

Google Arts & Culture

Learn Together: Meet Some of the Black Athletes Who Shaped Sports



Using the lesson plan and Google Arts & Culture resources

This lesson plan is designed to support you as you explore Google Arts & Culture stories and exhibits related to the lesson topic. The images you will see here are just a sample of the media—texts, images, audio, and video—available to you on the Google Arts & Culture website. A parent or teacher might be guiding you through the lesson, or you might choose to complete it on your own.

All you need to access the lesson is an internet connection and a web browser. You may want to take notes, whether you do that digitally or with paper and pen.

The lesson plan has an **introduction**, which will describe the topic and provide some background information that will help you understand what you are seeing, hearing, and reading. Then the lesson will take you on a journey from one **Story** to another, fill in some details along the way, and pose **questions** that will help you focus on important ideas. Some lesson plans include a **project** related to the lesson topic. All end with a **quiz** and some **ideas for exploring the topic further**.

The lesson plan includes **questions** about the main stories and exhibits, and there is also a **quiz**. You will want to write answers to the questions in a notebook or on a piece of paper. Then you can check all your answers when you've finished the lesson.

Resources on the Google Arts & Culture website include Themes, Stories, Museum Views, items, and images.

- ❖ **Themes** bring together stories, exhibits, collections, images, audio, and video files that relate to a topic.
- ❖ In a **Story**, clicking on the arrow on the right side of a slide will move you forward. The arrow on the left side takes you back. Sometimes, clicking on the right arrow will zoom you in on an image. Just keep clicking to keep moving forward. Audio and videos on slides will play automatically. Clicking on an image title will take you to a page with more information about it.
- ❖ In **Museum Views**, you move through a 3D space. Click to move forward. Click, hold, and move the cursor left or right to turn.
- ❖ An **item** will take you to an individual **image**, where you can zoom in and sometimes read more about the artefact.



In this lesson, you will learn about:

- ❖ the history of the participation of Black athletes in American sports.
- ❖ how Black athletes have been remembered and honored.
- ❖ the challenges Black male and female athletes have faced.
- ❖ specific Black athletes that changed the course of American sports.

You will:

- ❖ view some stories and exhibits about important Black athletes in American sports.
- ❖ answer some questions about what you have seen and read.

This lesson will take **30–45 minutes** to complete.



15c Javelin stamp, United States Postal Service 1979-09-05
Smithsonian's National Postal Museum

Learn Together: Black Athletes Who Shaped Sports

Sporting events have played a large role in American society, especially over the past century. Sports teach teamwork and good sportsmanship, and allow for community engagement. However, in the earlier days of professional sports, the most oppressed populations were often overlooked or cast out. But these athletes did not simply go away or leave their passion for the games behind. Instead, they worked hard to prove themselves, and eventually the major leagues became integrated.

Like many other American institutions, sports have been a reflection of, and stimulus for, racial progress in American society. As more people saw the skills Black athletes could bring to sports, the more they realized how unfair and wrong racial discrimination is. And as more major league teams began to integrate, the more society itself began to integrate. Because of the hard work and ability of many Black athletes, both male and female, most American sports now better reflect the diversity of the United States.

As you view the exhibits and stories in this lesson, think about these questions:

- ❖ What led many major sports leagues and teams to begin integration?
- ❖ How does the history of Black athletes show how sports can act as an impetus for social change?
- ❖ What challenges have Black athletes faced, and how did they overcome those challenges?

