

# The Greatest Thing



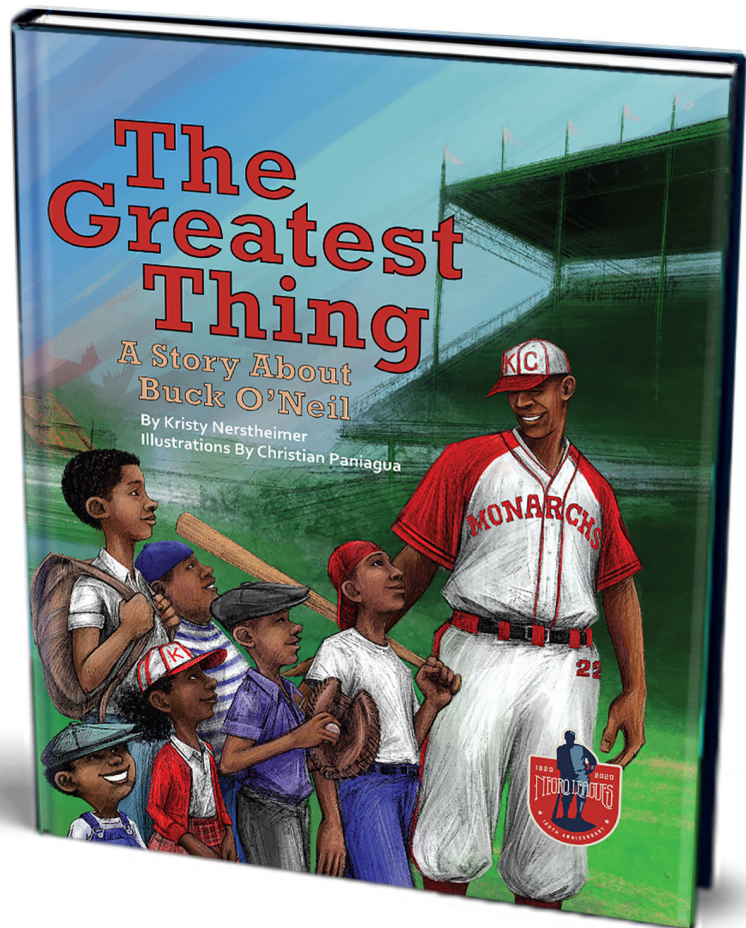
# THE GREATEST THING

## A STORY ABOUT BUCK O'NEIL

### CURRICULUM ENHANCEMENT GUIDE

#### INTEGRATION ACTIVITIES INCLUDE:

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# ART

*Hands-on discovery • Creative thinking • Personal expression*

Take a picture walk through *The Greatest Thing* and comment on each illustration as you go.

- What is an illustrator's job?
- How do the illustrations add to the overall appeal of this book?
- Why do you think Christian Paniagua was selected to illustrate this book?
- Research Christian Paniagua and learn about other books he's illustrated or projects he's worked on.

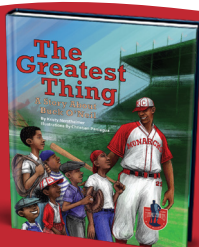
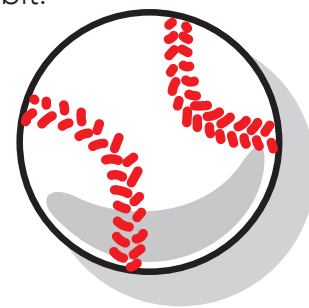
Read the classic baseball poem "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest Lawrence Thayer. Use crayons or colored pencils to illustrate a scene from the poem. Share your illustration with the class.



Create a paper plate baseball.

- You'll need these supplies: white paper plates, white paper (ripped into smaller pieces), red paper (pre-cut into strips) or red yarn, glue, bowls for the glue, and paint brushes.
- Put glue into the bowls. Add a small amount of water to thin the glue down a bit.
- "Paint" the plate with the glue.
- Then, cover the plate with the ripped paper.
- Finally, glue the red strips or yarn down on the plate to make it look like a baseball.

Have students research their favorite ballpark and see if they can learn about any artwork displayed in or around the ballpark. For example, Kauffman Stadium hosts a Royals bobblehead gallery and many murals of past players. Have students share their findings with the class.



