

Guide for
**The Bat Boy
& His Violin**

by Gavin Curtis



Welcome to



A NOTE ABOUT JOURNALS

A personal journal is the perfect place for kids to gather their drawings, ideas, questions, and new words.

We suggest that you have a journal for each child—an AfterSchool KidzLit journal or a journal each child has made and decorated for himself.

The purpose of this program is simple—to help you build a love of reading and strong relationships at your site. You don’t have to be a trained teacher or a literature expert to be a successful AfterSchool KidzLit leader. All you have to do is enjoy kids and reading.

Always read the book and its AfterSchool KidzLit Guide before your session with the kids. Decide which activities and discussions are best suited to your group and the time you have available.

Look to your “QuickTips” handbook for additional activities and ideas for organizing and planning your sessions. It’s packed with helpful suggestions, information, games, and projects.

Remember that reading is its own reward. Through books, all of us make connections to stories and their characters, to our own lives, to each other, and to the world. So make yourself comfortable, pick up a good book, and have fun!

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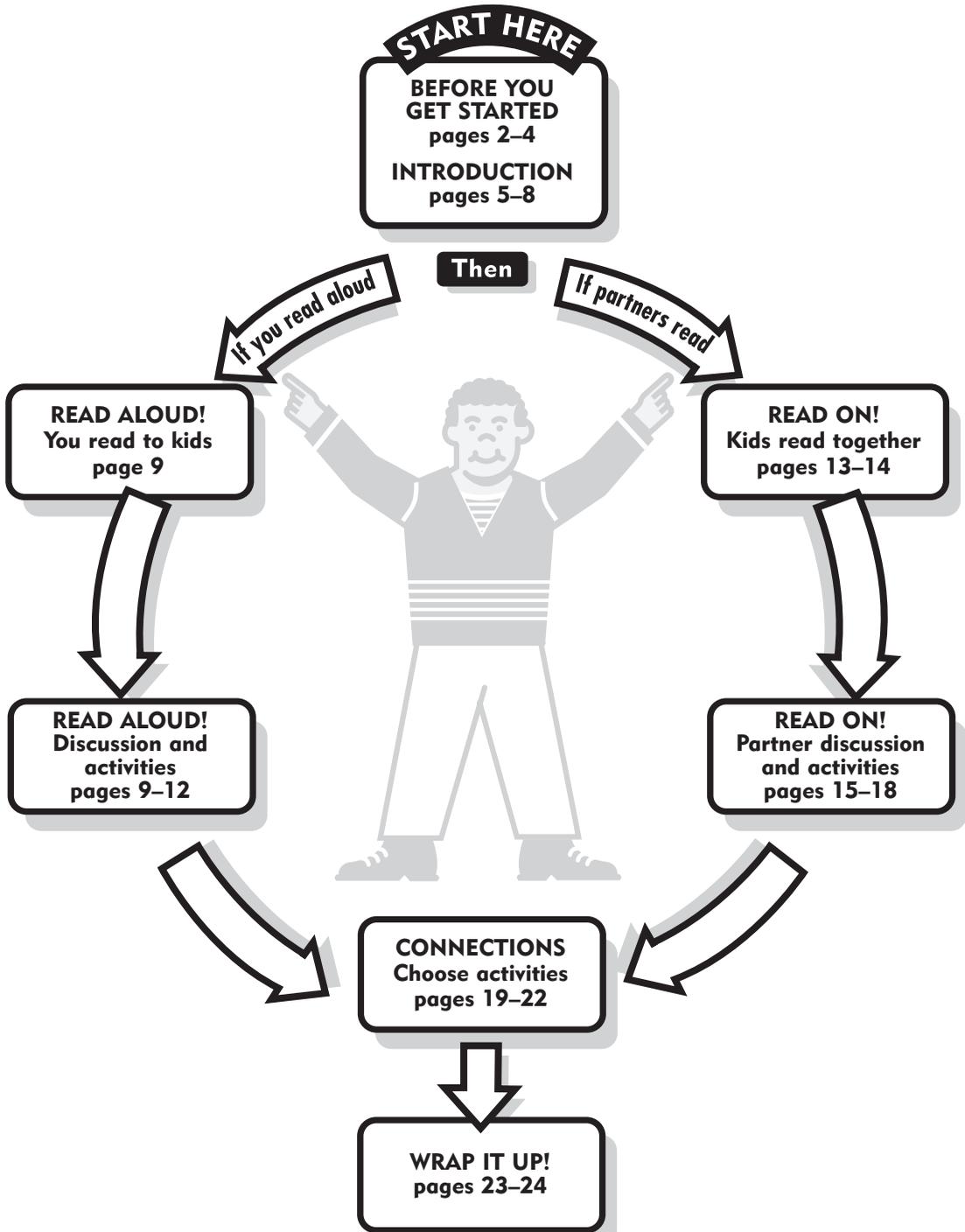
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CHOOSE A DIRECTION | How to Use This Guide



BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

- ▶ Read through “What’s the Story?” and “Some Big Ideas” for an overview of the book and themes emphasized in discussions and activities. You and the kids may discover others.

NOTE

The Bat Boy & His Violin does not have page numbers. You may want to write them in, starting with the title page.

What’s the Story?

“Strike three, you’re out!” shouts the umpire. The Dukes are losing again. They’re known as the worst team in the Negro National League, and the 1948 season is turning out to be their worst yet—at least until Reginald comes along. Reginald’s father, the Dukes’ manager, brings his son to the games because he needs a bat boy, but Reginald would much rather play the violin. Reginald’s father does not seem to appreciate or even understand his son’s musical ability. But when Reginald fills the ballpark with the stirring sounds of Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach, the Dukes start winning. Eventually they lose to the famous Monarchs, but win or lose, Reginald’s father develops a renewed pride in his son and his gift for music.



Some Big Ideas Suggested by the Story

Identity

- The things that we love to do help define who we are.
- Most of us feel our best when we are doing something we love.

Our Relationship to the Arts

- Some people express themselves best through music.
- Music can bring joy, comfort, and inspiration to both listeners and players.

Family Relationships

- Some parents want their children to follow in their footsteps when it comes to hobbies, interests, or even careers.
- Sometimes parents have a hard time seeing who their children are and what they need.
- Children can teach their parents important life lessons.

Racism/Prejudice

- Racist and discriminatory laws in effect before the 1960s were painful for African Americans to endure.
- African Americans have always found ways to keep their spirits and community alive—even in the face of racism and segregation.



Some Things the Kids Will Need to Know

- Before 1950, racism prevented African Americans from playing in the major leagues with white players, regardless of their skills.
- The teams in the Negro Leagues were African American baseball teams that played together until the 1950s. Many baseball legends, including Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Leroy “Satchel” Paige, and Jackie Robinson, started out playing in the Negro Leagues. These teams were tremendously popular with African American baseball fans.
- Before civil rights laws were passed in the 1960s, African Americans often had trouble finding hotels and restaurants that would serve them.
- Segregation in baseball started to crumble in 1947 when Branch Rickey, president of the Brooklyn Dodgers, ignored the ban on African Americans and recruited Jackie Robinson for his team.
- The integration of the major leagues meant that the Negro Leagues lost players and eventually died out. There were fewer opportunities for African Americans to play professionally because they were now competing with white players for positions in the major leagues.

- ▶ Lead an introductory activity (or two) to build curiosity and excitement about the story. An introduction warms the kids up to the characters and ideas they will encounter and gives them a chance to build on what they know from their own life experiences.

Encouraging Me

15 minutes

Group Discussion/Chart: Let everyone know that in the story you are about to read, a father learns to appreciate his son’s amazing violin playing—even though he originally wanted his son to follow in his footsteps and get involved in the game of baseball. Then ask the kids to think about the different things their parents (and other significant adults) encourage them to do. Invite the group to think about everything from chores and homework to hobbies and fun activities. Make a list as answers are shared. Ask follow-up questions such as:

- Why do you think your parents (or other adults) encourage you to _____?
 - How do they show their encouragement and support for this activity? What do they do?
 - How do you feel when your parents encourage you to _____?
- Is there anything you enjoy doing that you’d like more encouragement and support for? What is it?
 - What would you like your parents to do to encourage and support you?
 - What are some ways you might let them know?