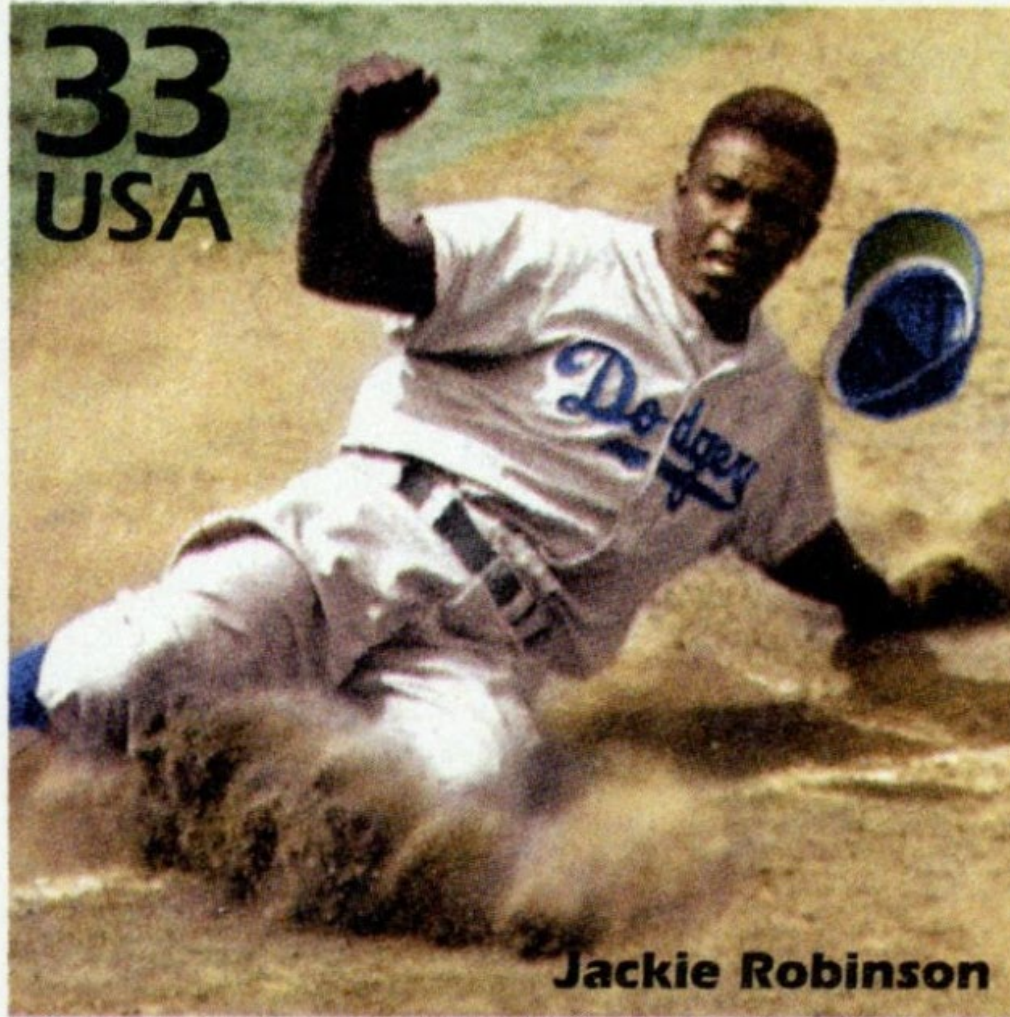
African Americans in Sports – The Black Experience on Stamps

In the United States, one way to honor people who have contributed to society or made a difference in some way is to feature them on commemorative stamps. This practice also allows people to collect stamps and remember the people who are highlighted on them. Although Black Americans have been active in sports since the early twentieth century, it was not until the late 1970s that the first stamp was printed featuring a Black athlete.

Click [here](#) to learn about how and when Black athletes have been celebrated on commemorative postage.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. How did Black athletes contribute to the Olympic Games on behalf of the United States?
2. Why was Jesse Owens's victory at the 1936 Olympics significant enough to be remembered on a stamp?
3. How did Black athletes use their status to promote social justice?





Game Changers

While it was difficult for Black male athletes to receive recognition for their achievements, it was even harder for Black female athletes to participate in major sporting events. For example, two Black women, Louise Stokes and Tidye Pickett, qualified to participate in the track and field events in the 1932 Olympics, but were not permitted to attend due to their race. This discrimination did not stop women of all races from fighting for their legal rights to compete in sports.

Click [here](#) to learn about the history of women in sports.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What was the purpose of Title IX of the Education Amendments?
2. How did Wilma Robinson change people's perceptions of Black women in sports?
3. Why were Black colleges and universities more accepting of women in sports than white institutions?

To learn about the tennis player Serena Williams, click [here](#).



The New Face of Baseball

Jackie Robinson became the first athlete of color in major league baseball when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. Once the color barrier was broken, many other major league teams began recruiting Black and Latino players. Black and Latino fans around the country, and in Hispanic countries, were eager to see themselves represented in the classic American pastime.

Click [here](#) to learn about the integration of major league baseball.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. How were Cuban and Black baseball players connected?
2. Why was Osvaldo Salas an ideal photographer to capture the integration of baseball?
3. Why was the integration of major league baseball important for American society at the time?

Joe Louis, Outside the Ring

Joe Louis was the world heavyweight boxing champion from 1937 until his temporary retirement in 1949. His success in boxing made him the first Black athlete to be admired by white people, but his generosity and philanthropy were what made so many people look up to him. Louis earned almost \$5 million in his boxing career but donated nearly all of it or spent it on endeavors to help local Black communities.

Click [here](#) to learn about the legacy of Joe Louis's philanthropy.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. How did Louis make history as a golfer?
2. Why was it significant for Louis to be shopping at a department store on Chicago's south side?
3. How did Louis use his fame and wealth to help others?



