



Classroom Guide for
CATCHING THE MOON
The Story of a Young Girl's Baseball
Dream
by **Crystal Hubbard**
with **Randy DuBurke**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 3–4

Interest Level: Grades 1–5

Guided Reading Level: Q

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 5.2/.5

Lexile™ Measure: 760AD

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Sports (baseball), Self-Esteem, Achieving Goals/Determination, Women's History/Breaking Gender Barriers, Famous African Americans

Synopsis

Catching the Moon is based on the childhood of Marcenia “Toni Stone” Lyle Alberga (1921–1995), an African American girl who grew up to become the first woman to play for an all-male professional baseball team. Despite her parents' misgivings, young Marcenia cared only about playing baseball and was a regular on a team of local boys. Then Gabby Street, the manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, came to town looking for recruits for a summer baseball camp. Undeterred by the fact that the camp was only for boys, and that her family could not afford proper baseball shoes (cleats), Marcenia made up her mind to attend. She did everything in her power to change Street's mind. Finally her determination and pluck won him over. Marcenia was accepted into the camp and on her way to making her dream of a baseball career come true.

Background

Marcenia Lyle was born in 1921 in St. Paul, Minnesota. She began her baseball career at the age of sixteen as a pitcher for the Twin Cities Colored Giants. As her career took off, Lyle changed her name to Toni Stone, which she thought sounded more professional. When she married, she took her husband's last name, Alberga. Marcenia

"Toni Stone" Lyle Alberga faced two major obstacles in her baseball career. First, she was African American at a time when professional baseball teams were segregated. Second, she was a woman at a time when women rarely played professional baseball. As the first female player in the Negro Leagues, she was often harassed by the male players. Marcenia "Toni Stone" Lyle Alberga was inducted into the Women's Sports Hall of Fame in 1993. She is also honored in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, in the Women in Baseball exhibit and in the Negro Leagues section.

Teaching Tip

This book is an excellent choice to use in March when Women's History Month is observed. The book also provides a timely connection to the opening of major league baseball spring training.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background by tapping prior knowledge with questions such as the following:

1. What sport do you like to play the most? Why do you like it? What is the best part about playing that sport?
2. What is the difference between amateur sports and professional sports? Give an example from your favorite sport or a sport you know something about.
3. Have you ever tried to convince an adult that you should be allowed to do something? What did you do? How successful were you in persuading the adult?
4. What do you know about baseball? Why do you think the rules about playing this game have changed over time?

Exploring the Book

Write the title *Catching the Moon: The Story of a Young Girl's Baseball Dream* on the chalkboard. Lead a discussion about what the first part of the title might mean and how this meaning relates to the rest of the title.

Have volunteers identify different parts of the book including the title page, the copyright information, acknowledgments, author's sources, dedications, and afterword. Plan to share the afterword with students when they finish reading the book.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to:

- find out if Marcenia's baseball dream comes true.
- understand the problems that Marcenia encounters in seeking her dream.

VOCABULARY

Tell students that sports writers often use lively language when describing an event. The verbs they use are particularly colorful. If possible, give some examples from sports articles in your local newspaper. Then write the following verbs on the board and explain

that they all appear in the book. Call on volunteers to define each word; encourage students to act out a word if it makes the meaning clearer. Use a dictionary for words that students do not know. Follow up with a discussion of how these verbs make the text in *Catching the Moon* livelier.

crouched
launched
planted

slammed
snared
mustered

huddled
bolted
punched

scooped
pumped
lingered

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop understanding of the content. Encourage students to refer back to the text and illustrations in the book to support their responses.

1. Why did Marcenia love baseball?
2. What was her dream? How did her passion for baseball affect the other things in her life?
3. How did Marcenia's parents feel about her interest in baseball? Why did they feel this way?
4. Why do you think her mother worried that Marcenia would be a maid?
5. How was Marcenia different from the other girls at school?
6. Who was Mr. Gabby Street? Why were the boys excited about his appearance in town?
7. Why did the boys come to Marcenia's defense when Mr. Street said he didn't have girls in his camp?
8. How did Marcenia show Mr. Street that she would be a good candidate for his camp? What chance did she take?
9. How did Marcenia behave after her father said he could not afford to buy her cleats? What did her behavior tell you about Marcenia?
10. Why did the artist show the moon as a baseball in one of the illustrations?
11. Why do you think Mr. Street gave baseball shoes to Marcenia?
12. Why did her father allow Marcenia to keep the shoes even though he didn't like to accept charity?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might find lines that help tell about the character of Marcenia.
- The **Illustrator** might show some imagined scenes of Marcenia at the baseball camp.
- The **Connector** might find books about other baseball players who broke barriers.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might find information about the history of women in baseball.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

The following questions or similar ones will help students personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, in oral discussion, or in written form.

