

LEVELED BOOK • Z

# Baseball



Written by Martina Deignan

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## Focus Question

Why is baseball known as "the great American pastime"? Is this an accurate nickname? Why?

# Words to Know

barrier

coveted

discrimination

fielding

foul

inducted

pennants

perseverance

statistics

strike

umpire

vying

Front cover: A batter swings and misses a ball in a game in Southern California.

Title page: An Oakland Athletics shortstop throws the ball to first base as a Seattle Mariners runner slides into second base.

Page 3: A runner barely escapes being tagged out as an umpire pays close attention in the Japan Series in Tokyo, Japan in 2013.

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Baseball

Spectacular Sports

Level Z Leveled Book

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## Correlation

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Fountas & Pinnell	U-V
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	50



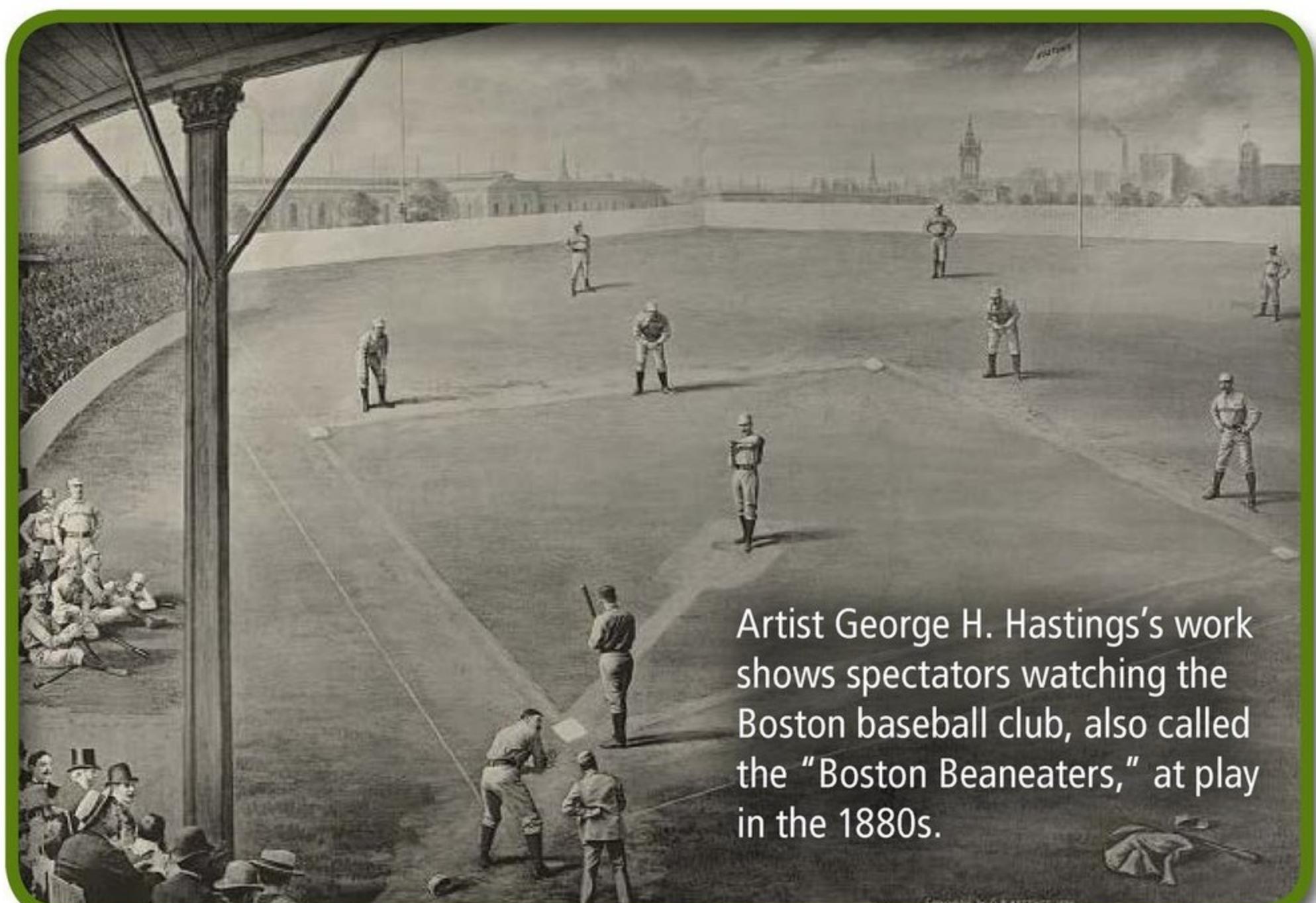
## Table of Contents

What Is Baseball? .....	4
The Rules of the Game .....	6
American Baseball: A Look Back .....	9
Historic Stadiums .....	11
Baseball Legends .....	13
A Timeless Sport .....	15
Glossary .....	16