Run the Bases

10–15 minutes

Set Up the Bases: Have the kids create a baseball diamond by setting up home plate and three bases outside, at a baseball, softball, or a playground field.

MATERIALS

variety of music selections (classical, hip hop, reggae, rock)
cassette or CD player

- **Play Music:** Start off by having everyone run or jog once around the bases. Then play one type of music and invite everyone to run the bases “to the music,” adjusting their gait to show how the music makes them feel (graceful, wild, calm, and so on). Encourage everyone to be as expressive as they can be and to have fun. For a twist, have one person lead with a set of exaggerated movements, while everyone follows, imitating those movements. Repeat this activity with several different types of music so the kids experience how different music affects their spirits—and their running.

Negro League “Hall of Fame”

10–15 minutes

Prepare in Advance: Write each of these names on an index card: Satchel, Paige, Jackie, Robinson, José, Mendez, Smokey Joe, Williams, Willie, Mays, Hank, and Aaron. Then write each of the following clues on a strip of paper, fold the strips, and put them into a baseball cap:

- All of these baseball players played in the same league before some of them joined the major leagues.
- Baseball great Smokey Joe Williams was never permitted to wear a major league uniform because of racial segregation.
- Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play baseball in the major leagues.

NOTE

An excellent, kid-friendly resource book on the subject is *Leagues Apart: The Men and Times of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, by Lawrence S. Ritter. If your program has access to the Internet, search for a site devoted to the history of the Negro Leagues.

- José Mendez led the Kansas City Monarchs—an all-black team—to win three pennants.
- Leroy “Satchel” Paige wasn’t signed on to play for a major league team until his forty-second birthday because of racial segregation.

Group Discussion: Ask the kids what they know (or want to know) about the Negro Leagues. Build on this knowledge by sharing some basic information with them. (See “Some Things the Kids Will Need to Know” on page 4 of this guide.)

Group Name Game: Explain that the kids will use their cards to try to match the first and last names of some famous baseball players. Distribute the cards (one or two per child) and have everyone circulate to find their matches. Have the kids lay their matches out together on the floor. Invite everyone to gather around and guess what these men have in common—but don’t tell the answer. (All six played in the Negro Leagues before blacks were allowed to play in the major leagues). If the kids need help, have some volunteers take turns picking clues out of the hat and reading them aloud. If the group is still stumped, have the kids read more clues until they guess the answer.



OPTION

If you're unable to contact a violinist, play examples of classical violin (recordings by Itzhak Perlman or Anne-Sophie Mutter) and/or other styles such as jazz (recordings by Stephane Grappelli or Regina Carter), bluegrass (Alison Krauss & Union Station), and old-timey fiddling.

Violinin'

15–45 minutes

Host a Visitor: Invite an adult (such as a staff member, teacher, or parent) or a child at your site who plays the violin to explain about the construction of a violin and demonstrate how it is played. If your visitor is a seasoned player, ask him or her to play a variety of types of music to demonstrate the different feelings the violin can evoke and convey (such as happiness, sadness, frenzy, suspense, and so on).



- ▶ Use this section only if you are reading aloud to the whole group. For kids reading with kids, use the Read On! pages at the back of this guide.

Note: You may want to introduce “Cool Words” before reading.

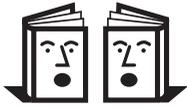


Reading

20–30 minutes

Read the book aloud to your group, pausing occasionally for the kids’ comments and questions about the story, its illustrations, or any words they don’t know.

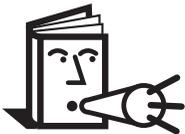




Talk It Over

Give the kids a chance to react to the reading and then ask some of the questions suggested below. As needed, follow up with “Why do you think that?” or “Tell us more.”

- Why do you think playing the violin was so important to Reginald?
- What hobbies or interests are really important to you? What do you like about them?
- Why do you think Papa wanted Reginald to be part of the baseball world?
- Why did Papa’s feelings about Reginald’s violin playing change from the beginning to the end of the story?
- What do you think Reginald and his father learned about each other by the end of the story?
- How do you think Reginald’s father and the other players in the Negro Leagues felt about the white major league team accepting Jackie Robinson?
 - Why might this change have meant different things to different people?