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Reading • Writing • Listening • Speaking

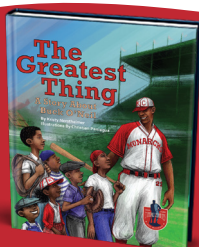
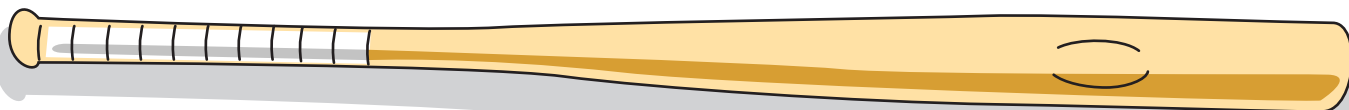
Discuss the different elements in a story: plot, character, setting, climax, and resolution. Have students create their own baseball stories or other stories of perseverance. Older students can critique and edit each other's work. Once the final draft is completed, have students share their stories with the class. Younger students can complete The Big Game template on page 4.

Read different stories and books about opening day at a baseball game. Have students create a poem or story about the excitement of being a fan on opening day. Challenge students to use all five senses when writing their poems or stories: describe what the field looks like, the different sounds they might hear, the smells and taste of popcorn or peanuts, and the touch of the baseball.

Have several students act out the poem, "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest Lawrence Thayer. Then answer these questions:

- What do you know about Casey based on this poem?
- How did the crowd view Casey at the beginning of the poem?
- How did the crowd view Casey at the end of the poem?
- Is Casey someone you'd want on your baseball team? Why or why not?

Ask students to write their own poems about baseball. Younger students can create an acrostic poem template on page 5 using the word BASEBALL. Older students can write a free verse poem of their choice. Share these poems with the class and/or post them around the classroom.



# THE BIG GAME

Students may complete this simple story starter.

**The big day had finally arrived!**

\_\_\_\_\_ was very excited.

\_\_\_\_\_ had practiced for weeks

\_\_\_\_\_ tried to remember

everything Coach \_\_\_\_\_.

When \_\_\_\_\_ went up to bat,

she/he \_\_\_\_\_ the ball.

***It was a home run! It was an exciting day!***

# ACROSTIC POEM

Use the first letter of each line to create a poem about baseball.

**B** \_\_\_\_\_

**A** \_\_\_\_\_

**S** \_\_\_\_\_

**E** \_\_\_\_\_

**B** \_\_\_\_\_

**A** \_\_\_\_\_

**L** \_\_\_\_\_

**L** \_\_\_\_\_

# LIBRARY & TECHNOLOGY

Oral language • Reading readiness • Technology skills

Dan Gutman writes a series of historical fiction chapter books about baseball for young readers. Have students choose a book to read from his website:

<https://dangutman.com/dans-books/baseball-card-adventure-series/>

Then have them share what they learned and compare to Buck O'Neil's life.

Allow students to create a table to record their favorite baseball players' batting averages, RBIs, and home runs. (See the math activity.) Here are the steps:

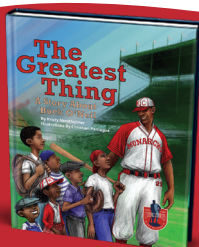
- Open up a Google document.
- Select insert, then table.
- Create a table with four columns and as many rows as each student needs. See the 4x4 table below as an example. After students research their own favorite players, they will *insert* the information into the *table* they've created.

Baseball Player	Career Batting Average	RBIs	Home Runs
Buck O'Neil			
Babe Ruth			
Salvador Perez			

Find and read several biographies of Civil Rights activists. Have students open a Google document and write a letter of appreciation to one of these men or women. Share these letters with the class.

Women have also played a part in baseball's history. Research the All-Girls American Baseball League as well as female players in the Negro Leagues. Then have students answer these questions:

- What did you learn about women in baseball?
- How does being a female baseball player compare to being a Negro Leagues baseball player?
- When students finish their research, encourage them to watch the movie *A League of Their Own* based on the All-Girls American Baseball League.