## What Is Baseball?

Long before the United States existed, the game we recognize today as baseball was shaped by the early English settlers who brought differing versions of the game to the British colonies. Stool ball, trap ball, and rounders were all played in eighteenth-century America, and all of these games involved batting, throwing, running, and making quick decisions.

In 1845, nearly 70 years after the United States declared its independence from the British, a club called the Knickerbockers met in New York City. The baseball regulations they created became the foundation for the game millions of people around the world enjoy today.



Artist George H. Hastings's work shows spectators watching the Boston baseball club, also called the "Boston Beaneaters," at play in the 1880s.

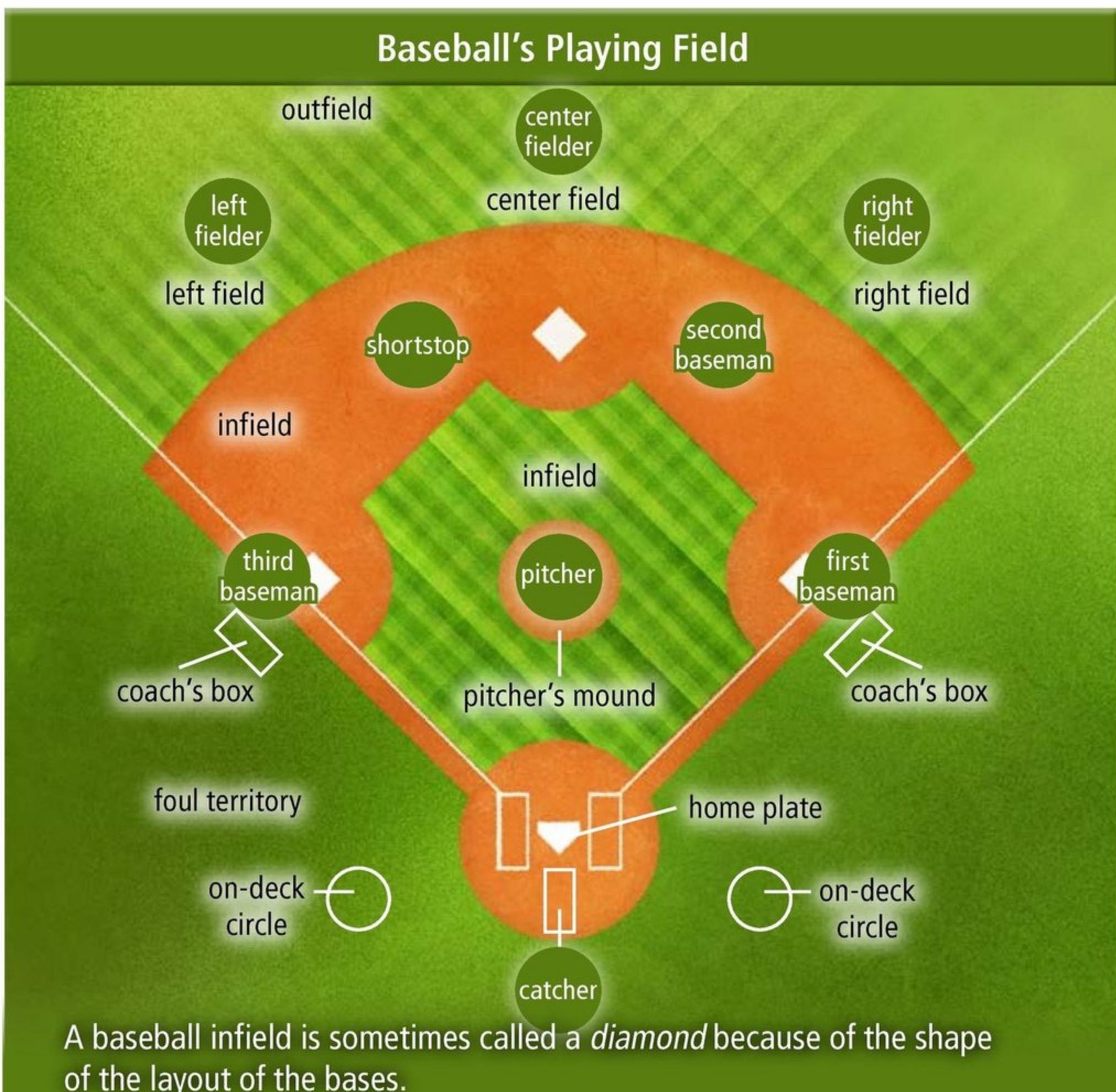
## Baseball Around the World



In North America, there are currently 30 Major League Baseball (MLB) teams vying to win the **coveted** North American championship—the World Series. There are 240 minor league teams as well. Minor leagues offer players the chance to hone their skills, and a small percentage make it to the major leagues.

Today, “the great American pastime” is played globally in over one hundred countries with millions of fans. International baseball competition is governed by the World Baseball Softball Confederation, which organizes the World Baseball Classic. This international tournament is played every four years and was created to promote baseball around the world.

For youth players, Little League is extremely popular, with about 2.4 million players in over one hundred countries. The Little League World Series has been held every year since 1947.



## The Rules of the Game

Baseball games have two opposing teams consisting of nine players on each team. The teams take turns playing offense (batting and base running) and defense (pitching and **fielding**).

