

A Museum of Their Own



World Almanac for Kids

Willie Mays and Roy Campanella started out in the Negro Leagues and followed Jackie Robinson into the majors.

When the baseball that Leroy "Satchel" Paige and Josh Gibson autographed went up for sale several years ago, the staff at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum wanted to get their mitts on it.

And why wouldn't they? On the ball were the signatures of two of the greatest players in Negro Leagues history—in all of baseball history, for that matter.

But the small museum, devoted to telling the story of the Negro Leagues, struck out. The round relic fetched \$30,000, more than the museum's yearly budget to buy such items.

Now, though, the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum is about to hit a home run. Officials have unveiled an ambitious \$15 million project to expand the organization's collection and exhibition space.

The museum plans to buy an old building up the street from the current museum and to turn it into a library and research center. The vacant building is an old YMCA where the first Negro League was born. The building served the black community of Kansas City, Missouri, for decades.

"It was a place where people could go and get something to eat and not worry about segregation," Ray Doswell, the museum's curator, told *Weekly Reader Senior Edition*. "It's also where the Negro National League was founded."

First Negro League

Why did African Americans need a league of their own? They had to form their own leagues because they weren't allowed to play with white ballplayers.

The first Negro League got its start in 1920. That's when Andrew Rube Foster, a pitcher with the 1902 Cuban X-Giants and the Chicago Union Giants, decided that black players needed a baseball league.

Foster met with a group of African Americans at the YMCA in Kansas City. There they formed the Negro National League. The league flourished for a decade. "It is your league," Foster told fellow

African Americans. "Nurse it! Help it! Keep it!"

African Americans soon began playing in other Negro Leagues around the country. Traveling from town to town was a hard life for many. Because hotels in many cities did not allow blacks inside, the players slept on buses, in stadiums and along the sides of roads.

More often than not, the players had to face ethnic slurs and taunts. "Out on the field, there'd be some white folks in the stands," Satchel Paige wrote in his autobiography. "Some of them'd call you [hateful names], but most would cheer you."



Library of Congress

Jackie Robinson integrated baseball by playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

In 1947, black players finally got their shot in the majors. That's when Jackie Robinson, a veteran of the Negro Leagues, integrated baseball by playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Great Ballplayers

Many Negro League players became baseball's best. Henry Aaron, who played for several major-league teams, including the Atlanta Braves, began his career slugging home runs for the Indianapolis Clowns of the Negro American League. In 1974, he broke "Babe" Ruth's all-time home-run mark.

James "Cool Papa" Bell was one of the fastest men in baseball. During his career, he stole 173 bases. Paige used to say Bell was so quick that he could flip off a light switch in the bedroom and be across the room under the covers before the light went out.

Then there was Paige himself. After two decades in the Negro Leagues, Paige helped the Cleveland Indians win the American League pennant in 1948. At the time, Paige was a 42-year-old major-league "rookie" pitcher.

Unique History

The new research center at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum will give the public a chance to learn more about those players and hundreds of others who toiled in baseball obscurity.

There will be interactive exhibits and computers as well as memorabilia. The museum is already home to dozens of bats, balls, and uniforms and hundreds of photographs.

"There's a connection between baseball and African American history," Doswell told *Weekly Reader Senior Edition*. "We want to show young people what these guys went through just to play baseball. Many of these guys worked in the iron mills or on railroads until game time."

Vocabulary

exhibit

noun

definition: An exhibit is something that is shown to many people in one place. Museums are places where people come to see exhibits.

Spanish: exposición, exhibición, demostración

obscurity

noun

definition: the state or condition of being unknown.

As an artist, he was rescued from obscurity when one of his works turned up in a famous collection.

forms: obscurities

project

noun

definition: any activity that takes great effort or planning.

The building project will take five years to complete.

Spanish: proyecto

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the text, when did the first Negro League start?

- A. in 1902
- B. in 1920
- C. in 1947
- D. in 1948

2. In the text, the small museum can't afford to purchase an expensive autographed baseball. How is the problem solved?

- A. Visitors will be charged more to enter the museum.
- B. A \$15 million project will help the museum grow its collection.
- C. The museum will no longer include autographed baseballs in its collection.
- D. The baseball will be donated to the museum.

3. Read these two paragraphs from the text.

African Americans soon began playing in other Negro Leagues around the country. Traveling from town to town was a hard life for many. Because hotels in many cities did not allow blacks inside, the players slept on buses, in stadiums and along the sides of roads.

More often than not, the players had to face ethnic slurs and taunts. "Out on the field, there'd be some white folks in the stands," Satchel Paige wrote in his autobiography. "Some of them'd call you [hateful names], but most would cheer you."

What can you conclude about the Negro Leagues?

- A. Players in the Negro Leagues were always welcome on the field.
- B. Teams in the Negro Leagues played white baseball teams.
- C. Players in the Negro Leagues faced discrimination while playing baseball.
- D. Teams in the Negro Leagues were eventually allowed in hotels.

4. Read these sentences from the text.

Now, though, the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum is about to hit a home run. Officials have unveiled an ambitious \$15 million project to expand the organization's collection and exhibition space.

What does the author mean by stating that "the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum is about to hit a home run"?

- A. Many African American players were famous home-run hitters.
- B. The museum is enlarging its collection and adding space.
- C. The old YMCA building is part of the Negro Leagues' history.
- D. Many African Americans in baseball once faced segregation.

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A. Some of baseball's best players were in the Negro League.
- B. The Negro League began in 1920 because African Americans weren't allowed to play with white baseball players.
- C. The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum is expanding to better tell the story of African Americans in baseball.
- D. The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum is home to many different kinds of memorabilia.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

The vacant building is an old YMCA where the first Negro League was born. The building served the black community of Kansas City, Missouri, for decades.

As used in these sentences, what does the word "**vacant**" mean?

- A. occupied
- B. dirty
- C. blank
- D. empty

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

_____ of remaining unused, the YMCA building will now be part of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum.

- A. Yet
- B. But
- C. Otherwise
- D. Instead

8. Based on the text, why is Henry Aaron included in the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum?

9. What important effect did Jackie Robinson have on African Americans in baseball?
Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. The museum staff is probably excited about its new building, because
 - A. it will have room to display the autographed baseball.
 - B. it got \$15 million to buy the building.
 - C. it is the exact building where Negro Leagues began.
 - D. the vacant building was once a YMCA.

2. Examples of figurative language in this passage include all the following except
 - A. black players finally got their shot in the majors.
 - B. Nurse it!
 - C. the vacant building is an old YMCA.
 - D. the small museum struck out.

3. The reason African Americans were not allowed to play with white players was
 - A. they weren't as athletic as white players.
 - B. that there were too few hotels that they could stay in.
 - C. that they were too old.
 - D. due to the practice of segregation.

4. After baseball became integrated, which of the following records were made:
 - A. Satchel Paige was probably the oldest major-league rookie.
 - B. "Cool Papa" Bell stole 173 bases.
 - C. Henry Aaron broke Babe Ruth's homerun record.
 - D. all of the above

5. Why would it be difficult to play baseball if after working in the iron mills or on railroads until game time?