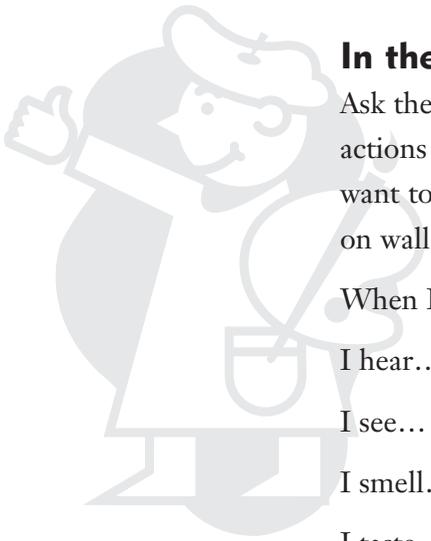


Try This!

Choose one

Team Logo

Most teams have a logo or design that includes the team’s name. Logos appear on team caps, uniforms, banners, and souvenirs. Design a colorful and eye-catching logo for the Dukes.



In the Stands

Ask the kids to brainstorm a list of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and actions that they might experience at a baseball game. They may want to draw a stadium scene as well. Write the following headings on wall charts and record the kids' experiences under each.

When I'm at the ballpark:

I hear...

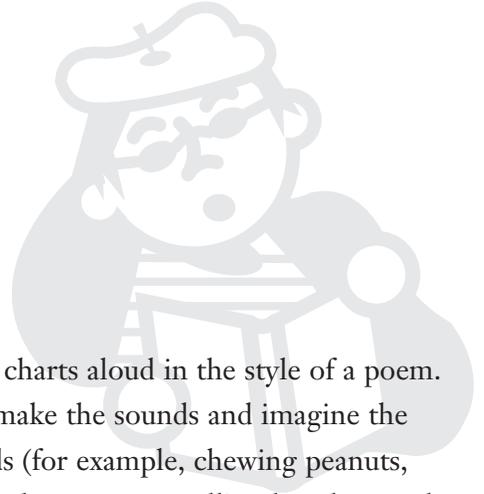
I see...

I smell...

I taste...

I touch...

Take a few minutes to read the charts aloud in the style of a poem. As you read, invite the kids to make the sounds and imagine the sensations of being in the stands (for example, chewing peanuts, hearing the crowd roar, seeing a home run, smelling hot dogs and mustard, waving a team banner).



Standing Ovation

Most of us rarely receive a standing ovation where we are acknowledged by others. Here's a chance for everyone who wants it to have that experience. Ask for volunteers who would like to receive a standing ovation. One by one, have each volunteer sit in the middle of the circle with everyone else in the group seated around them. Tell the group to think for a moment about this person's talents and strengths. Then, at a signal, have the group rise and give an ovation with sustained clapping, whistling, bravos, etc., in support of the person in the center. Invite the receiver of the ovation to talk about how it felt to be acknowledged in this way. Repeat this for each volunteer.



Cool Words

Ask the kids if they remember any words that stood out in the reading. Share the following list of Cool Words (or create your own) and ask the kids what words are new to them. Help them figure out what these words mean by rereading the original sentences and talking about their context. Invite the kids to pick words they like or want to remember and write them in the Cool Words collections in their journals.



See Quick Tip #6, "What's Cool About Words?" for more ideas on how to use vocabulary.

sashay (p. 1): glide

cooped (p. 1): confined in a space

orchestra (p. 2): large group of musicians who play different instruments

fiddle (p. 2): another name for the violin

violin (p. 2): stringed instrument played with a bow

inspire (p. 2): stimulate an action; motivate

rickety (p. 4): old, shaky

bleachers (p. 4): outdoor benches used to sit on and watch a game

shortstop (p. 6): baseball player who is positioned between second and third base

buff (p. 6): rub with a soft cloth to make shiny

umpire (p. 9): sports official, as in baseball, who rules on plays

jig (p. 10): fast dance

gifted (p. 16): very talented

stadium (p. 19): large, often open structure used for hosting sports events

catfish (p. 19): freshwater fish with feelers like cat whiskers

lullaby (p. 19): soothing song parents often sing to their children to help them fall asleep

sonata (p. 26): piece of music written for one or more individual musicians

- ▶ For partner reading, cross-age buddy reading, or book clubs.