The pitcher throws the ball to a catcher on his or her team, and when a batter from the other team swings the bat and hits the ball, he or she runs counter-clockwise around the bases to home plate, touching each base in order.

If a batter doesn't swing and the ball is within the **strike** zone, or swings and misses, the ball is declared a strike by the **umpire**. A batter with less than two strikes is also issued a strike if he or she hits a **foul** ball—any ball hit into foul territory. After three strikes, the batter is out. If a pitch is outside the strike zone and the batter doesn't swing, it's declared a ball. If a pitcher pitches four balls, the batter "walks" to first base.

If a player hits the ball beyond the outfield or runs all the way to home base right after hitting the ball, it's a home run. If not, the base runner can remain safely on one of the bases until a teammate hits a ball, at which point the runner can sprint to the next base. Only one runner may occupy a base. Each runner who touches home plate scores one run. The team with the most runs wins the game.

A batter hits the ball and runs toward first base. In the field, players scramble to try to catch a fly ball or field a ground ball to stop the runner from advancing around the bases. If the ball is caught without touching the ground, the batter is out. If the ball touches the ground first, the ball is fielded and the defensive team works together to get it to a base player who can force out a runner by tagging or touching the runner or the base he or she is required to advance to. When the team at bat gets three outs, the teams switch positions.

## Baseball Statistics

### Earned Run Average (ERA)

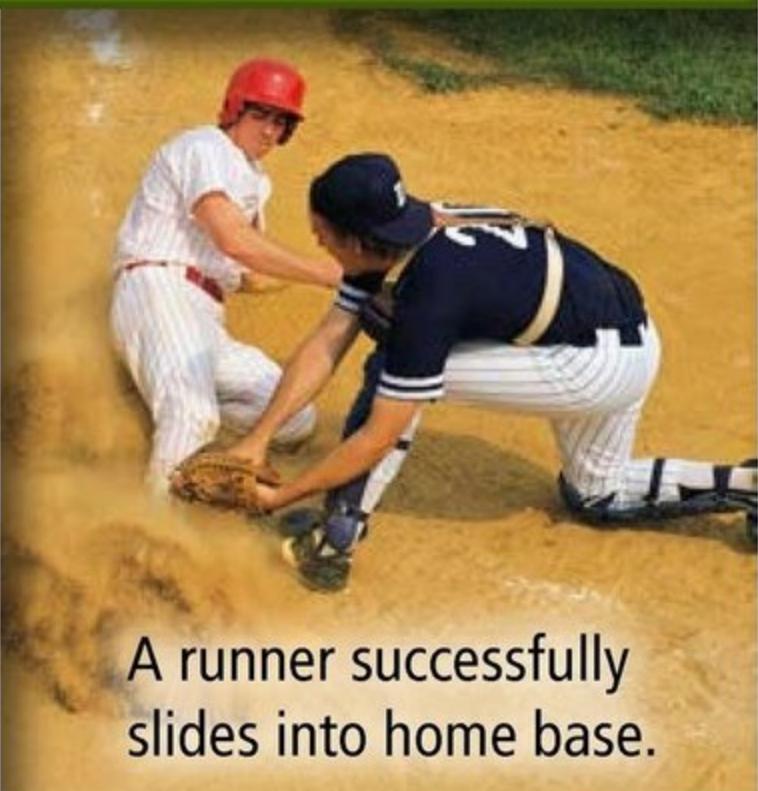
runs allowed ÷ innings pitched x 9 = ERA

Question: If a pitcher allowed 20 runs in 63 innings, what is his or her ERA?