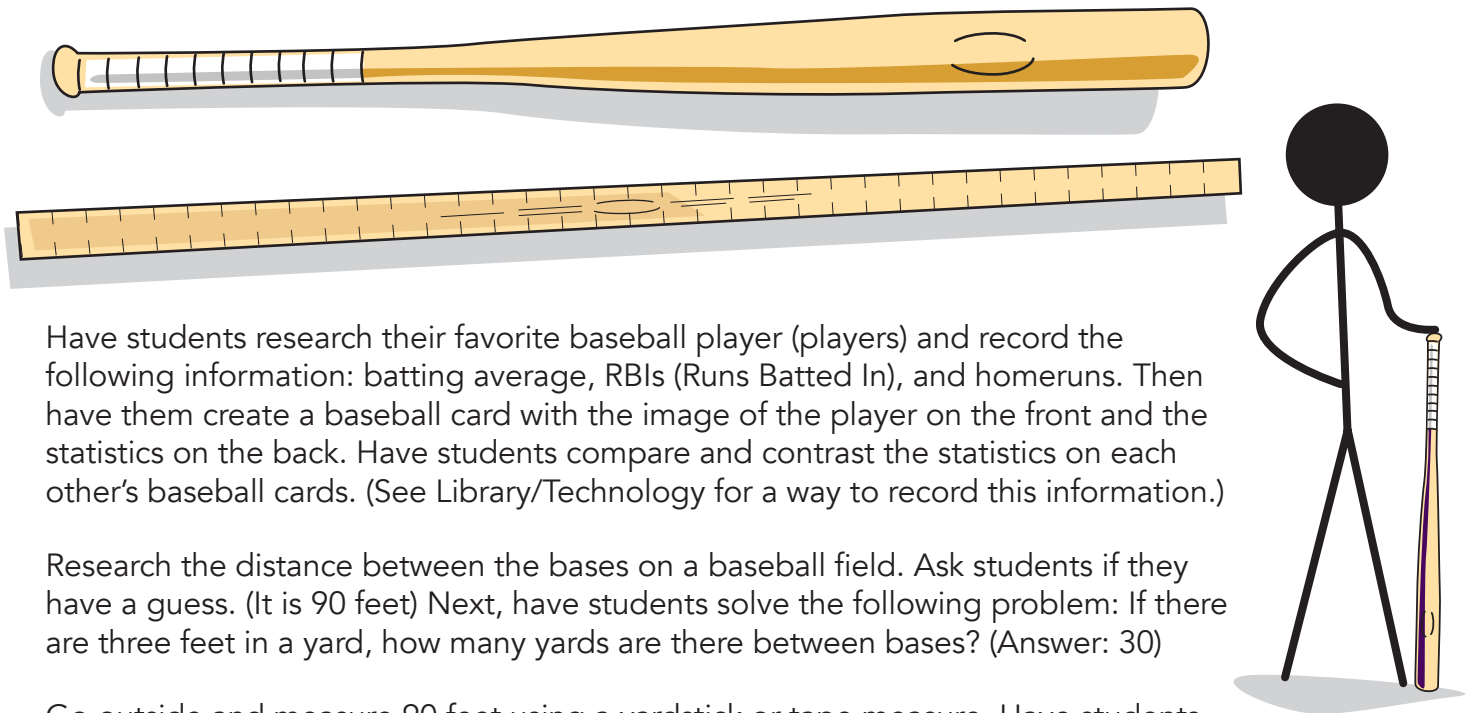




# MATH

*Abstract math concepts • Number sense • Number relationships*

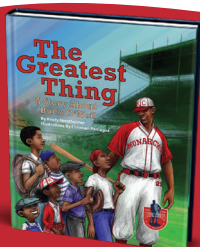
Using a baseball bat, have students lie down on the floor and measure how tall they are in reference to the baseball bat. Have students first estimate. Then use a yardstick to check estimations. Graph the comparisons. Consider using the baseball bat to measure other things in your classroom like the perimeter of the room.



Have students research their favorite baseball player (players) and record the following information: batting average, RBIs (Runs Batted In), and homeruns. Then have them create a baseball card with the image of the player on the front and the statistics on the back. Have students compare and contrast the statistics on each other's baseball cards. (See Library/Technology for a way to record this information.)

Research the distance between the bases on a baseball field. Ask students if they have a guess. (It is 90 feet) Next, have students solve the following problem: If there are three feet in a yard, how many yards are there between bases? (Answer: 30)

Go outside and measure 90 feet using a yardstick or tape measure. Have students estimate how many students lying head to toe it would take to reach 90 feet. Write down student estimates. Then, let students lie down head to toe to find out. Compare the results.



# MUSIC & PE

Voice • Rhythm • Gross motor activities

Teach students the rules of baseball and have them play a game! Challenge your staff to have a schoolwide teacher vs. student game.

Involve students in different spring training exercises: running the bases, pop fly drills, agility drills, running around cones, batting practice, etc.

