Satchel
The Life and Times of an American Legend
Written by Larry Tye

• A 2009 New York Times Notable Book
• A 2009 CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title

“It takes nothing away from Jackie Robinson to note, as Larry Tye does in this important new book, that Satchel Paige—he of a fastball of historic proportions—is an overlooked pioneer in the integration of baseball, and of America itself. This engaging biography sheds light not only on Paige but on the game and the country he helped change forever.”

—Jon Meacham, Pulitzer-Prize winning author of American Lion

Satchel is a story of triumph along with tragedy. Leroy “Satchel” Paige pitched baseballs so hard and fast that his catchers had to cushion their gloves with beefsteaks, with control so pinpoint he could toss nine of 10 pitches directly over a matchbook placed on home plate. Yet Satchel was born in 1906 in Alabama, a time and place where his skin color prevented him from fully participating in society or the game he played. Banished like all blacks then from the all-white Major Leagues, he spent his prime pitching in the shadow world of the Negro Leagues.

This book, then, is a biography of two American icons—Satchel Paige and Jim Crow. It tells the story of Jim Crow racial segregation through the story of strikeout king Satchel Paige, whose career and life were shaped by an insidious system that separated the races everywhere from schoolyards to buses to ball fields. Those stories start when Satchel did, in 1906, and continue nearly a full century until his death in 1982. Satchel blends meticulous historical research and hundreds of interviews into a compelling narrative. It is a book for those who love tales of baseball, of race, or of the American dream.

Teachers and students will find Satchel an enormously useful teaching tool. His life—its highs along with lows—opens opportunities for research, analysis, and discussion.
• note to teachers

Larry Tye’s *Satchel* offers a lens into 20th-Century America. It explores race, geography, and history. It takes us deep into the urban cultures of Chicago and Pittsburgh, Mobile and Kansas City, and follows Satchel’s African American barnstorming teams onto farms and into small towns across rural America. Students will see how a biographer captures an enigmatic, historically important figure from our past. Racism comes to life in these pages, along with successful bids to uproot it. We watch relationships evolve between blacks and white, players and fans, men and women, modernists and traditionalists. It a book appropriate for students from middle school through graduate school.

There is no better way to follow the ups and downs of blacks and whites in America than in the controlled setting of a baseball diamond. And what better way to bring alive the story of race than through the singular lens of America’s most gifted, engaging, and enduring black ballplayer? Just as *Seabiscuit* was about more than a heroic race horse—it was the story of depression era America and the triumph of hope—so *Satchel* shows us the full sweep not just of black baseball but of Jim Crow America.

• about the book

Satchel’s story is larger-than-life. He learned to pitch in reform school. When he played years later in Venezuela, crowd members at first threatened him with poison darts, then shared their meal of bug meat and asked for his autograph when one of them recognized him as the great Satchel Paige. His salary in his best years at least equaled the President’s, which is how he could afford forty tailor-made suits, thirty pairs of custom-made shoes with pearls in the toes, underwear festooned with flowers, and a personal valet. And no other player in history—not even the great Babe Ruth—was threatened with a firing squad if he lost the way Satchel said he was in 1937, when Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo summoned him to the island nation to pitch in a critical series.

This book rewrites our history of the integration of baseball, with Satchel Paige playing at least as critical a role as Jackie Robinson. The truth is that Satchel had been hacking away at Jim Crow long before the world heard of Jackie. Satchel never was a modern militant, waging war over every slight, but he brought a spotlight to the Negro Leagues. He pushed to be paid a wage commensurate with his drawing power, in the process raising the wages of his teammates. He proved that black fans would fill ballparks, even when those parks had concrete seats and makeshift walls, and that white fans, too, would turn out to see black superstars. Satchel pitched so brilliantly, especially when his teams were beating the best of the white big leaguers, that fans, sportswriters, and big league owners like Brooklyn’s Branch Rickey could not help but notice. If Jackie Robinson was the father of equal opportunity in baseball, Satchel Paige was the grandfather.

• about the author

**LARRY TYE** was a prize-winning journalist at *The Boston Globe* and a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. An avid baseball fan, Tye now runs a Boston-based training program for medical journalists. He is the author of *The Father of Spin, Home Lands*, and *Rising from the Rails*, and co-author, with Kitty Dukakis, of *Shock*.
teaching ideas

“Preface”

1. Have students discuss what inspired Larry Tye to write Satchel. What legends prompted his interest in this baseball legend? (See Class Activities #3 for a corresponding project).

2. Discuss the process of research. Explain the difference between primary and secondary sources. Have students conduct library research on an event from the recent past. Then, have students conduct interview projects in which they talk to a parent/grandparent/local resident about the same event. Discuss the differences in the sources.