### Batting Average (AVG)

hits ÷ at bats = AVG

Question: If a batter gets 25 hits in 103 times at bat, what is his or her AVG?



A runner successfully slides into home base.

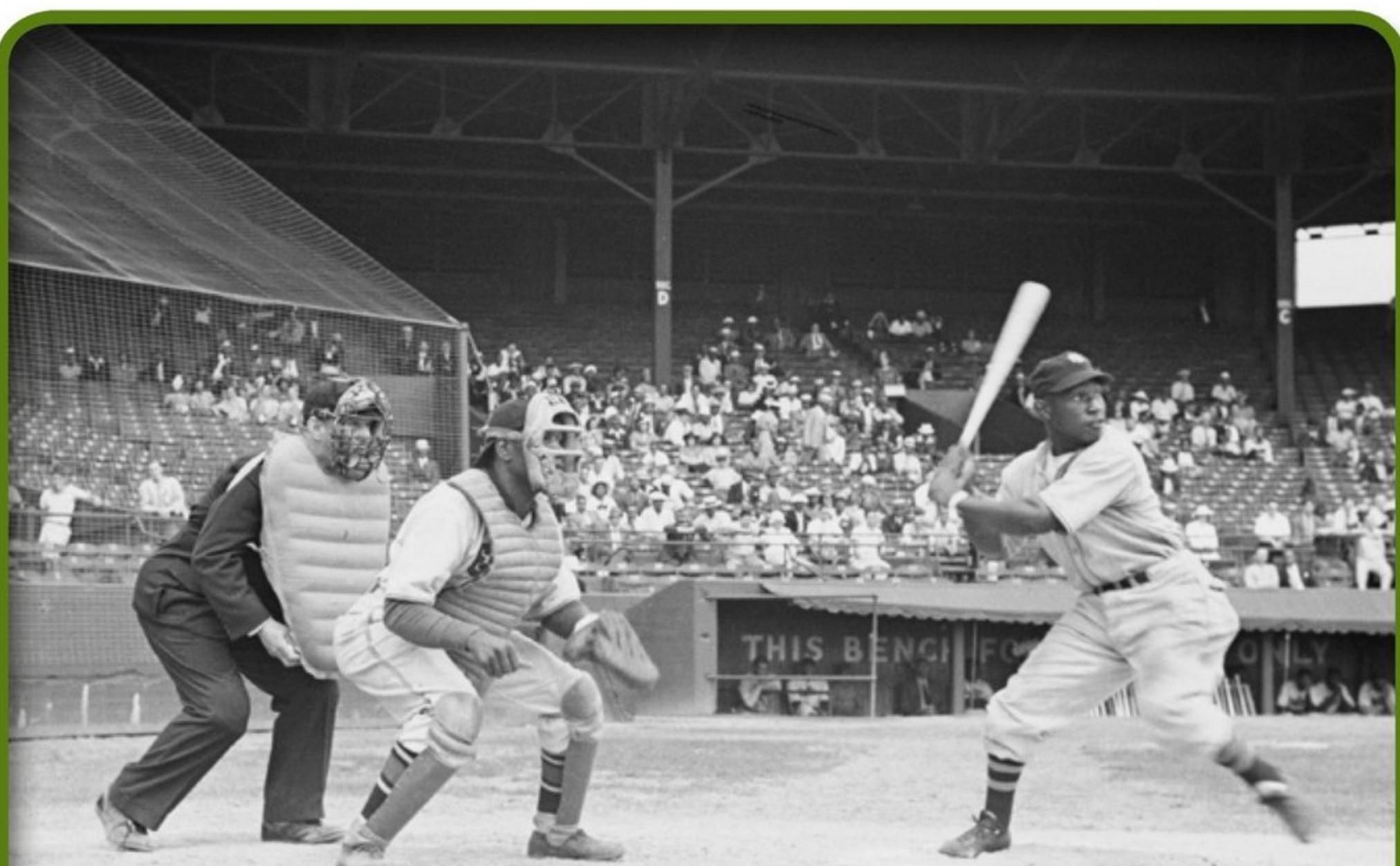
There are nine innings in a baseball game. One inning consists of each team playing once in the field and once at bat. The visiting team always bats first, and the home team bats second. If the score is tied at the end of the nine innings, extra innings are played until there is a winner.

