

Who's on First?

Educators' Guide

About the Book

Iconic comedians William “Bud” Abbott and Lou Costello introduced “Who’s on First?”—one of the most famous comedy skits of all time—in the 1930s and continued to entertain with the performance throughout their prolific careers. In 1956 the duo was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and in 1999 *Time* magazine named “Who’s on First?” the best comedy sketch of the 20th century.

This classic routine has taken on new life as a picture book called *Who’s on First*, featuring full-color, retro-stylized illustrations by cartoonist and **illustrator John Marx** and the rat-a-tat banter of Abbott and Costello’s original skit. Young readers, baseball fans, and those who read along with them will be delighted by the series of misunderstandings that Abbott (played by a rabbit) and Costello (played by a bear) encounter as Abbott joins the baseball team that Costello coaches and asks to learn the names of his teammates.

Who’s on First? is the perfect book to use across the curriculum to pique students’ interest in the game of baseball, the Five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why), the perils of miscommunication, friendship, the laws of force and motion, and much more.

Genre

Children’s animal odd-couples

Themes

Baseball

Friendship

Communication

“Who’s on First?” on the Web

- To view several performances of Abbott and Costello’s famous comedy routine, search “Who’s on First?” at Google or YouTube.com. The search will yield additional versions of “Who’s On First?” such as a performance with a Shakespeare twist and a variation on the routine with comedians Billy Crystal and Jerry Seinfeld.

- To find the radio/audio version (which was how Abbott and Costello performed the routine originally) and script of “Who’s on First?” visit <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/humor4.shtml>.

Teaching Who’s on First? Across the Curriculum

English Language Arts

Compare & Contrast: After viewing Abbott and Costello’s “Who’s on First?” and reading *Who’s on First?* discuss ways the comedy routine and the book are alike and different (e.g., the characters in the comedy routine are people, but the characters in the book are animals). Then chart students’ responses on a Venn diagram.

Story Elements—The Five Ws: Spark your students’ interest in story elements (who, what, when, where, why) by viewing the comedy routine and reading *Who’s on First?* After enjoying the book and discussing the players’ names, introduce the Five Ws baseball-glove graphic organizer, which is included in this teaching guide. Demonstrate how to complete the graphic organizer using *Who’s on First?* and provide guided practice with other stories. For more examples of Five Ws graphic organizers, go to <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/graphicorganizers/5ws/>.

Readers’ Theater: After viewing the original Abbott and Costello routine and reading *Who’s on First?*, provide students with the written script, which is available at <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/humor4.shtml>. Have students practice with partners and perform a readers’ theater version of this famous routine. For more information on readers’ theater, visit <http://www.scholastic.com/librarians/programs/whatisrt.htm>.

Poetry: After students have watched or participated in a baseball or softball game, ask them to think about the sounds they heard and help them write poetry using onomatopoeia (imitation of sounds in words). For a complete lesson plan, visit ReadWriteThink.org and enter “That Sounds Fun! Sound Words and Sports Poetry.”

Writer’s Craft—Speech Bubbles: Use *Who’s on First?* along with Mo Willams’s *Elephant and Piggie* book series to teach students about using speech bubbles to write dialogue. Students need to notice that Abbott’s speech bubbles are a different color than Costello’s; that the first speaker’s speech bubble is always placed to the left (or above) the second

speaker's speech bubble; that some words inside speech bubbles are bigger or bolder than others so that readers can tell how loud to say certain words. After reading and discussing several books that use speech bubbles for dialogue, have students tell a knock-knock joke by drawing a comic strip that uses speech bubbles.

Communication

View Abbott and Costello's "Who's on First?" routine and read the book aloud to introduce a unit on effective communication. After viewing and reading this famous comedy skit, have a class discussion about miscommunication. In *Who's on First?* both characters are trying to talk about the same topic (players on a baseball team), so why do they become so frustrated with each other? What could they do to increase their understanding of each other? Use the lesson plans at the following websites to extend students' learning:

- <https://sites.google.com/site/abigailidster/tech-prep/communication-lesson-plan>
- http://www.educationworld.com/a_tsl/archives/02-1/lesson020.shtml

Physical Education

Baseball: Introduce the game of baseball by reading aloud *Who's on First?* and discussing player positions. Make a diagram of a baseball diamond and help students understand why the field positions are assigned numbers. Then allow each student to experience each position by playing a baseball or softball game and rotating positions after each batter. For a detailed lesson plan, go to <http://www.beaconlearningcenter.com/Lessons/1356.htm>.

Rainy-Day Activity: As a rainy-day activity, view Abbott and Costello's skit and read *Who's on First?* indoors. Prepare nine signs, each with the name of a player from the book (use "Naturally" for right field). Set up a mini-baseball diamond in the classroom or gym. Then assign a student to hold each sign and stand in the corresponding position on the "field." Assign two students to read the parts of Abbott and Costello from the book. Each time a player's name is mentioned, the students holding that card must hold up the sign. See a detailed lesson plan at <http://www.pecentral.org/lessonideas/ViewLesson.asp?ID=825#.U0i7KZPjljs>.