Sing Buck O'Neil's song. Watch this clip before conducting it with your class. *Buck O'Neil singing June 2006 - YouTube*

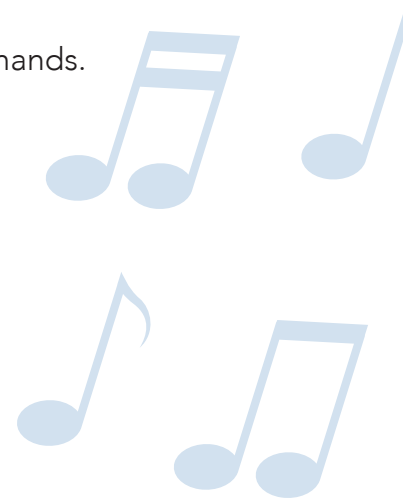
- Gather students in a large circle. If appropriate, have everyone join hands.
- Have your class repeat as you say/sing each phrase:



Teacher: **"The Greatest Thing"**  
Class repeats.

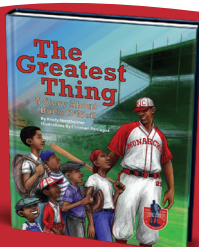
Teacher: **"In All My Life"**  
Class repeats.

Teacher: **"Is Loving You"**  
Class repeats.



Final Line: Teacher: **"Is... LOV...ING...YOUUUU"**

Sing *"Take Me Out to the Ballgame:"* Have students dress like they are going to a baseball game and then video your class singing the song!



# SCIENCE

Earth • Weather • Health • Living things

How is a baseball made? Show your class this video to find out:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usnZ\\_rdRo\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usnZ_rdRo_M)

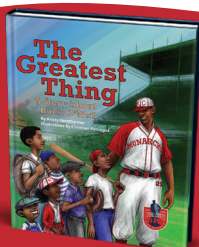
Before watching the video, have students predict how long it will take to create a baseball. Then see if they were right. Next, show students a baseball that has been cut in half, and examine the layers inside. Can your students see all the layers mentioned in the video above?

Have students make their own baseballs. They could make two different kinds. One could use rocks with socks tied around them like Buck's mom did in the book. The second baseball could be made with rubber bands. Using the scientific method, students can hypothesize which baseball can be thrown the farthest. If possible, demonstrate this activity outdoors by throwing each baseball and then measuring which traveled the farthest.



Corked baseball bats give batters an unfair advantage. Have students research why corked bats unfairly help players and then learn about the different kinds of wooden bats the MLB players use.

Read the book *From Wood to Baseball Bat* by Robin Nelson to learn about how a wooden bat is created. Give students a piece of wood and sandpaper. Let them see what it feels like to smooth out wood like they do when making baseball bats.



# SOCIAL EMOTIONAL

*Self-awareness • Relationships • Decision making*

Discuss how Buck O'Neil may have felt throughout the story. Make a list of the different emotions. Younger students can use the template to create emotion faces with popsicle sticks and act out the emotions Buck experienced. Older students can act out different parts of the story to experience empathy and compassion.



Create a bulletin board and title it “Compliment Catcher!”

With the baseball theme in mind, put up baseball mitts with students’ names on them. Have students write compliments to each other and attach them to the baseball mitts.

Discuss teamwork and what that might have meant to Buck O'Neil. Relate how teamwork can be used in the classroom. Create a classroom chant and sing when your class accomplishes tasks together.