Read Quick Tip #8,
“Independent and
Partner Reading,”
before leading a
Read On! session
for the first time.

Directions to the Leader

1. Introduce the story (see page 2 of this guide).
2. Group the kids in twos or threes with one book per group. Consider starting with cross-age buddy reading—a great way for older kids to practice reading while helping younger ones.
3. Photocopy the Read On! pages that follow and give a set to each child or partnership. Explain how partners will use the pages to guide them.
4. Circulate as the kids read and talk, helping to refocus any who are struggling or off task as you go.
5. Reassemble the partners into one group and lead a discussion about the book and what it’s like to work in partnership.
6. Lead a Connection and Wrap It Up! activity.

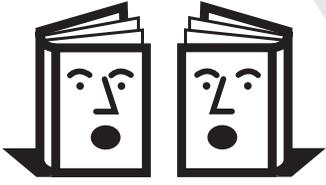
Read On!



Reading

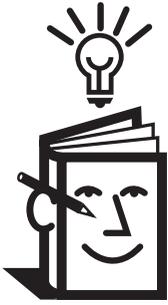
30 minutes

Read the book together. If you come across words that are new to you, talk about their meaning together or ask a friend or leader for help. Look up the words in a dictionary if one is available.



Talk

- Playing the violin was important to Reginald and baseball was important to his father. What hobby or interest is important to you?
- Why did Papa's feelings about Reginald's violin playing change from the beginning to the end of the story?
- If you'd been a player for the Dukes, how would you have felt when the white major league team accepted Jackie Robinson? Why would you have felt this way?



Get It Down!

How would Reginald and his father complete the following statements?

Reginald: I love to play the violin because

_____.

Reginald's father: I love baseball because

_____.

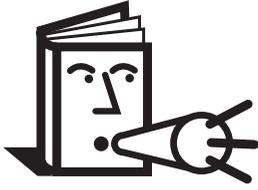
I wanted Reginald to be part of the baseball world

because _____.

Now answer for yourself:

I love to _____ because

_____.



Try This!

Choose one

Team Logo

Most teams have a logo or design that includes the team's name. Logos appear on team caps, uniforms, banners, and souvenirs. With your partner, design a colorful and eye-catching logo for the Dukes.

Stadium Sounds

Make a list of all of the sounds you could possibly imagine hearing at a baseball game. Remember to include sounds made by players, fans, announcers, as well as other sounds in the environment. Feel free to include unusual sounds like violin playing. With your partner, plan a stadium soundtrack and perform it for some friends.



Cool Words

What words do you like and want to remember?
Write them down in your journal or here.

- ▶ Use connection activities after the reading to help the children take a deeper look at the story's content and themes, the characters' actions and motives, and how the book relates to their own lives.

MATERIALS

- large blank index cards
- markers or colored pencils
- baseball cards (optional)

Baseball Cards

20–25 minutes

- **Make Cards:** Tell the kids that many children and adults like to collect baseball cards that feature their favorite players. Show examples if possible. Distribute large blank index cards and markers or colored pencils. Invite the kids to design cards for the following players on the Dukes: Mr. Forest (shortstop), Mr. Mosley (third base), Mr. LaRue (center field), or Mr. Ervin (catcher). Explain that one side of a baseball card includes a color picture of the player in uniform, the player's name, team, and position. The other side lists personal information (birthplace and date of birth), as well as baseball statistics for hitters such as their batting average, hits, home runs, and runs batted in; and for pitchers, their wins and losses, earned run average, strikeouts, and other records. The kids will have to invent first names and other information. They may enjoy trading cards, another favorite pastime of baseball fans.

Hey Team, What Do You Say?

