

Scott Foresman  
**Reading**

Leveled Reader 124A

**Great Talents: The  
Story of Negro  
League Baseball**  
by Mark Spann

Genre: Photo Essay  
Level: Easy

Scott Foresman



# GREAT TALENTS

The Story of

**NEGRO  
LEAGUE  
BASEBALL**

by  
**Mark Spann**

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Who is the greatest home-run hitter in baseball?

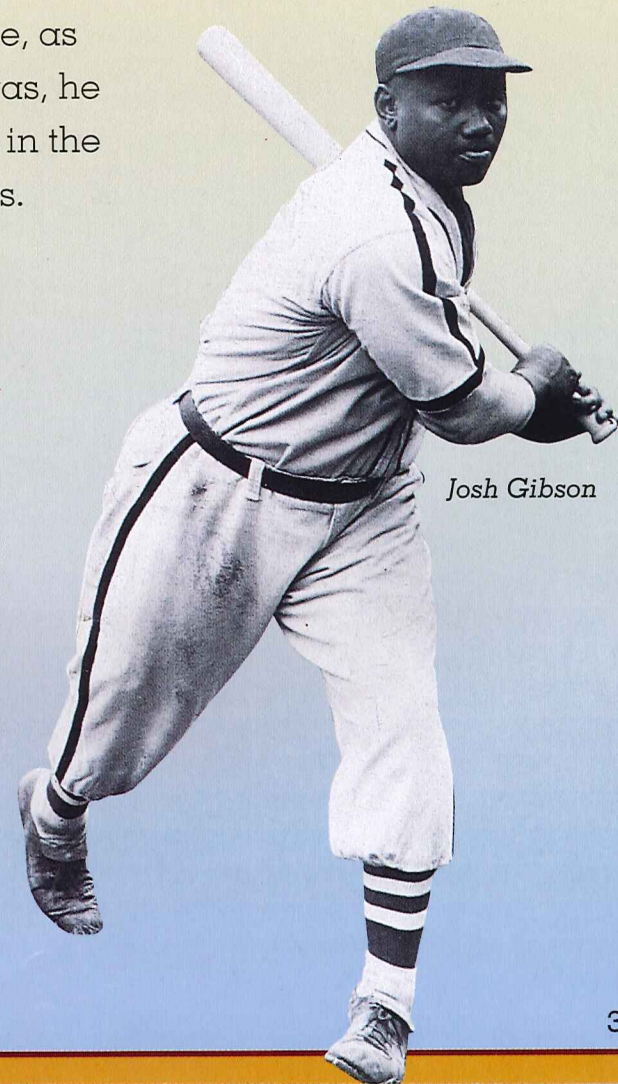
You might say Babe Ruth. He hit 714 home runs. You might say Hank Aaron. He was the only major league player to break Ruth's record. Aaron hit 755 home runs in his career. Or you might say Mark McGwire. He holds the major league record for the most home runs in one season.

From left to right:  
Hank Aaron,  
Babe Ruth,  
Mark McGwire



But the greatest home run hitter was an African American catcher. His name was Josh Gibson. He hit 962 home runs in all.

Have you ever heard of Josh Gibson? Most people haven't. That's because, as great as he was, he never played in the major leagues.





Before 1947, African Americans played baseball in their own leagues. They were called the Negro Leagues.

Josh Gibson was just one of their many talented players.

There was a time in this country when some people thought that skin color made us different from each other. People who did not have the same skin color could not do things together. They could not even play baseball together.

Therefore, African Americans were cut from the regular teams.



It wasn't that way when the game began.

Baseball is an old game. People were playing it 150 years ago. Soldiers played during the Civil War.

Later, teams formed in the big cities. Anyone who was talented enough to make the team could play.

Many teams included African Americans. But some people did not like this idea. Soon African Americans were cut from all of the teams.

When this happened, the major leagues lost many valuable players. And African Americans lost the chance to play big league baseball.



The African American players did not let that stop them. They organized teams of their own.