1. What words would you use to describe the character of Marcenia? How do you think those characteristics helped her make her dream come true?
2. How does this book affect your thinking about people who have set ideas and are slow to accept new ways of thinking?
3. Marcenia changed her name. Why did she do that? Would you ever change your name? Why? What new name might you pick?
4. Although she didn't agree with her parents, Marcenia respected their authority. Do you think she was right? How might you act when you and a family member have different points of view?
5. What would you tell someone who has not read *Catching the Moon* about this book? Why?
6. What could you learn from Marcenia? What advice do you think she would give you about pursuing a dream?
7. Crystal Hubbard, the author, has this advice for young readers: "You can make of your life what you want if you're willing to work hard and keep sight of the goals you set for yourself. If paths to your goal are blocked or doors are

slammed in your face, forge your own path, look for new doors to open." What are some ways you can apply this advice to your own life?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. Marcenia played baseball with the boys on the playground, but Mr. Street wasn't going to let her come to his all-boys baseball camp. Do you think girls and boys should play sports together? Write an essay in which you try to persuade readers to agree with your point of view.
2. Pretend you are Marcenia. Write a thank you note to Mr. Street for giving you baseball shoes and letting you attend his camp.
3. Have students go through the book and on separate paper, write captions for the illustrations.
4. Find out how Toni Stone is honored in her hometown of St. Paul, Minnesota. Write a report to share with the class.

ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Write the following baseball terms from the story on the chalkboard. Invite baseball fans in the class to act out and explain each term.

got a triple
deep flyball

doubled back
stole home

tagged out
slid into home

2. Read aloud a sentence from the book and have students read it aloud after you, pointing to each word as they speak.
3. Make an audiotape of the book and invite students to listen to it as they follow along with the text.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of these activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

Language Arts

Explain that a simile is a figure of speech in which two unlike things are compared, usually in a phrase that begins with *like* or *as*. Give as examples these similes from the book. Then challenge students to write their own similes about Marcenia.

Marcenia's teeth gleamed like the noonday sun.

It [the moon] was so round and bright, like a brand new baseball.

Science

This story lends itself to a mini-lesson on the five senses. Write the names of the senses—sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch—on the chalkboard. Give the

examples below from the book. Then encourage students to find other examples of how the senses are described or suggested in the book.

Sight: Marcenia kept her eyes on each pitch.

Sound: The baseball slams into Marcenia's glove.

Taste: She loved the powdery taste of dust clouds.

Smell: The puff of lather might smell of soap when Marcenia gets her hair washed.

Touch: The sun heated her hair.

Art

Students might enjoy designing baseball cards to honor Marcenia "Toni Stone" Lyle Alberga. Have students use the information in the afterword and the Internet to find facts and statistics to add to their cards.

Sports

1. Interested students might contact the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, for more information about Toni Stone.
2. Explain to students that a 1972 law, often called Title IX, provided equal opportunities for female athletes, especially in high schools and colleges. Have students work with partners to find out how the law has impacted women's sports.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Crystal Hubbard began her publishing career in journalism. As a copy editor in the sports department of the *Boston Herald*, her "interest in sports exploded," and she became determined to share the stories of African American sports heroes with children. *Catching the Moon: The Story of a Young Girl's Baseball Dream* was her first picture book. Both it and another of Hubbard's books, *The Last Black King of the Kentucky Derby*, have received numerous honors. Says Hubbard, "I think sports are important in terms of helping develop skills in working well with others and in building self-esteem." As a young girl, Hubbard met Arthur Ashe, the tennis player. Not surprisingly, her most recent book is a biography of the tennis great called *Game, Set, Match, Champion Arthur Ashe*. Following her own girlhood dream, Hubbard now writes fulltime. She lives with her husband and their four children in Missouri.

Randy DuBurke has been an illustrator for more than twenty years, and his work includes book covers, comics, and editorial illustration as well as children's books. He received the Coretta Scott King John Steptoe Award for New Talent in Illustration for his debut picture book, *The Moon Ring*. Other books have included the graphic biography *Malcolm X* and Lee & Low's graphic novel *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty*. DuBurke's work has also appeared in *The New York Times* and *Mad* magazine. He lives with his wife and their two sons in Switzerland.

Awards and honors *Catching the Moon* has received include:

- Best Children's Books of the Year, Bank Street College
- Storytelling World Award Honor, Stories for Young Listeners, *Storytelling World*
- Amelia Bloomer Project, ALA Feminist Task Force of the Social Responsibilities Round Table

Resources on the Web

Learn more about *Catching the Moon* at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/30/pb/catching_the_moon_the_story_of_a_young_girl_s_baseball_dream

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Order Information

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