30 minutes

Show Illustrations: Scan the book and show your group the six illustrations that involve Reginald and several team members at once—specifically, the illustrations where teammates:

- Slip and slide on the bats (pp. 6–7)
- Listen to Reginald play violin in the dugout (pp. 10–11)
- Celebrate their winning streak outside the bus (pp. 16–17)
- Sit and talk around the campfire (pp. 18–19)
- Walk off the field after losing to the Monarchs (pp. 22–23)
- Listen to Reginald’s recital (p. 26)

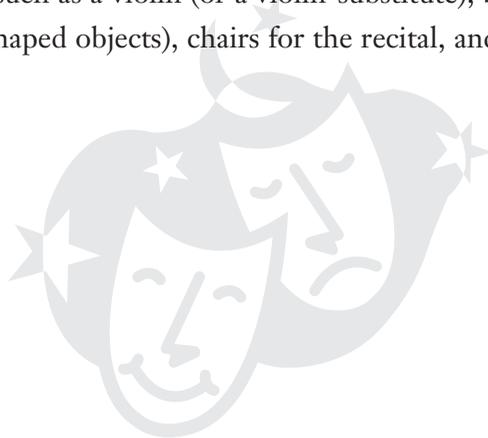


Read Quick Tip #10,
“Drama.”

NOTE

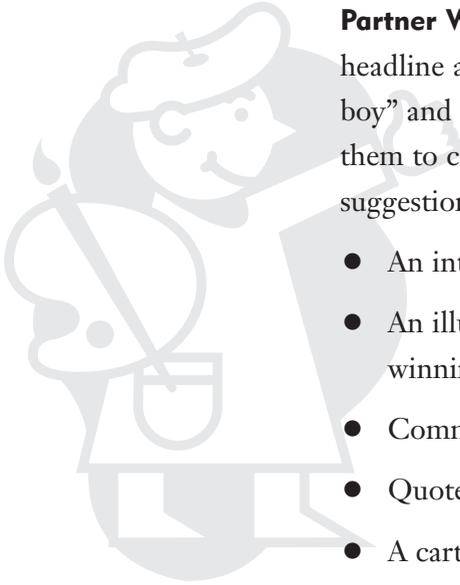
If you have a particularly large group of kids, divide the kids into two groups for the role-play.

Group Role-Play: Shouting out “curtain up” and “curtain down” to start and end each scene, have the kids act out the six scenes. Ask for a volunteer (or two) in advance to play Reginald. Everyone else will be baseball players, as many players as there are kids in your group. Show the specific illustration before each short scene and invite the kids to act out what they think the ballplayers would be saying in the moment—and to be as vocal as they can! Invite the kids to collect a few props such as a violin (or a violin-substitute), baseball bats (or similarly-shaped objects), chairs for the recital, and so on.



Baseball Is Big News

45 minutes



Partner Writing/Illustration: Have partners write and design a headline and front-page news article about the violin-playing “bat boy” and how he helped the Dukes end their losing streak. Invite them to come up with their own ideas or consider the following suggestions as they plan:

- An interview with the bat boy and/or various players on the team
- An illustration of Reginald playing the violin during one of the winning runs
- Comments from Reginald’s father about what has happened
- Quotes from the fans in the bleachers
- A cartoon strip about a favorite part of the story

Sharing: Have the kids exchange and read one another’s articles.

Option: Some kids may prefer to plan a live program describing the events of Reginald’s first day as a bat boy, as they are viewed and reported by radio announcers. Allow time for them to present their program to the group. At the beginning of each presentation, have everyone sing “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.” Invite volunteers to select things they can use to make music (for example, pencils on glasses or an overturned trash can for percussion, stomping with their feet, whistling the tune) as everyone else sings. You may wish to write the words on a wall chart and sing it first yourself if the kids are unfamiliar with its tune and lyrics.

Run the Bases or Violinin’

30 minutes

These two Introduction activities (see pages 6–8 of this guide) are likely to be just as enjoyable as Connection activities after kids have read the book. Consider doing whichever activity you did not choose for an introduction before the reading.