Quiz

Read the questions and write your answer in your notebook or on a piece of paper.

1. How are Black American athletes remembered and honored aside from being featured on stamps?
2. Why is Jackie Robinson an important figure among Black athletes?
3. How has Title IX impacted the participation of girls in sports?
4. What challenges do women and girls still face when it comes to sports?
5. Why did the United States and Cuba have a strong relationship when it came to baseball?
6. Why was the New York Giants' all-Black outfield a significant milestone?
7. Why was Joe Louis commemorated on a US stamp?
8. How did Joe Louis help the Black community through entrepreneurship?

Explore Further

This lesson has given you some vocabulary to talk about Black athletes in the United States. It has also introduced you to some basic ideas that are relevant to this topic. To learn about other aspects of Black history and culture, click [here](#).



It's Your Turn!

In this lesson, you learned about the history of Black athletes in the United States. Now it's your turn to do something. Here are some ideas for projects that you can do at home or in the classroom.

- ❖ Choose a Black athlete who is active in sports today. Do some research on this athlete and think about how the Black athletes that came before paved the way for the athlete you chose. Create a slideshow or timeline that shows how the athlete you chose followed in the footsteps of other Black athletes.
- ❖ Create a design for a stamp for a Black athlete you did not see featured on a stamp in this lesson. Write a few sentences that explain your design and why you feel this athlete should be featured on a stamp.
- ❖ Think of another way we can commemorate Black athletes who changed history, such as a poster or a work of art. Create that commemoration to a Black athlete from this lesson who inspired you.

Venus and Serena Williams, Top: Andrees Latif/Reuters; Bottom: Ian Waldie/Reuters
2001-09-03, LIFE Photo Collection

Answers

African Americans in Sports – The Black Experience on Stamps

1. Black athletes have set records and scored victories in boxing, javelin throwing, and track and field.
2. Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics. Because he was a Black man competing in Germany, his achievements showed that Hitler's beliefs of racial superiority were false at a pivotal time in Germany.
3. Because Black athletes were well known enough to be honored on stamps, they had more of a voice in society than other Black Americans at the time. Joe Louis used his status to fight against Jim Crow laws. Arthur Ashe fought against discrimination. Jackie Robinson worked for the NAACP and fought against all color barriers.

Game Changers

1. Title IX prohibited discrimination based on gender in educational programs or activities that receive financial aid, which includes sports.
2. Wilma Robinson overcame polio to eventually win the gold medal in track and field at the Olympics. Because her victory was broadcast on television, people could see that Black women were as capable as anyone else at excelling in sports.
3. Because Black male athletes faced discrimination based on their race, they most likely understood that discrimination against women was equally unfair. They also saw sports as a way to build community and promote leadership skills.

The New Face of Baseball

1. The Black baseball leagues would often recruit Cuban players prior to integration.
2. Salas was from Cuba and understood the desire people in his home country had to see Latino and Black baseball players. Because he worked for Spanish-language publications, he was able to distribute his photographs to the people who wanted to see them most.
3. Because baseball experienced its "golden age" after the integration of the major league, people could see that Black and Latino baseball players were not inferior to white players and were often better than them.

Joe Louis, Outside the Ring

1. He was the first Black golfer to play in the PGA.
2. The picture of Louis shopping at a department store on Chicago's south side showed that supporting local businesses was important to him.
3. Louis mentored Black children, found businesses that were popular in Black communities, and fought in World War II.

Answers

Quiz

1. Some Black American athletes are remembered by having stadiums named after them, sculptures built in their honor, and streets named after them.
2. Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier by being the first Black athlete to play in major league baseball.
3. Participation of girls in sports has increased ten times, and participation of women in college sports has increased six times.
4. Sports teams for women and girls still often have more trouble securing the correct equipment and facilities than sports teams for men and boys do. They also often do not have access to coaches of equal caliber to coaches of men's teams and do not receive as much publicity as men's sports teams.
5. American players would often travel to Cuba in the winter to play baseball since it was warmer there, and Cuban players were recruited to teams in the Black leagues and formed their own leagues in the United States as well.
6. Prior to the all-Black outfield, there was an unwritten rule that a certain number of Black players could not be on the field at the same time. The all-Black outfield was significant because it showed that the Giants were not afraid to show the team's diversity and integration.
7. Joe Louis was commemorated on a US stamp honoring him for his skills in boxing as well as his philanthropic efforts.
8. Louis founded companies that supplied products, such as milk, to Black grocery stores and local schools.

33c Satchel Paige stamp (Jul 6, 2000), US Postal Service
Smithsonian's National Postal Museum