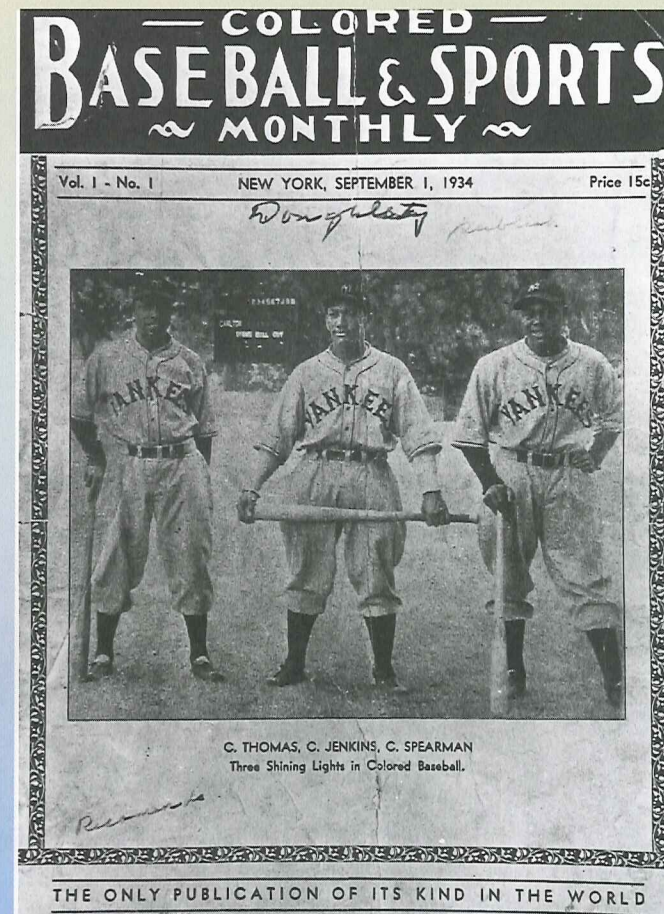
The first such team was the Cuban Giants, from New York. Frank P. Thompson started the team in 1885. He was a waiter at a hotel. Most of the other players were waiters who worked with him.

*Jud Wilson of the Philadelphia Stars scores a run against the New York Black Yankees, c. 1936-1937.*



The Cuban Giants played against the best teams in New York. They won most of their games.

At the same time, teams were forming in other cities. The teams played against each other.





In 1920, Rube Foster formed the Negro National League. A few years later, the Negro American League came along. These were the biggest Negro Leagues.