3. In “Preface” ix, Tye discusses his search for Satchel’s age. Why was this search difficult? Why was this search important?

4. Several terms from “Preface” recur throughout the text. Have students define and discuss “Jim Crow,” “Uncle Tom,” and “Stepin Fetchit.” Do these terms still have relevance today? What words have taken their places? Do the attitudes underlying these phrases still ring true? Have students discuss with parents/older adults the realities of these terms.

5. In “Preface” xi, the text compares Satchel to A. Philip Randolph, W.E.B. Du Bois, and other civil rights leaders. In what way(s) is Satchel like these men? In what way(s) is he different?

“Chronology”

1. Use the “Chronology” to construct a timeline of American and world history. What major world events took place during Satchel’s life? How did they affect his life?

2. Have students construct timelines of their own lives. What significant personal and world events intersect?

“Author’s Note”

1. Why was Tye’s “tactical decision” necessary?

2. What matters of style does Tye address in this note? Use the “Author’s Note” as a springboard to discussions of style and voice in student writing.

“Coming Alive”

1. Have students describe the Mobile, Alabama, of Satchel’s youth.

2. Have students describe Satchel’s family. What were the family relationships and how did they impact Satchel’s life? What were the attitudes of Mobile? How did these impact Satchel as he was growing up?

3. Have students research the Mobile Bay hurricane. Use that hurricane to prompt a research study of hurricanes in the United States.

4. Discuss the history of race in Mobile (pp. 4-6). How does race in this city parallel or differ from the racial history of America? Or the Deep South?

5. Use Maya Angelou’s “My Arkansas” to discuss the lingering racism of American society.

6. Have students create a family tree for Satchel. Also have students create family trees of their own. (Be careful of strained and unclear family relationships.)

7. How did “Satchel” get his nickname? Why might there be differing versions of this and other stories of Satchel’s life?

8. Have students trace Satchel’s early development as a baseball player.

9. Discuss Mount Meigs Reform School. What was its purpose? Out of what movement did it arise? How did it impact Satchel’s life?
teaching ideas (continued)

“Blackball”
1. What was Alex Herman’s role in Satchel’s life? Discuss the concept and role of mentors. Ask your students to identify a mentor in their lives. Encourage students to establish mentor relationships through local groups that provide such services.
2. How did Satchel respond to making money?
3. Discuss the history of race in baseball. How is race viewed differently today than it was when Satchel was playing baseball? Are there still similarities?
4. Have students discuss the differences between the White and Negro Leagues.
5. What did baseball mean to black society? Have students describe a typical Negro League game. What elements were different from white baseball?
6. Discuss Satchel’s relationships with his managers and the other players. What might have motivated Satchel’s separation from his teammates?

“The Glory Trail”
1. Who was Janet Howard? Connect her to Satchel.
2. Why are Satchel’s statistics difficult to know? How did the realities of Satchel’s career mask or enhance his real results?
3. How did baseball reporters help clear the path for integrated baseball? Have students examine the role of the press in social change. Use the press’s role in integrating baseball as a starting point.

“The Game in Black and White”
1. What unique opportunity did Neil Churchill give Satchel? Why did this opportunity allow Satchel to “crack another little chink in Jim Crow”?
2. Discuss the diversity of venues that this chapter explores. Why/how did Satchel play in so many settings?
3. How did “barnstorming” give black players a chance to compare their skills to whites?
4. How did these famous barnstorming white players match up to Satchel’s pitching?

“South of the Border”
1. What “liberties” did playing south of the border give black athletes?
2. Discuss Satchel’s shoulder injury. How did it happen? What were its repercussions? How did Satchel recover?
3. In Puerto Rico, Satchel met Lucy. Discuss their meeting. How does the story of their marriage portray Satchel? How did he justify his infidelities? How do these stories alter Satchel’s image?

“South of the Border”
1. Discuss the significance of Satchel’s purchase of a home in Kansas City.
2. Why is Satchel’s advice to young players (p. 156) ironic?
“Master of the Manor”
1. What happened to Satchel’s relationships with Janet and Lucy?
2. Discuss Satchel’s relationship with Lahoma Jean Brown. How was it different from the others?
3. In this chapter, what signs of maturity begin to show in Satchel’s life?

“Baseball’s Great Experiment”
1. Why was Jackie Robinson a “better” choice for breaking baseball’s color barrier than Satchel?
2. Why did Satchel have “little use” for Robinson (p. 181)?
3. Where does the integration of baseball fit in the timeline of racial equality in America?