Baseball relies on many **statistics** (stats) to evaluate the success of its players. A pitcher's Earned Run Average (ERA) is calculated by dividing the number of runs the pitcher has allowed by the total number of innings pitched. This number is multiplied by nine (the number of innings in a regular baseball game) to get the average.

Important stats for batters are the batting average, or AVG, and runs batted in, or RBI. The batting average is determined by comparing a batter's number of hits to his or her total times at bat. The RBI tells how many runners have scored based on the batter's success at the plate.

## American Baseball: A Look Back

Due to racial **discrimination** in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there were once different leagues for African American players. From 1890 to 1947, major league baseball was off-limits to African Americans and Latinos, but discrimination didn't prevent them from playing. As early as 1870, African American teams known as the "Negro Leagues" had developed. These leagues included some of the most talented players in the game. Over time, baseball evolved, the color **barrier** crumbled, and the Negro Leagues faded away.



A Newark player at bat in 1936. Hundreds of teams participated in the Negro Leagues.



Women practiced their skills during many professional games in the 1940s and 1950s. Over six hundred women competed in fifteen professional women's teams.

Women have never been allowed to participate in a major league game, but they have contributed significantly to the sport. In 1943, millions of men, including professional baseball players, had enlisted in the armed forces to fight in World War II. With the major league talent pool depleted, Chicago Cubs owner Philip Wrigley was inspired to start a professional women's baseball league.

The All-American Professional Girls Baseball League (AAPGBL), as they were called, had as many as twenty thousand cheering fans come out to watch them play a game in their early days.

After the war, major league players began to return home and professional baseball became predominantly a man's game again. The women's league played its last season in 1954.

## Historic Stadiums

As the game became more popular, baseball's landscape began to change. For years, the East Coast was the focus of baseball. However, in 1957 the Brooklyn Dodgers made the decision to move to Los Angeles, and were soon followed by the New York Giants, who found a new home in San Francisco.

With the move west, new teams and divisions were added, old ballparks began to be torn down, and new stadiums were built.

Home to the Red Sox, Fenway Park in Boston is the oldest major league ballpark in the United States. Fenway opened on April 20, 1912. Today it remains much the same as when it was first built.

Like fans in many cities, fans in Boston have a special place in their hearts for their ball field. Up to 37,673 fans fill seats at Fenway Park.



The second-oldest stadium is Wrigley Field in Chicago, home to the Cubs and built in 1914.

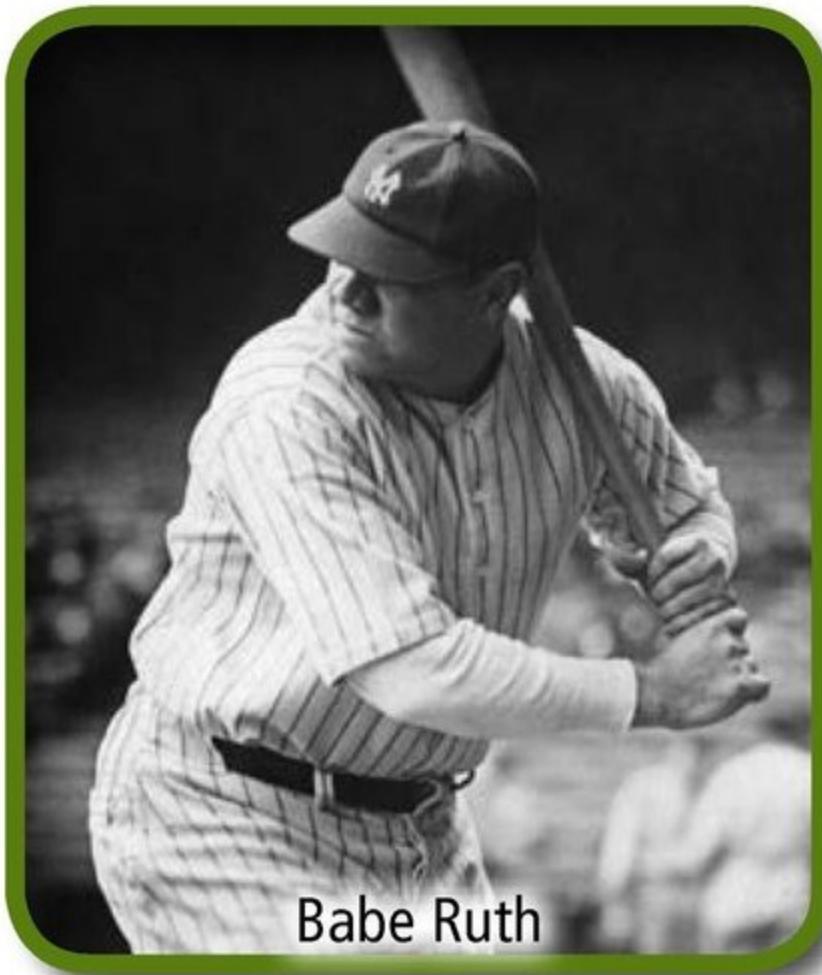
Although both these stadiums show their age, fans believe there is something very special about them. Wrigley and Fenway are steeped in history.