Social Studies

Friendship: Many children's books employ animal odd-couples as friends: Elephant and Piggie (Mo Willems), Mouse and Mole (Wong Herbert Yee), Frog and Toad (Arnold Lobel), Snake and Lizard (Joy Cowley), George and Martha (James Marshall), and now Abbott the

rabbit and Costello the bear. Include *Who's on First?* in a unit about friendship in which you read aloud stories about animal friends. Discuss the characteristics of friendship, and decide how to be a good friend.

U.S. History: After reading *Who's on First?* discuss the interesting names of the players. Then introduce students to some real baseball heroes such as Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Mickey Mantle, or Joe Morgan. Help students find information at the library or online about famous baseball players. Then have students make baseball cards that illustrate and describe their favorite historical players.

Civil Rights: Read *Who's on First?* as a springboard for teaching about women and minorities in baseball. For biographical information on female professional baseball players, go to www.exploratorium.edu/baseball/girlsofsummer.html. Click on names to view biographies. For a timeline of women in sports, see <http://www.teachervision.fen.com/athletes/resource/63107.html>.

To explore Jackie Robinson's role as the first African American baseball player to play Major League Baseball, read *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* by Bette Bao Lord and explore websites about Robinson. See a complete lesson plan at <http://www.teachervision.fen.com/civil-rights/lesson-plan/3336.html?detoured=1>.

Geography: After reading *Who's on First?* have a class discussion about baseball teams and use a map of U.S. states and cities to locate baseball teams around the country. Go online to learn about famous baseball parks (e.g., Wrigley Field, Dodger Stadium).

Math

Basic Math Facts: Read *Who's on First?* as an introduction to a new game called Homerun Math. This game reinforces any math computation skill, especially basic math facts. Arrange students into two teams and push desks back to form a baseball diamond, with home plate near a whiteboard or chart paper. Show the "batter" a math-problem flashcard. If the batter solves the problem correctly, he or she gets to go to first base. Runners advance around the bases as batters solve problems correctly. If a batter answers incorrectly, he records an out and the runners do not advance. Each runner who crosses home plate marks one point on the board for his or her team. When the team at bat records three outs, the other team gets to "bat." Find adaptations of Homerun Math at http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/04/lp338-01.shtml.

Addition of Three or More Numbers: Read *Who's On First?* and view the famous comedy skit (use a performance in which Abbott and Costello are wearing baseball uniforms). Discuss player positions and uniforms in baseball. Supply a roster of players from your local high school, college, or professional baseball team that includes players' jersey numbers. Have students add these numbers to make a target total (e.g., 25, 50, or 100). Use hundred charts, snap-together cubes, place-value blocks, and other manipulatives if necessary, or allow students to practice adding on a calculator. Students can also combine players' weight, height, or other statistics to meet a target goal. For more details about this activity and other baseball-related lesson plans, go to <http://www.milb.com/documents/2011/03/24/17103888/1/EducationDayBooklet2011.pdf>.

Geometry: After reading and discussing *Who's on First?* use the lesson plans from the National Baseball Hall of Fame website to introduce everyday geometric concepts such as circumference, area, perimeter, and diameter. Click on the "Level 1—Rookie" lessons at baseballhall.org/education/school-programs/curriculum/geometry.

Decimals and Percentages: Read aloud *Who's On First?* or view Abbott and Costello's famous routine to familiarize students with baseball field positions and pique their interest in the sport. Then teach students how to play Baseball Math, a simple board game (the board is an unlined piece of paper with a baseball diamond drawn on it) that you can expand into baseball leagues to give students practice following directions, adding numbers, analyzing game results, and calculating win/loss records in decimals and percentages. View a lesson plan for Baseball Math at <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/baseball-math>.

Statistical Data: Introduce the game of baseball to middle-grade students by reading *Who's on First?* and having students play a few innings of baseball or showing a video clip of part of a baseball game. Discuss some of the plays and players. Then begin a math unit in which students become managers of their very own Fantasy Baseball team. They will work with the statistical information on baseball trading cards, such as the number of homeruns, times at bat, and RBIs to build a nine-player baseball team, determine the line-up, and play a simulated baseball game. See a detailed lesson plan at <http://www.pbs.org/teachers/mathline/lessonplans/pdf/msmp/fantasybaseball.pdf>.

Science

Force & Motion/Biomechanics: Read *Who's on First?* or view the comedy routine online as an introduction to the sport of baseball and, specifically, to the skill of pitching. Show video of different pitchers and discuss the internal and external forces acting on the pitcher's body and on the ball. Then conduct an experiment to determine how the length of a pitcher's stride affects the speed of the pitch. For more background information and instructions for setting up the experiment, visit www.sciencebuddies.org and search "The Biomechanics of Pitching."

Simple Machines: In a unit on simple machines, use *Who's on First?* as a springboard to a class discussion about inventions that could help players in various positions on the baseball field, or an invention that would make the job of a stadium worker easier. View a few innings of a baseball or softball game, either live or on video, and have students make careful observations of specific positions. Then have students invent ways to improve or simplify players' performance and draw their inventions. View details of this and other baseball-and-science lesson plans at http://www.milb.com/documents/2009/02/17/511706/1/lesson_plans.pdf.



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