Leagues Apart

One or more sessions

Research: If the kids are interested in learning more about the Negro Leagues, read the book *Leagues Apart: The Men and Times of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, by Lawrence S. Ritter, or make it available for interested baseball fans to read on their own. The book has colorful illustrations and includes a lot of kid-friendly information about the famous and lesser-known ballplayers, and what life was like playing for the Negro Leagues at the time. If computers are available, encourage the kids to search the Internet using the words “Negro Baseball Leagues.”



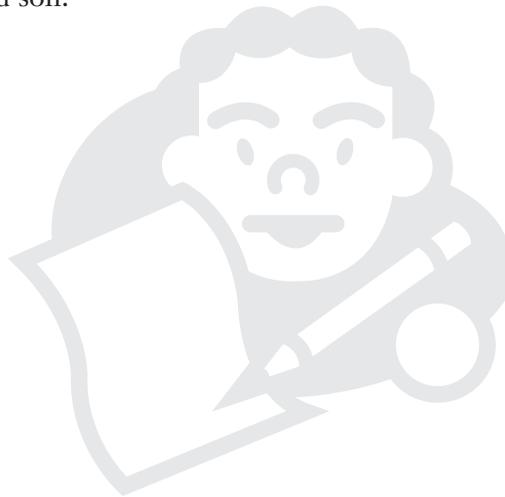
- ▶ These short activities help the kids pull together and extend their thinking and learning about the story, its vocabulary, and its themes.

Our Advice

10–15 minutes

Partner Activity: Distribute two strips of paper to each partnership and invite them to think about what advice they'd like to give Reginald and his dad about their relationship and how to share their different interests. Have them write their advice to Reginald on one strip and suggestions for his father on the other.

Group Chart: Invite the partners to hang their advice strips on a group chart under the following headings: “Our Advice for Reginald” and “Our Advice for Papa.” Ask follow-up questions (such as “What made you write this?”) to get partners talking about the advice they wrote and why they think it's important for this father and son.



“This Is...” Word Game

15–20 minutes

Pick Words: Write a list of Cool Words from the guide or the kids’ own collections on a group chart for all to see. Have everyone come up to the list, check off a favorite word (so nobody else chooses the same word), and write it on a small scrap of paper. Then ask everyone to fold their scrap of paper with the word and put it in a baseball cap.

NOTE

Since all the words are posted where the players can see them, they will eventually guess the correct one.

Group Game: Demonstrate the game by picking a word out of the hat and giving the group a clue with one “This is...” statement. Example: Your word is “stadium,” so you say: “This is the big area with thousands of seats where baseball games are held.” Then encourage everyone to guess your word. If they guess incorrectly, you may give one more clue, such as: “This is another word for ballpark.” Again, give the group a chance to guess. Let them continue to guess until they identify the word. Continue inviting volunteers to take a turn picking a word from the hat and giving “This is...” clues to the group.



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The Bat Boy & His Violin: What's the Story?

"Strike three, you're out!" shouts the umpire. The Dukes are losing again. They're known as the worst team in the Negro National League, and the 1948 season is turning out to be their worst yet—at least until Reginald comes along. Reginald's father, the Dukes' manager, brings his son to the games because he needs a bat boy, but Reginald would much rather play the violin. Reginald's father does not seem to appreciate or even understand his son's musical ability. But when Reginald fills the ballpark with the stirring sounds of Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach, the Dukes start winning. Eventually they lose to the famous Monarchs, but win or lose, Reginald's father develops a renewed pride in his son and his gift for music.



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The Bat Boy and His Violin. No description. by. Reginald loves to create beautiful music on his violin. But Papa, manager of the Dukes, the worst team in the Negro National League, needs a bat boy, not a "fiddler," and traveling with the Dukes doesn't leave Reginald much time for practicing. Soon the Dukes' dugout is filled with Beethoven, Mozart, and Bach -- and the bleachers are filled with the sound of the Dukes' bats. Has Reginald's violin changed the Dukes' luck -- and can his music pull off a miracle victory against the powerful Monarchs? Gavin Curtis's beautifully told story of family ties and Flag ShowMe. Viewed after searching for: violin. You must be logged into ShowMe. Signup.