They are reminders to fans that even though many things change, these two aging stadiums remain the same.

Major league baseball, once having had only sixteen stadiums, is now played in thirty arenas across the country. Long ago, games were only played in the daytime. Now they are often played at night and in domed stadiums. Additionally, players were rarely traded and enjoyed playing on one team for many seasons. Today, there is constant movement of players as they are traded frequently throughout the season.

Wrigley Field seats 41,072 devoted fans.





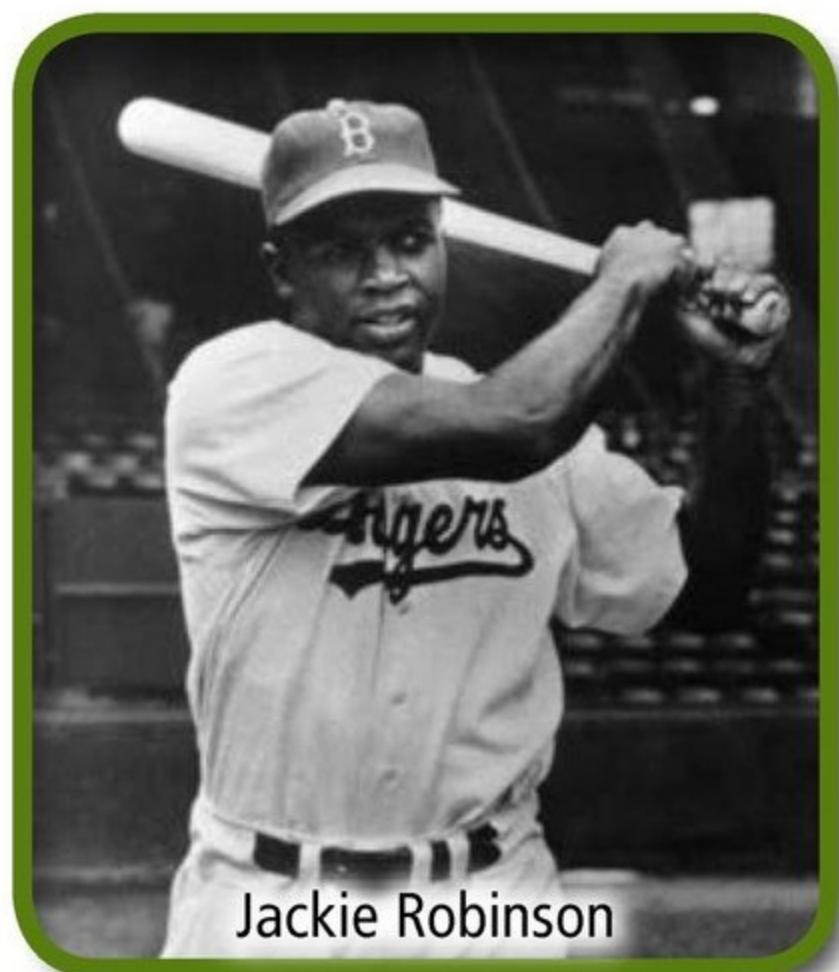
Babe Ruth

## Baseball Legends

George Herman Ruth, better known as "Babe," is the most famous baseball player in history and is considered by many to be the best baseball player who ever lived. As a Yankee,

Babe, also known as the "Sultan of Swat," spent twenty-two seasons with the majors, broke every record for home runs, and helped set unheard-of attendance records in professional baseball. Babe assisted the Yankees in winning seven **pennants** and four World Series titles.

