

Katie Bradley

Wake Forest University

TOPIC: History of the Negro Leagues and Baseball**NCTM STANDARDS:** Number and Operations, Data Analysis and Probability, Reasoning and Proof, Representation**GOALS:**

Students will collect and analyze statistics on two great baseball players, and form an argument for who the better baseball player was.

INTRODUCTION:

In 1884 the first African-American baseball player, Fleetwood Walker, joined major league baseball. Then in 1890, African-Americans were banned from major league baseball, and this ban continued through the 1946 season. During this time, several attempts were made to start leagues for African-American players, but it was not until 1920 that the first successful league, The Negro National League, was formed. Jackie Robinson was the first African-American baseball player to cross the color line into major league baseball in 1947, with the Brooklyn Dodgers. By 1952, over 150 former Negro League players joined major league baseball, and the Negro League era came to a close. Despite its short-lived era, the Negro Leagues had many great players, a lot of whom are now members of the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

ACTIVITIES:

- Part 1. Introduction. Students will read about the Negro Leagues on the internet. In groups of 4 or 5, students will find 3 interesting facts about The Negro League to share with the class, and answer 3 questions. Review the answers to the 3 questions with the class.
- Part 2. Researching Players. Staying in the same groups, students will be given two lists; one containing six Negro League baseball players, and the other containing six Major League baseball players of the same era. They are to pick one name from each list, and research the two players' annual hitting statistics. They are to find and compare the statistics of the two players to form an argument for who the better baseball player was.
- Part 3. Presentation of argument. Students will present to the class who was the better baseball player, out of the 2 they chose. For whatever stats they use as support, they must provide an explanation on how each one is calculated.

ASSESSMENT: At the end of the activity, students will present their argument for who the better baseball player was. They will have to use their knowledge of basic computations and statistics, as well as their problem solving and reasoning skills.

Part 1. Introduction.

The Negro Leagues were an important part of early twentieth century African-American culture in the United States. Explore the following website to learn about the Negro Leagues.

<http://www.negroleaguebaseball.com/>

Find three facts you and your group members find interesting, and be prepared to share them with the class.

Fact 1:

Fact 2:

Fact 3:

Answer the following questions about the Negro Leagues' history.

1. Who created the first successful Negro League?
2. True or False: There were no white players to play in the Negro Leagues. Support your answer.
3. List 2 reasons the Negro Leagues became less popular in the 1940's, and eventually disbanded in 1952.

Part 2. Researching Players.

Pick two players to research from the following table; one from the Negro Leagues column and one from the Major Leagues column:

Negro Leagues	Major Leagues
Biz Mackey	Lou Gehrig
Sam Jethroe	Mel Ott
Cool Papa Bell	Rogers Hornsby
Josh Gibson	Jimmie Foxx
Monte Irvin	Joe DiMaggio
Larry Doby	Hank Greenberg

After choosing two players, go to the following websites and research the annual statistics for each of your players:

Major League Baseball:

<http://www.baseball-almanac.com/legendary/lisab100.shtml>

Negro League Baseball:

Josh Gibson: <http://sports.jrank.org/pages/1645/Gibson-Josh-Career-Statistics.html>

Biz Mackey: http://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Biz_Mackey

Cool Papa Bell: http://www.baseball-almanac.com/players/p_bell1.shtml

The other 3 players: <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/legendary/lisabr40.shtml>

Your goal is to decide which baseball player was better. You may use any statistics you like to form your argument, and you must include an explanation for why you chose the statistics you did. If you choose to include percentages, such as batting average or slugging percentage, you must give an explanation of how each of percentage is calculated.

Part 3. Presentation of Argument.

At the completion of the project, your group will present your project to the class. There are two parts of the presentation:

1. Choose the 3 most interesting facts your group found about the Negro Leagues, and share with the class.
2. Explain to the class which of the two baseball players you researched was better. You must include the statistics used to support your argument.

Each group must turn in a one page, written summary including the 3 interesting facts their group chose to share, along with the players and statistics used to decide who the better baseball player was.

TEACHER NOTES/SOLUTIONS

Part 1. After students have researched the Negro Leagues on the website, lead a class discussion about the 3 questions. Allow students to ask any additional questions, or add any additional information.

1. Who created the first successful Negro League?

Andrew “Rube” Foster in 1920. A few other attempts had been made to create a league, but this was the first to be successful.

2. True or False: There were no white players to play in the Negro Leagues. Support your answer.

False – A pitcher, Eddie Klepp, signed with the Cleveland Buckeyes about the same time Jackie Robinson entered the Major Leagues (1946). He only lasted in the Negro Leagues for one season, and dealt with segregation issues, and was not allowed to take the field for a game in Birmingham, Alabama.

3. List 2 reasons the Negro Leagues became less popular in the 1940’s, and eventually disbanded in 1952.

Major League Baseball was integrated in the 1940’s, and the best players from the Negro Leagues joined Major League teams. Throughout the 1940’s fan support lessened because they began following the African-American players in the Major League. Due to the lack of fan support, the Negro Leagues were unable to financially support themselves.

Part 2. The following is an example, comparing Cool Papa Bell vs. Lou Gehrig.

- Students can choose any statistics they like to formulate their argument, so here are a few possibilities:
 - **Career batting average**
Cool Papa Bell: .337 -- Lou Gehrig: .342
 - If students use batting average, they must explain how it is calculated: # of hits / # of at bats
 - **Years played**
Cool Papa Bell: 20 seasons -- Lou Gehrig: 17 seasons
 - **Homeruns**
Cool Papa Bell: 63 - Lou Gehrig: 493
 - **Hits**
Cool Papa Bell: 1241 -- Lou Gehrig: 2721
 - If students choose this stat, maybe they would analyze how many hits that averaged out to a year. Again, they would need to explain their calculations.
 - Cool Papa Bell: 1241 hits / 20 seasons = 62 hits per season
 - Lou Gehrig: 2721 hits / 17 seasons = 160 hits per season
- Students could continue analyzing more stats, or they could stop here and state their argument.

Part 3. Have each group present their three most interesting facts about the Negro Leagues. Then have each group will state who the two players were that they chose to compare, and then state which one they decided was better. After stating their decision, they must go through each statistic used, and explain how those statistics helped them reach their decision. Be sure to collect a one page, written summary from each group.