a legend?
6. What happens when someone is excluded from playing a sport? How does that make you feel? How do you think that makes the person feel?
7. Have you ever imagined yourself as a star of something? What was it? How would you work to achieve this stardom?

Exploring the Book

Display the front cover of the book and write title on the chalk board, including the subtitle. Read the title aloud for students. Ask them why they think the first part of the title is in Spanish.

Point out that this book is nonfiction. Call on volunteers to explain the difference between fiction and nonfiction.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Ask students to read to find the answers to these questions:

- What do the players in this book have in common?
- What obstacles did these players have to overcome?

VOCABULARY

This book contains many words that have a special meaning in baseball. They include:

pitcher	shortstop	outfielder	catcher	fastball
league	diamond	major	spin	exhibition
ERA	homer	slugger	baseman	spitball
shutout	stealing	strike	double	triple
scorecard	rookie	delivery	season	screwball

Challenge students to do one or more of the following:

- Find at least five words that have special baseball meanings and other meanings as well. Use each word in two different sentences to show its different meanings.
- Find at least five compound words. Write the two words in each compound. Then use each compound word in a sentence.
- Alphabetize all the words and write a baseball meaning for each.
- Find at least three more baseball words in the book to add to the list.

READING AND RESPONDING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to help guide their understanding of the book. Encourage students to refer to passages in the book to support their responses.

1. What themes run throughout this book?
2. What are some of the countries these players represent?
3. What did you learn from this book? What did you learn from the players?
4. Which player(s) impressed you the most? Why?
5. Why do you think so many players have nicknames?
6. What was the "color barrier"? How did Jackie Robinson change things for baseball players of color?
7. Why were these players considered groundbreakers in their sport?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in developing the roles of the circle members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Question section of this guide to help group members explore the text.

- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines that tell how each player was unique or describe the hardships the player faced.
- The **Illustrator** might draw pictures of the players in poses other than those shown in the book.
- The **Connector** might find and share more information about the players in the book.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of each player's story.
- The **Investigator** might research other information about the racial issues and barriers that have existed in the past in professional baseball.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals or in oral discussion.

1. What would you say to some of these players? What would you ask them?
2. What is your definition of a good sport? Why did these Latino players have to be good sports? Which players today do you think fit your definition of a good sport?
3. What position do you (would you like to) play in baseball? Why?
4. How does this book affect your thinking about racism and prejudice?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for them to share and discuss their work.

1. Write a comparison of baseball in the early twentieth century and baseball as it is played today. Things you might compare are: who plays, the rules, the uniforms, the equipment, the influence of television.
2. Pretend you are a sports writer for a newspaper. Write a story about a game in which one of the players in ¡BÉISBOL! is playing. Use some of the baseball terms from the book.
3. Write a description of one of the players mentioned in the book telling what the player is like in action. This description could be in the form of a free verse poem.

ELL (ESL) Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Lead a brief “text tour” focusing students’ attention on text features such as the type in color, listing of career highlights and boldface words, words in italics, page headings, and illustrations.
2. Use a photograph or diagram of a baseball field to help students identify concrete nouns and action verbs from the book.

Teaching Tip

This book is also available in Spanish. You might pair Spanish speakers with strong English speakers to work with both versions of the book, translating from one language to the other.

3. Build confidence by having Spanish speakers pronounce the names of the players for the rest of the class.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, you might try some of the following activities.

Math

1. Have students draw a major league baseball diamond to scale. Let the class baseball fans lead the way in showing the appropriate labels for the diagram.
2. Baseball is a sport known for its many statistical records. Encourage students to look up the statistics for some of the players in the book and to make tables or graphs using these statistics. Students who collect baseball cards might share the statistics on the cards with partners or small groups.

Sports

Students might research and compile short biographies of contemporary Latino ballplayers to share with the class. These biographies could also be illustrated with drawings or pictures from magazines or newspapers, and then put together in book form to create a companion volume for ¡BÉISBOL!

Social Studies

1. Provide a map of North America and South America and have students locate each country or place mentioned in the book. Point out that Puerto Rico is not a separate country but commonwealth in association with the United States.
2. Challenge students to list the hometown of each major league baseball team in the United States and then locate the cities on a map of the country.
3. Students might work in groups to construct a timeline showing when each player featured in ¡BÉISBOL! was active in baseball.

4. Some students might be interested in researching the exhibits, facilities, and other offerings of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, located in Cooperstown, New York.
5. Some students might follow baseball news and report to the class about the Latino players who are on the sports pages or featured on television broadcasts of games.

Drama

1. Some students might research and prepare This Is Your Life presentations for the different players featured in ¡BÉISBOL!
2. Students who play baseball might act out some of the plays described in the book for the rest of the class. Suggest that they consult the baseball vocabulary from the book.

Language Arts

Read aloud the famous poem, "Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic, Sung in the Year 1888" by Ernest Lawrence Thayer. Students may enjoy learning and reciting the poem at a group. There are several illustrated picture book versions of the poem available. It can also be found at: www.potw.org/archive/potw30.html.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Jonah Winter is a longtime baseball enthusiast, and his love of the game inspired him to write this book as well as *Fair Ball!: 14 Great Stars from Baseball's Negro Leagues* and *Roberto Clemente: Pride Of The Pittsburgh Pirates*. Winter, who began his literary experiences as an editorial assistant and then an editor in publishing, was influenced in his career as an author of picture books by his mother, a children's book illustrator, and his father, a painter. Winter graduated from Oberlin College and has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Virginia. He lives with his family in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¡BÉISBOL! LATINO BASEBALL PIONEERS AND LEGENDS has been honored as a "Choices," selection and one of "40 Books About Sports for 2003" by the Cooperative Children's Book Center. It is also listed on the Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award Masterlist, sponsored by the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association. Winter's other children's books include *Diego, Frida*, and *Once Upon A Time In Chicago: The Story Of Benny Goodman*. He has also written volumes of poetry for adults and is the recipient of the 2000 Pushcart Prize for poetry.

RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *¡Béisbol! Latino Baseball Players and Pioneers* at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/20/pb/beisbol_latino_baseball_pioneers_and_legends

¡Béisbol! Latino Baseball Players and Pioneers in Spanish:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/142/hc/beisbol_pioneros_y_leyandas_del_beisbol_latino

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(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Themes: Baseball History, Sports, Latin American Interest, Occupations

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http://www.leeandlow.com/books/20/pb/beisbol_latino_baseball_pioneers_and_legends (secure online ordering)

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