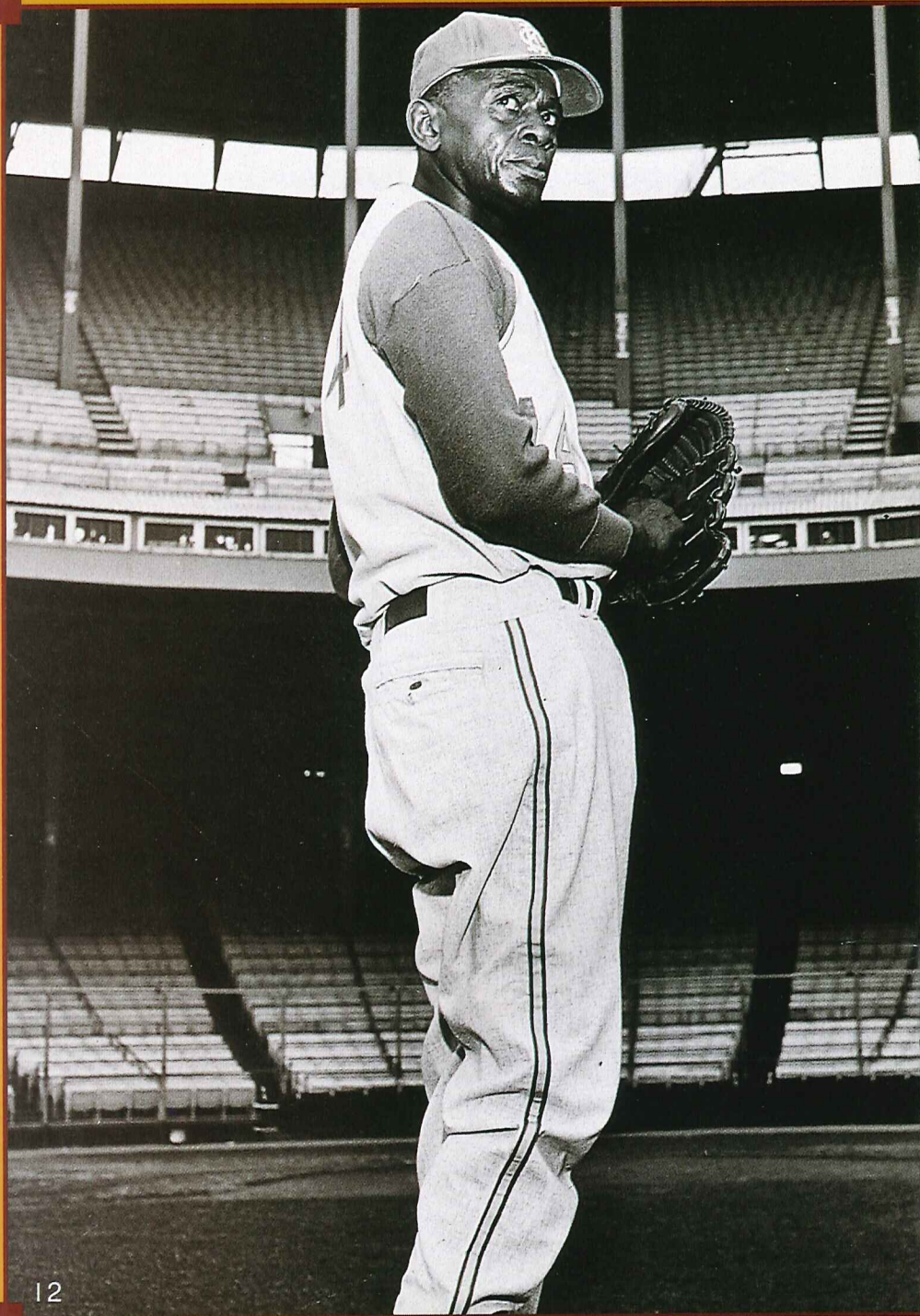
Many of the teams had colorful names. These were names like the New York Black Yankees, the Atlanta Black Crackers, and the Page Fence Giants. They played all over the country. Often, they used major league ball parks.

The Negro Leagues had their own World Series. They also had an all-star game. It attracted huge crowds. Sometimes the crowds at those games were larger than the crowds at major league games. People who watched knew the Negro Leagues had many valuable players.

*The New York Black Yankees*







### *Satchel Paige*



A pitcher named Satchel Paige was one of the most popular and valuable players in the Negro Leagues.

Paige later played in the major leagues too. Dizzy Dean, who was one of the best pitchers of all time, once said that he was not nearly as good as Satchel Paige.

Paige was twenty years old when he began playing baseball. He was tall and skinny. But he threw a baseball harder and faster than anyone else. There was always a big crowd at the game if Satchel Paige was pitching.

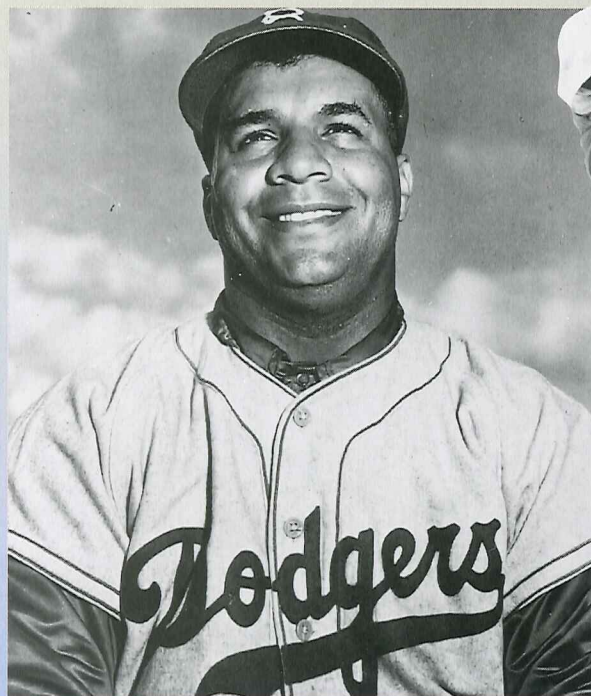


In the 1940s Paige and his all-star team played all over the country. They beat many major league teams.