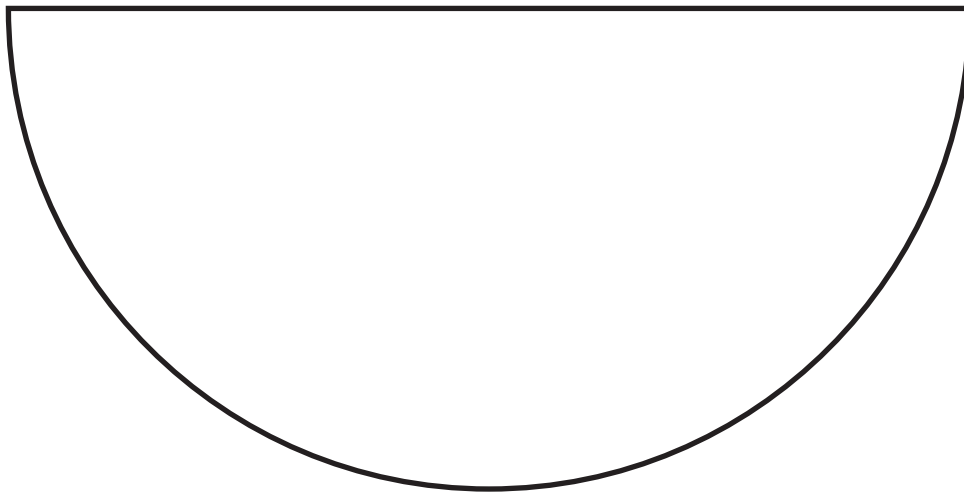
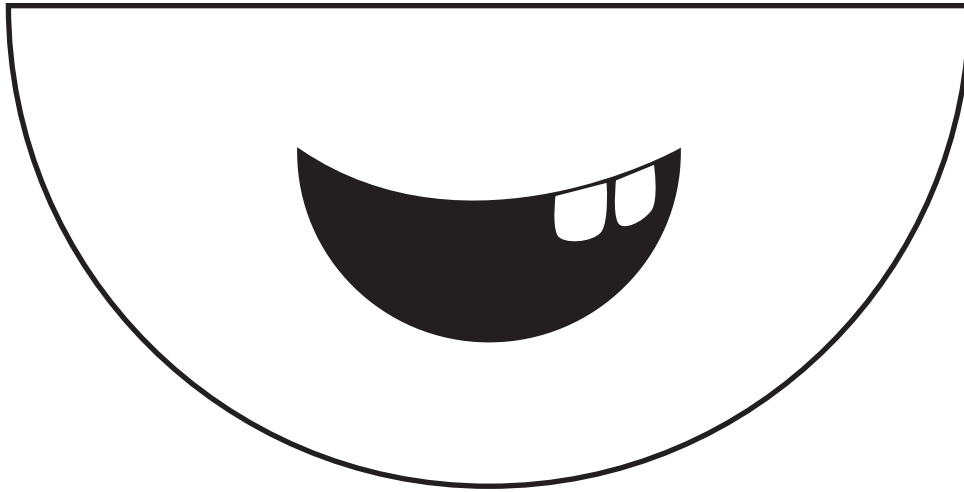
Discuss Buck O'Neil's accomplishments (big and small): baseball star, first African American coach in MLB, worked hard at school, kind, and loving. Talk about what kind of character traits are needed for such accomplishments: perseverance, grit, and determination. Create a “Wall of Fame” in your classroom. Put students’ pictures on the “Wall of Fame” and list students’ different successes throughout the year: an A on a math test, learning all the sight words, etc.

Create Emotion Faces. Begin with construction paper faces (template on page 11 or paper plates cut in half). Children may color and design their half-faces to express an emotion—happiness, surprise, worry, sadness, etc.—then glue the half-face to a popsicle stick. Children can create more than one emotion face, especially if they will be used during story time.



# EMOTION FACES

Cut out the half-face templates and attach them to popsicle sticks.

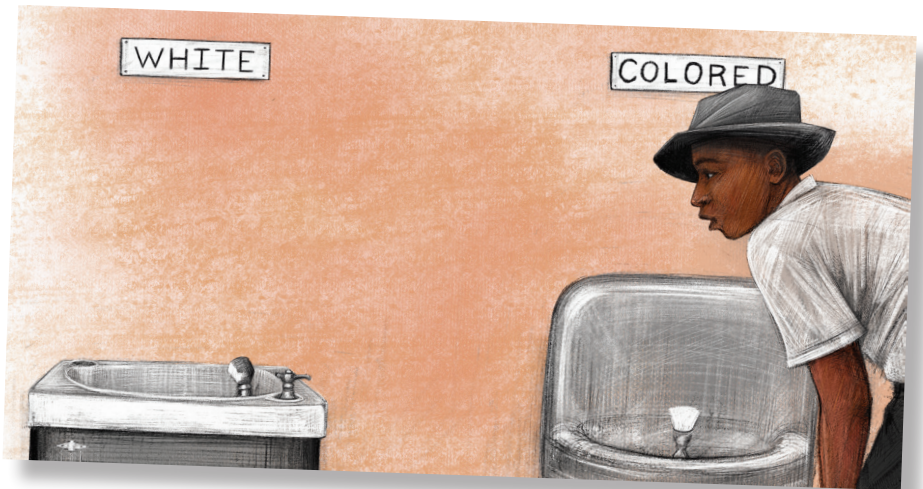


# SOCIAL STUDIES

Surroundings • Community

Define segregation. Discuss the unfair treatment Buck went through during the story. Then have your class recite the Buck O'Neil Pledge together. See template on page 13.

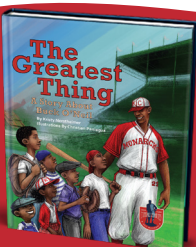
Have older students complete A Brief History Lesson using the template on page 14. Encourage them to create a personal statement committing to racial justice towards all.



Research the following Negro Leagues' players: Satchel Page, Rube Foster, Jackie Robinson, James "Cool Papa" Bell, and Josh Gibson. Make a video pretending to be a baseball announcer sharing facts about each player.