“An Opening at Last”
1. Who gave Satchel his entry into the white majors?
2. For how long had Satchel pitched before he got his first Major League contract?
3. How did Satchel’s first Major League season go?
4. Discuss the mix-ups involved in Satchel’s marriage to Lahoma. How are they typical of Satchel’s life?
5. How many children did Satchel have?
6. Satchel still holds the record for oldest pitcher to ever throw a complete game. At what age did he pitch?
7. Satchel appeared in his last Major League game at what age (a record also)?

“Maybe I’ll Pitch Forever”
1. Which of Satchel’s feats make him a legend?
2. What books did Satchel pen?

“Crafting a Legend”
1. When was Satchel admitted into the Baseball Hall of Fame? In what ways was the admission hollow for Satchel?
2. Describe Satchel’s later working years of his life. Do you think these years were personally satisfying/successful?
3. Describe Satchel’s goals for his children. What did these goals reveal about Satchel?
4. Describe Satchel’s later years and death.
1. Have students write their autobiographies. They can begin by making timelines of their lives. Then, they can interview significant people in their lives to help compile stories about their lives. Do the stories people relay reflect the major points on the timeline? Discuss how history can be up to interpretation, especially when it comes to writing biography.

2. Have students choose a significant event from their lives about which to write a narrative essay. They should begin by identifying the event and its significance. Use a pre-writing device to generate the specific details of the event. First, hook the reader; then, narrate the event, and end with how the event is significant.

3. Have students identify a person who inspires them. Assign students a writing project about this person. This project may take the form of a poem, essay, or short story.

4. Use Satchel as a springboard to researching the famous people with whom Satchel came into contact. Use figures from sports, entertainment, and history that are mentioned in the text, such as:

   - Louis Armstrong
   - P. T. Barnum
   - Count Basie
   - Cab Calloway
   - Dizzy Dean
   - Fats Domino
   - W. E. B. Du Bois
   - “Duke” Ellington
   - Marcus Garvey
   - Moss Hart
   - Lena Horne
   - Teddy Horne
   - Langston Hughes
   - Jack Johnson
   - George Kaufman
   - Joe Louis
   - Martin Luther
   - Mills Brothers
   - Frank Merriwell
   - Jessie Owens
   - A. Philip Randolph
   - Paul Robeson
   - Bojangles Robinson
   - Jackie Robinson
   - Will Rogers
   - Art Rooney
   - Max Schmeling
   - Jim Thorpe
   - Booker T. Washington
   - Cy Young

   Teachers might also assign modern ball players, entertainers, and public figures.

5. Use Satchel to introduce a study of the racial history of America. Examine the debate between W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. How does Satchel’s experience at Mount Meigs figure in this debate?

6. Satchel Paige is famous for his aphorisms, or pithy expressions of life. Have students study aphorisms, and construct their own versions, perhaps based on modern communications (iPods, email, texting) or other modern-day examples.

7. Examine barriers as a subject for writing about social problems. What barriers do students encounter daily? What barriers still remain for minorities in America?

8. Work with a math teacher to study the mathematics of baseball. http://www.teachersfirst.com/baseball.htm has many activities to help get you started.

9. Use Satchel for geographical discovery. Have students trace Satchel’s movements on U.S. and world maps. Assign students to research the different places that were important to Satchel’s life. Students can also prepare travel brochures to “sell” their location to classmates.

10. Have students write essays on the importance of a home. Lead a discussion of Satchel’s search for belonging.
• for further reading

Uncle Tom or New Negro? African Americans Reflect on Booker T. Washington and Up from Slavery 100 Years Later, Rebecca Carroll

The Complete Game: Reflections on Baseball, Pitching, and Life on the Mound, Ron Darling

The Souls of Black Folk, W. E. B. Du Bois

Satchel Paige’s America, William Price Fox


Dreams from My Father, Barack Obama

Maybe I’ll Pitch Forever, Leroy Paige

Pitchin’ Man: Satchel Paige’s Own Story, Satchel Paige

Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete, William C. Rhoden

Baseball: A History of America’s Favorite Game, George Vecsey

Up from Slavery, Booker T. Washington

• online resources

  • http://www.baseball-almanac.com: A site for baseball history and statistics.
  • http://www.baseballhalloffame.org: The official site of the Baseball Hall of Fame.
  • http://www.satchelpaige.com: A site for biography, quotations, and more.