In every city people saw how good the Negro League players were.

They began to think that it was time for these valuable players to play in the major leagues.

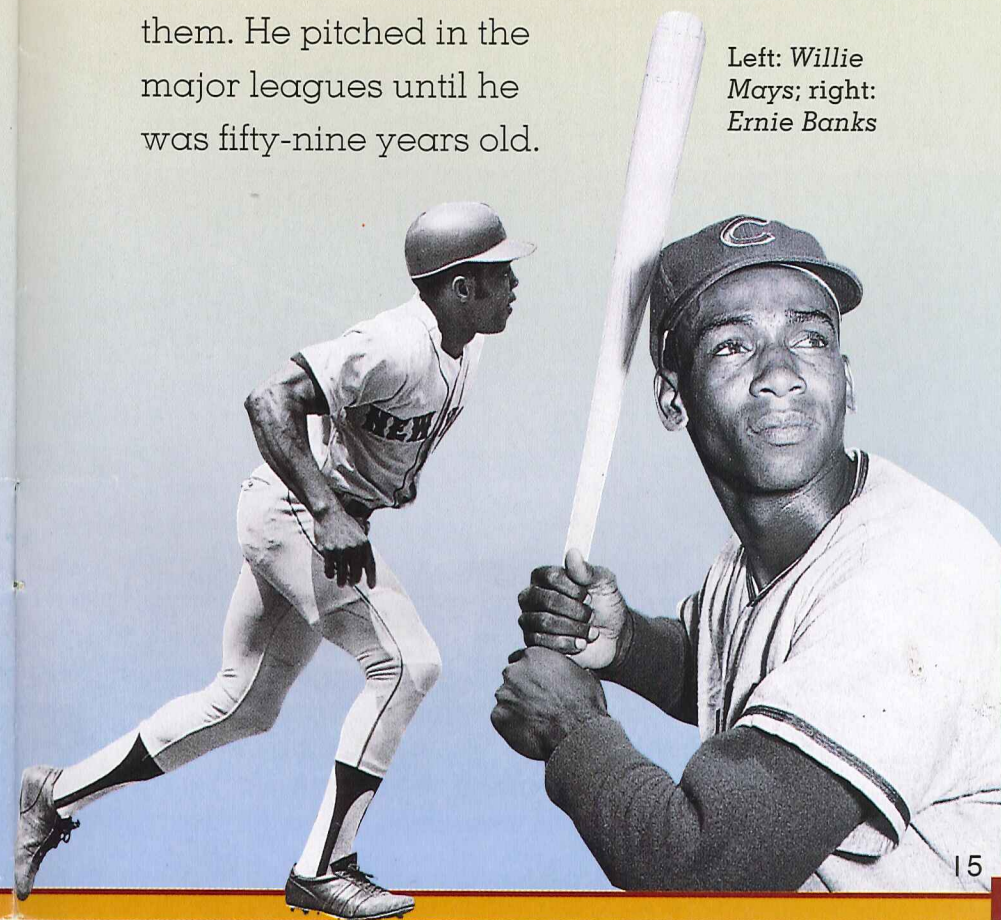
Left: Roy Campanella; right: Jackie Robinson



In 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first African American in the major leagues. Soon others, such as Willie Mays and Ernie Banks were asked to join.

Satchel Paige was invited even though he was in his forties at the time. Paige was so good that many teams wanted him to play for them. He pitched in the major leagues until he was fifty-nine years old.

Left: Willie Mays; right: Ernie Banks





The Negro Leagues were less popular once the major leagues allowed African Americans to play. The last teams stopped playing in 1960.

Negro Leagues were an important part of baseball for over sixty years. They gave African Americans the chance to play the game. They also gave baseball some of its greatest players.

*Josh Gibson*



The Leveled Readers are easy-to-read selections that give children additional reading experiences with tested vocabulary and targeted comprehension skills, as well as a variety of literary genres.

**Skills Reinforced in This Book:**

**Vocabulary:** *cut, valuable*

**Comprehension Skill:** Cause and Effect

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