Make a list of all the things named after Buck O'Neil. Then draw pictures or make a virtual collage of the many things that honor him.

- **Field Trip:** Negro Leagues Baseball Museum 16 East 18th Street  
Kansas City, MO 64108  
[nlbm.com](http://nlbm.com)



# THE BUCK O'NEIL PLEDGE

I, \_\_\_\_\_, promise to work hard at school each and every day.

I promise to follow my dream because

I am capable and smart enough to

become whomever I wish to be.

I promise to keep Buck O'Neil's spirit alive by treating others with

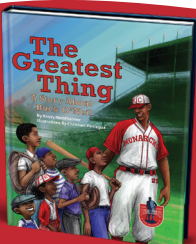
kindness and respect, regardless of what they look like

or the color of their skin.

And I promise to play baseball, watch baseball,

or learn more about baseball players

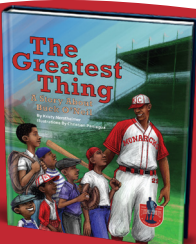
from the Negro Leagues.



# A BRIEF HISTORY LESSON

Racism, or the view that one race is superior to another, dates back to the beginning of slavery in the United States which was as early as the 1500s. After over 300 years of enslavement, the American Civil War was fought between the Northern and Southern states from 1861-1865 to prohibit slavery and free slaves in the South. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation declaring freedom for enslaved people in the Southern states. This act eventually led to victory for the Northern states, ending slavery and ending the Civil War. However, the struggles for black people were not over. Shortly after the Civil War ended, the "Jim Crow" laws were enacted. These laws kept black and white people segregated in public places until The Civil Rights Act of 1964 legally prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

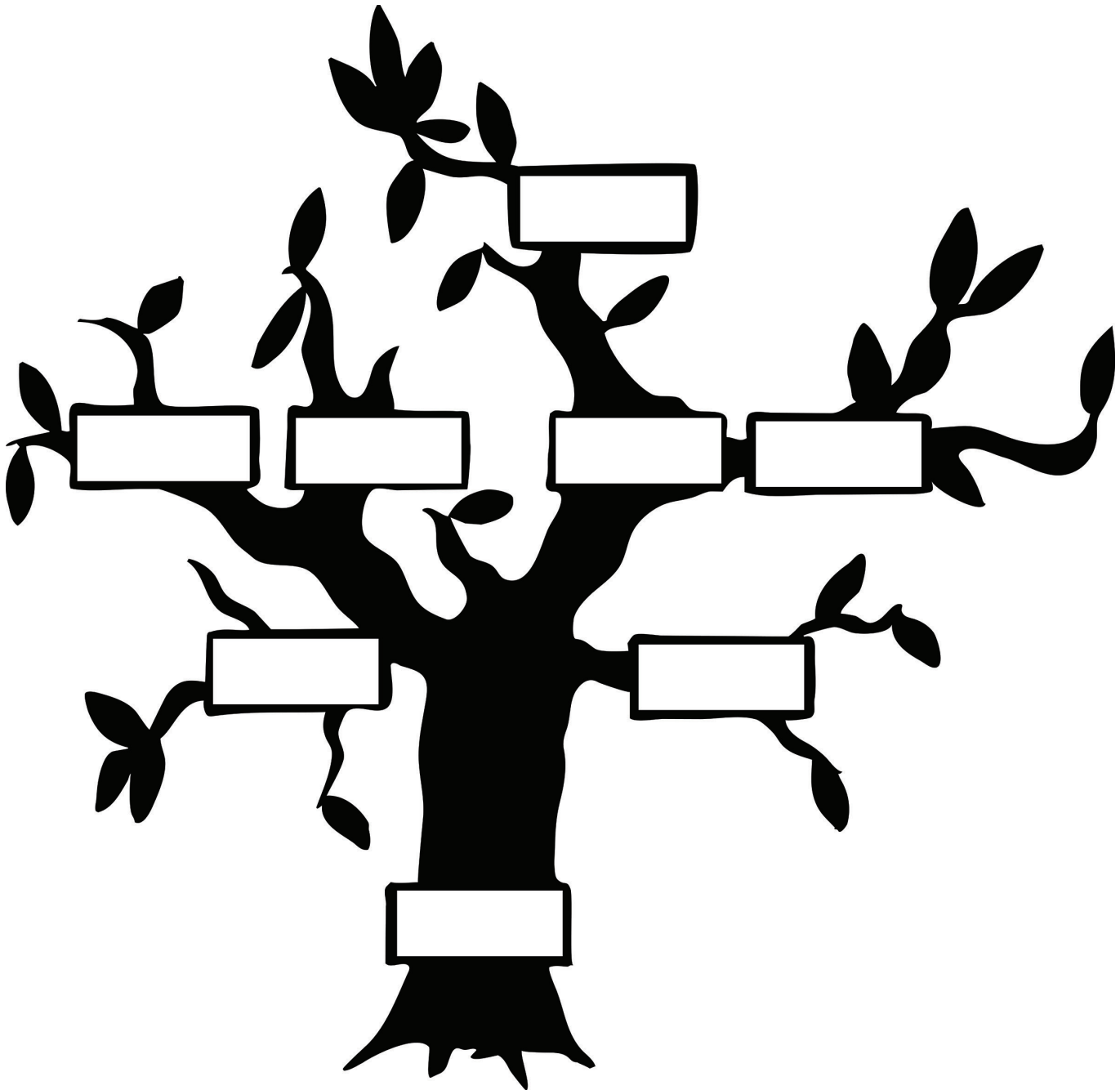
1. Calculate the number of years black people have suffered due to racism.
2. Buck grew up during the years of the Jim Crow laws. Research and list facts about these laws.
3. Buck O'Neil could not go to the high school in his neighborhood because he was black. How did that make him feel? Did that stop him from pursuing his dream? Why or why not?
4. Buck O'Neil played baseball in the Negro Leagues because baseball was segregated too. Who was the first African American to play in the Major Leagues? Describe what life may have been like during this period of time.
5. Why did the Negro Leagues begin to dissolve? Why did Buck O'Neil think the players from the Negro Leagues might be forgotten?
6. What did Buck O'Neil do so players would be remembered? Research facts about The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum.
7. What does it mean to be anti-racist?
8. Find out about your family's history during this time period. Share ways to be anti-racist.