American hero Jackie Robinson became a symbol of hope to many Americans on April 15, 1947, when he broke through the color barrier and became the first African American major league player. "Number 42" was with the Dodgers for ten seasons, playing in six World Series for the team, which won the championship title in 1955. The baseball world observes Jackie Robinson Day each year on April 15.



Jackie Robinson



Roberto Clemente

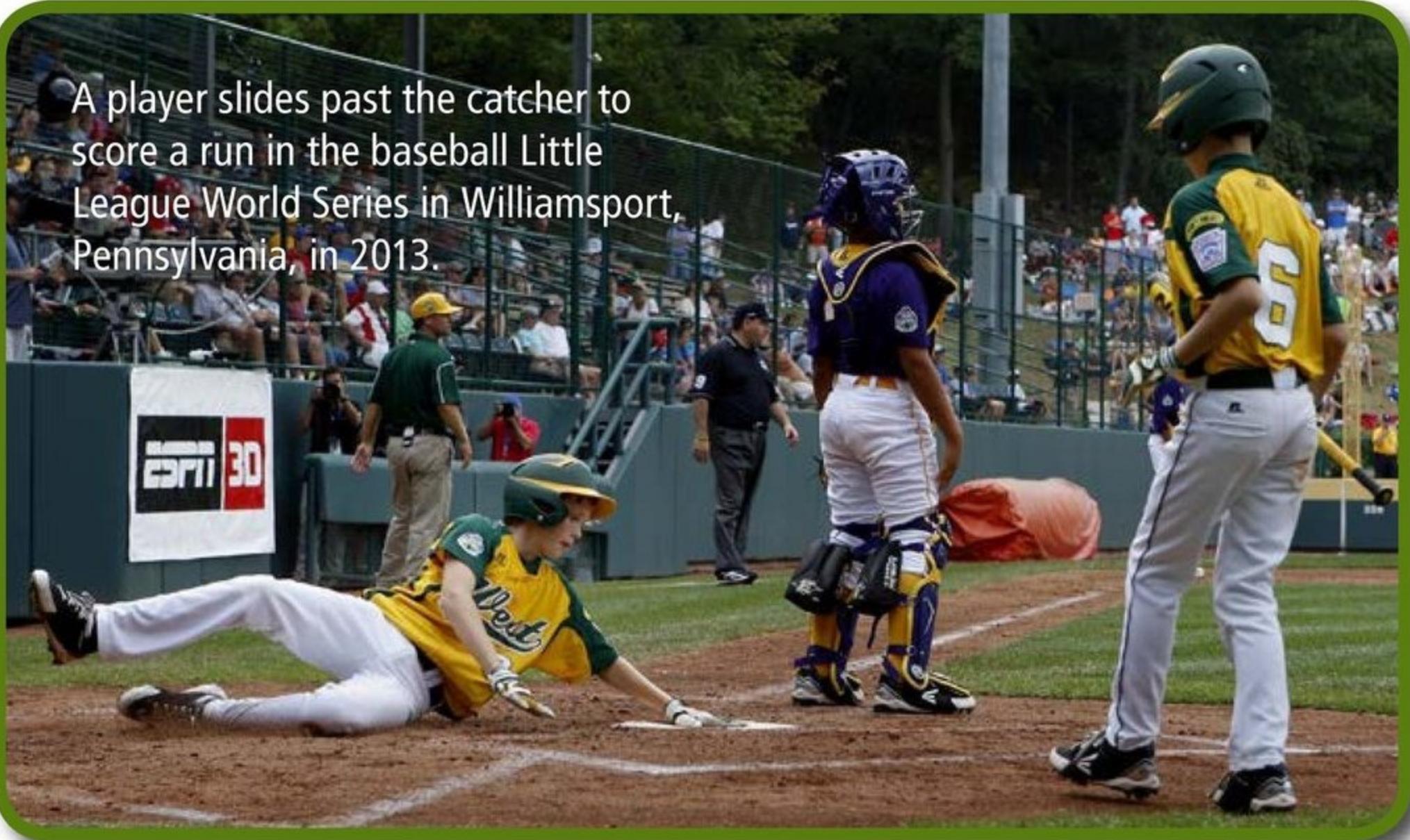
Known as “the Pride of Puerto Rico,” baseball legend Roberto Clemente played right field for the Pittsburgh Pirates from 1955 to 1972. His home run in Game 7 of the 1971 World Series was decisive, as the Pirates defeated the Orioles 2-1 to capture the series championship. In

1972, Roberto was tragically killed in a plane crash. The following summer, he was elected the first Latin American player to be **inducted** into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Derek Jeter is a modern baseball hero who is regarded as one of baseball’s greatest competitors. As a shortstop, Derek was a leader in scoring hits and runs in the American League and was a five-time World Series champion. When he retired from the game in October 2014, he remarked, “The thing that means the most to me is to be remembered as a Yankee.”