• about the guide writer

DAVID CORLEY teaches high school English in South Carolina. His experience is with many different levels of students in grades 9-12. He has also taught courses for adult education, college, and graduate-level students.
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Fiction:

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. Things Fall Apart
Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. Purple Hibiscus
Asimov, Isaac. I, Robot
Bradbury, Ray. Fahrenheit 451
Brooks, Terry. The Shannara Trilogy
Butler, William. The Butterfly Revolution
Cather, Willa. My Antonia
Cisneros, Sandra. The House on Mango Street
Clark, William van Tilburg. The Ox-Bow Incident
Clarke, Arthur C. Childhood's End
Cook, Karin. What Girls Learn
Crichton, Michael. Jurassic Park
Doctorow, E.L. Ragtime
Drew, Alan. Gardens of Water
Dunn, Mark. Ella Minnow Pea
Ellis, Ella Throp. Swimming with the Whales
Ellison, Ralph. Invisible Man
Ford, Jamie. Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet
Gaines, Ernest. A Lesson Before Dying
Garcia Márquez, Gabriel. Chronicle of a Death Foretold
Gibbons, Kaye. Ellen Foster
Grisham, John. A Time to Kill
Guterson, David. Snow Falling on Cedars
Hansberry, Lorraine. A Raisin in the Sun
Hayes, Daniel. Eye of the Beholder
Hayes, Daniel. The Trouble with Lemons
Homer. Fitzgerald, Robert. trans. The Odyssey
Jones, Lloyd. Mister Pip
Kafka, Franz. The Trial
Khedairi, Betool. Absent
L’Amour, Louis. Hondo
Le Guin, Ursula K. A Wizard of Earthsea
Matar, Hisham. In the Country of Men
Maxwell, William. So Long, See You Tomorrow
McCarthy, Cormac. All The Pretty Horses
McCarthy, Susan Carol. Lay That Trumpet
McCarthy, Susan Carol. In Our Hands
Mieville, China. Un Lun Dun
Mitchell, David. Black Swan Green
Mori, Kyoko. Shizuko’s Daughter
Mullen, Thomas. The Last Town on Earth
Naylor, Gloria. Mama Day
Otsuka, Julie. When the Emperor Was Divine
Potok, Chaim. The Chosen
Pullman, Philip. The Amber Spyglass
Pullman, Philip. The Golden Compass
Pullman, Philip. The Subtle Knife
Rawles, Nancy. My Jim
Remarque, Erich Maria. All Quiet on the Western Front
Richter, Conrad. The Light in the Forest
See, Lisa. Snow Flower and the Secret Fan
Shaara, Jeff. Gods and Generals
Shaara, Jeff. The Last Full Measure
Shaara, Michael. The Killer Angels
Shaffer, Mary Ann; Barrows, Annie. The Guernsey Literary & Potato Peel Pie Society
Shute, Neil. On the Beach
Sinclair, Upton. The Jungle
Spiegelman, Art. Maus I
Tan, Amy. The Joy Luck Club
Tolkien, J.R.R. Lord of the Rings Trilogy
Tolkien, J.R.R. The Hobbit
Twain, Mark. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Voigt, Cynthia. Dicey's Song
Voigt, Cynthia. Homecoming
Vonnegut, Kurt. Cat's Cradle
Vonnegut, Kurt. Slaughterhouse-Five
Walters, Maureen. Candle in the Wind
Wolf, Tobias. Old School

Nonfiction:

Angelou, Maya. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
Armstrong, Karen. Islam
Baldwin, James. Nobody Knows My Name
Baldwin, James. The Fire Next Time
Bryson, Bill. Short History of Nearly Everything
Cary, Lorene. Black Ice
Chen, Da. Colors of the Mountain
Collins, Billy. Poetry 180/180 More
Conway, Jill Ker. The Road from Coorain
Farrow, Anne, et al. Complicity
Frank, Anne. Diary of a Young Girl
Haley, Alex. The Autobiography of Malcolm X
Heath, Chip and Dan Heath. Made to Stick
Hickam, Homer. October Sky
Hunter, Latoya. The Diary of Latoya Hunter
Huntet-Gault, Charlayne. In My Place
Katz, Jon. Geeks
Kennedy, Randall. Nigger
Kidder, Tracy. Mountains Beyond Mountains
Kidder, Tracy. Strength in What Remains
Lewis, Anthony. Gideon's Trumpet
Miller, Jennifer. Inheriting the Holy Land
Nazario, Sonia. Enrique’s Journey
Neufeld, Josh. A.D.
Odyke, Irene Gut. In My Hands
Pollan, Michael. The Botany of Desire
Robison, John Elder. Look Me in the Eye
Santiago, Jesus. Almost a Woman
Santiago, Ersmalda. When I Was Puerto Rican
St. John, Warren. Outcasts United
Suskind, Ron. A Hope in the Unseen
Taylor, Nick. American-Made
Thomas, Firi. Down These Mean Streets
Tye, Larry. Satchel
Whiteley, Opal. Opal: The Journey of an Understanding Heart