# WHO IS IN YOUR FAMILY TREE?

Write the names of family members in the branch boxes.



# SPORT GLYPH

Have student fill in the picture on page 17 according to their answers to the questions below. When all the images are finished, display them in the room as a grouping.

- If you want to run bases on a baseball field, give your glyph orange cleats.
- If you prefer to walk, add purple tennis shoes to your picture.
- If you like to fly, add a bird to your picture.

## If you play sports, color the pants...

- Orange – soccer
- Yellow – basketball
- Black – American football
- Red – tennis
- Purple – swimming
- Green – dancing

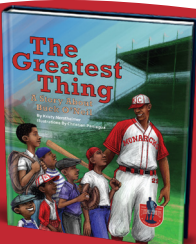
If you participate in more than one sport, choose your favorite, or make your pants multicolored. If you don't see your sport listed, choose a color for your pants that hasn't been used yet, and let us know what it is for.

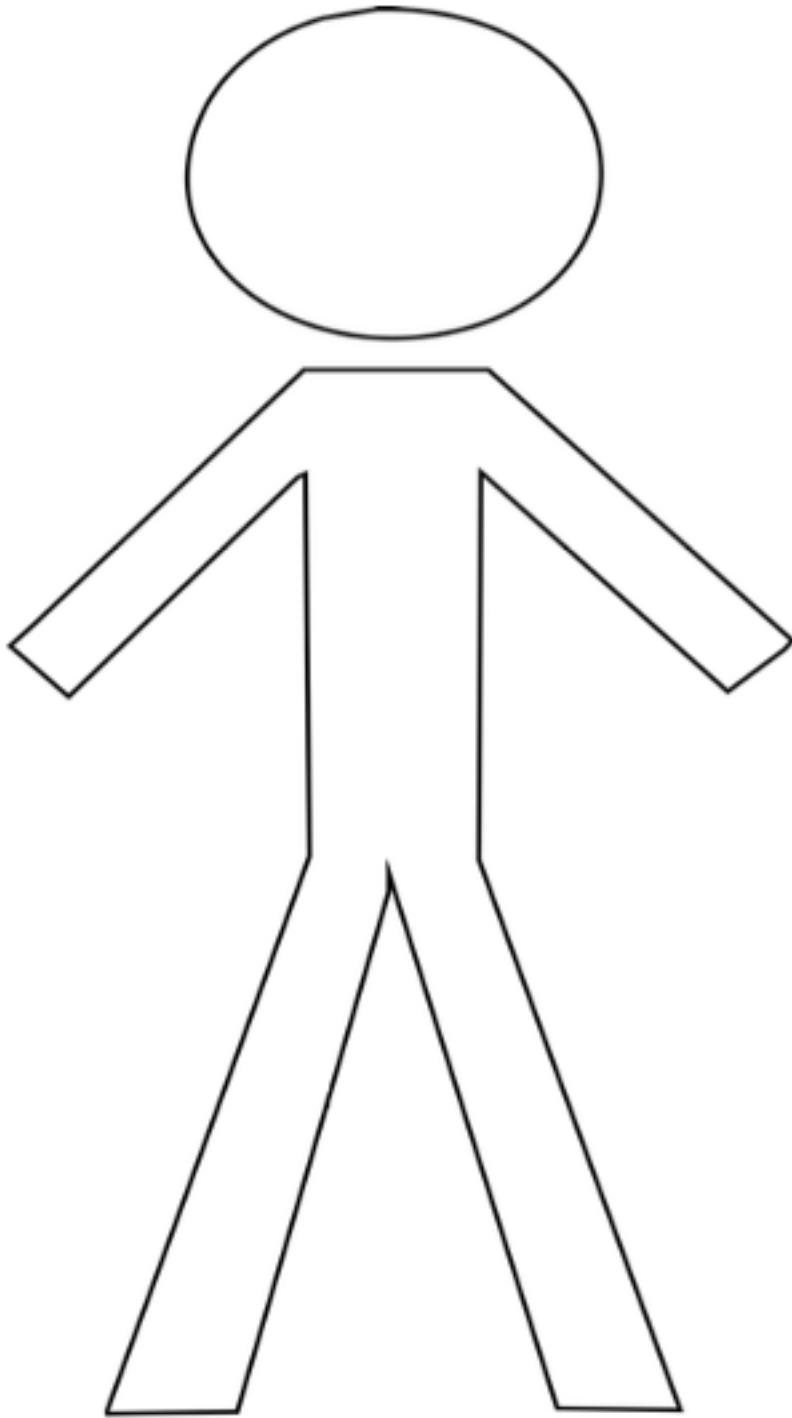
- If you have seen a professional baseball game, color the shirt red.
- If you have never seen a professional baseball game, color the shirt gray.
- If you want to meet a professional baseball player, give your glyph a blue ball cap.

## If you like to look at or read, add a book...

- Blue – fiction
- Brown – nonfiction

- If your room is clean right now, draw a baseball bat in the right hand.
- If your room is messy right now, draw a broom in the left hand.





# STATEMENT OF INTENT

Write 5-7 sentences comparing and contrasting what life was like during segregation compared to life today. Discuss racial inequalities that still exist today. List some solutions to these problems.

Write a personal statement of how you, one person, could commit to equity and justice.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, commit to working toward racial justice for all.

I can do this by:

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I may be one person, but one person can help change the world. Here is something I can do every day to honor my commitment:

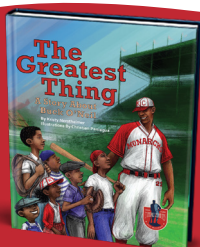
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Here is something I can encourage others to do for racial justice:

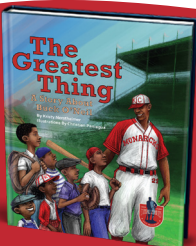
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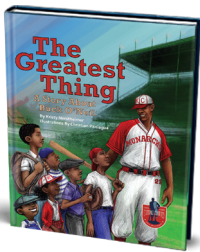


# NOTES

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# GUIDE INFO



## THE GREATEST THING: A STORY ABOUT BUCK O'NEIL

By Kristy Nerstheimer • Illustrator Christian Paniagua

*A portion of all book sales is given to Buck's nonprofit charity, First Base Enterprises and to the NLBM to continue his generous gifts for children.*

In the book you meet John Jordan 'Buck' O'Neil Jr., baseball player extraordinaire and eternal optimist. Follow him on his journey from childhood dreams, to playing baseball with the Kansas City Monarchs, to becoming the first African American coach in the major leagues. He is a baseball legend who showed the world how to live, love, and play ball.

The picture book biography dovetails with the 100th anniversary of the Negro National Leagues and is the debut in a series of children's sports biographies. MLB approved.

the little fig<sup>®</sup>, based in the Kansas City metro area, works with authors and illustrators around the world to produce books and products for preschool and early-elementary-school-aged children. The books, products, and services feature multiple languages, vibrant illustrations, curriculum guides, related music therapy compositions, and more. Our team takes pride in offering diverse books and products for children that are both entertaining and educational, teaching concepts and facts to facilitate learning in ways that spark each child's curiosity.

Email [sherry@thelittlefig.com](mailto:sherry@thelittlefig.com), call 913-226-6099, or visit [thelittlefig.com](http://thelittlefig.com) for more information.

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