Derek Jeter



## A Timeless Sport

Baseball is a wonderful pastime, but it goes beyond that. Players of the game rely on sharp mental skills as well as physical strength. Some people believe that baseball is like life itself. On baseball teams, just as in life, everyone has a position to play, and players have to cooperate to be successful.

Each year, with the onset of spring and warmer weather, a new baseball season begins. Baseball is not just for players, it's also a diversion for millions around the world. It takes fans back to fond memories of childhood when they played T-ball, stickball, and softball. It embodies many of the great qualities of the human spirit—patience, **perseverance**, and the seizing of once-in-a-lifetime opportunities.

## Glossary

<b>barrier</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a rule, obstacle, or problem that blocks progress (p. 9)
<b>coveted</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	strongly desired (p. 5)
<b>discrimination</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the unfair treatment of a person or group based on gender, race, age, religion, or other differences (p. 9)
<b>fielding</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	playing in the field of a baseball game (p. 6)
<b>foul</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	describes an action in a sport that is against the rules and for which a player receives a penalty (p. 7)
<b>inducted</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	selected to be a part of an organization or group (p. 14)
<b>pennants</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	prizes given to the winners of the American and National Leagues in baseball each year (p. 13)
<b>perseverance</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the quality of staying determined and committed despite challenge or delay (p. 15)
<b>statistics</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	numerical data that is collected, organized, and studied (p. 8)
<b>strike</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a negative ruling issued when a baseball batter swings at a ball unsuccessfully, fails to swing at a good ball, or hits a foul ball that is not caught (p. 7)
<b>umpire</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an official who rules on plays at a sporting event (p. 7)
<b>vy ing</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	competing (p. 5)

# Baseball

A Reading A-Z Level Z Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,590

## Connections

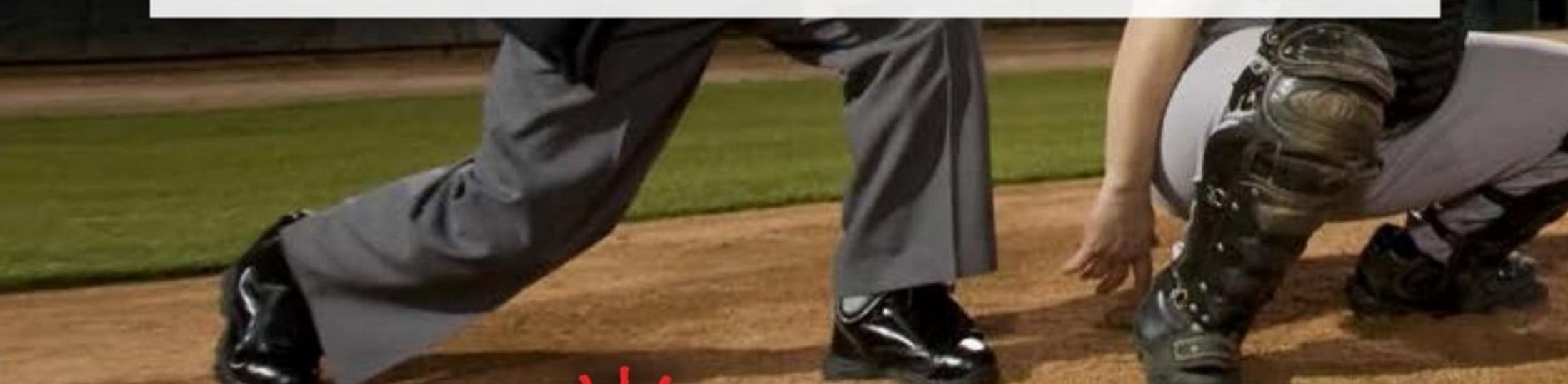
### Writing

Choose one current baseball player to research. Write a letter to that player, asking questions and sharing your knowledge of the game. Use details from your research to guide your writing.

### Social Studies

Research to learn more about the Negro Leagues and why they were developed.

Write a research paper discussing the impact of the civil rights movement on these leagues in America.



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