



INTERNATIONAL
TENNIS HALL OF FAME

Women and Tennis

Lesson 2: Althea Gibson and Integration

Unit Overview: As students work through the activities in this unit they will be introduced to some important women in tennis. They will explore, through varied learning experiences, these women's significance to the game of tennis, but more importantly their impact on the landscape of history. The activities that accompany this unit are geared towards grade 5, the students' multiple intelligences, and will provide academic challenges at multiple levels of cognitive complexity while satisfying the goal of working towards mastery of grade appropriate common core standards of *English Language Arts Standards/Reading: Informational Text*.

Objectives:

Students will be able to-

- Form an understanding of the contribution that Althea Gibson made to her sport in regards to the game of tennis and as women athletes in general.
- Gain background knowledge through vocabulary activities and comprehension activities (such as guided questioning and using appropriate graphic organizers) about the 1950s and about how Gibson contributed in a significant way to that specific time in history.
- Demonstrate what they have learned about Gibson, her significance to the game, and her place in history by successfully completing guided questioning activities, group organizers, and by taking part in meaningful classroom discussions.

Lesson Time Required: One hour or less



Hall of Famer Althea Gibson

Tall and sinewy, determined and athletic, confident and aggressive, Althea Gibson turned the 1950s into a showcase for her talent and temerity. Breaking the color barrier in 1950 at Forest Hills by gaining entry into the U.S. National Championships, Gibson played with peak efficiency from 1956-1958. In that span, she collected five major singles titles, sweeping Wimbledon and the U.S. back-to-back in the latter two seasons. For more information visit [Althea Gibson](#) on the International Tennis Hall of Fame website.

Althea Gibson Objects on Display in the Museum:



Time Magazine featuring Althea Gibson

(artist) Boris Chaliapin (Russian, 1904-1979)

(publisher) Time Inc. (American)

August 26, 1958

Gift of Michael Dodson, 1998

98.8.4

Location: Area 2: Tennis & Tours, 1940s and 1950s Case



Sports Illustrated Magazine featuring Althea Gibson

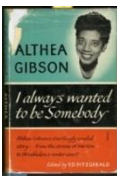
(publisher) Time Inc. (American)

September 2, 1957

ITHF&M Acquisition, 1998

98.81.2

Location: Area 2: Tennis & Tours, 1940s and 1950s Case



I Always Wanted to Be Somebody

(author) Althea Gibson (American, 1927-2003)

(publisher) Harper & Brothers Publishers (American)
1958

In her autobiography, Althea Gibson chronicles her life on and off the court, including the trials and tribulations she had to overcome in her rise to greatness.

Gift of Mr. John D. Law, 1997

PUB.1958.5

Location: Area 2: Tennis & Tours, American Tennis Association Case



Wheaties Cereal Box featuring Althea Gibson, 2001

General Mills (American)

ITHF&M Collection, 2001

2001.2.1

Location: Area 2: Tennis & Culture, Pop Culture Case

Possible Sources:

- *Althea Gibson* by Academic Industries
- *Althea Gibson* by Tim Biracree
- *Nothing but Trouble: The Althea Gibson Story* by Sue Stauffacher

Materials Needed:

- Vocabulary Builder #2
- Text "Editorials: A Vital Issue"
- Text "As I See It: An Open Letter to Althea Gibson"
- Text "Dear Miss Marble"
- Guided Questioning graphic organizer
- Text *Nothing but Trouble: The Althea Gibson Story*
- Tennis Ball graphic organizer
- Tennis ball cutouts

Vocabulary:

- **Wimbledon**- the oldest tennis tournament in the world, and is widely considered the most prestigious. It has been held at the All England Club in Wimbledon, London since 1877.
- **Harlem**- a large neighborhood in the northern section of the New York City borough of Manhattan. Since the 1920s, Harlem has been known as a major African-American residential, cultural, and business center.
- **Multi-talented**- (adj.) having many skills or talents

Common Core Standards:

English Language Arts Standards/Reading: Informational Text:

- **Key ideas and details**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.2 Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.3 Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.
- **Craft and Structure**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.4 Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 5 topic or subject area*.
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.5 Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6 Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.
- **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:**
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.7 Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8 Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9 Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.
- **Research to Build and Present Knowledge**
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.7 Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.8 Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work and provide a list of sources.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Lesson & Activity

Teaching/Model

1. Vocabulary Builder: Each student will receive a Vocabulary Builder graphic organizer. The teacher will read each word and ask the students to fill in bubble 1 if they have never heard the word before, bubble 2 if they have heard the word but are unsure of the definition or bubble 3 if they know the word and can give the definition and use it in a sentence.
2. The teacher will work collaboratively with the students to come up with a working definition of the words on the graphic organizer and a sentence using the words as they pertain to the lesson at hand.
3. ****Students who exceed or meet expectations:**
 - a. The students will be broken into groups of three and will independently (or in groups of two or three) read excerpts from “Editorials: A Vital Issue,” “As I See It: An Open Letter to Althea Gibson,” or “Dear Miss Marble.”
 - b. The students will then use what they have learned from their reading to complete the Guided Questioning graphic organizer to determine the central ideas of a primary source and provide an accurate summary,
 - c. The class will come together to discuss their articles with the ultimate goal of surmising that one of Althea Gibson’s major obstacles was fighting to be allowed to play in the 1950 U.S. Women’s National Championships.
 - d. Based on the discussion students will leave the classroom with an understanding of who Althea Gibson was in regard to tennis and strides she made in breaking the color barrier in tennis.
4. ****Students who partially meet or did not yet meet expectations:**
 - a. The teacher will read aloud *Nothing But Trouble: The Althea Gibson Story* by Sue Stauffacher
 - b. The students will then fill out the Tennis Ball graphic organizer with 5 facts they learned about Althea Gibson from the read aloud to draw evidence from literary text to support analysis, reflection, and research
 - c. The teacher will ask the students to pick the most interesting fact from their graphic organizer and write it on the tennis ball note paper to be posted somewhere in the classroom.
 - d. Based on determining important facts about Althea Gibson students will leave the classroom with an understanding of who Althea Gibson was in regards to tennis and strides she made in breaking the color barrier in tennis.

Vocabulary Builder #2

Target Word ❖ Rate of the Target Words. Rate each one using the scale below.	Definition ❖ Write in the Target Words' definition.	Sentence ❖ Use your Target Words in a sentence.
<p style="text-align: center;">Wimbledon</p> <p>① ② ③</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Harlem</p> <p>① ② ③</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">multi-talented</p> <p>① ② ③</p>		
<p>Rating Scale</p> <p>① = I don't know it at all. ② = I've seen it before. ③ = I might know it.</p>		

Guided Questions

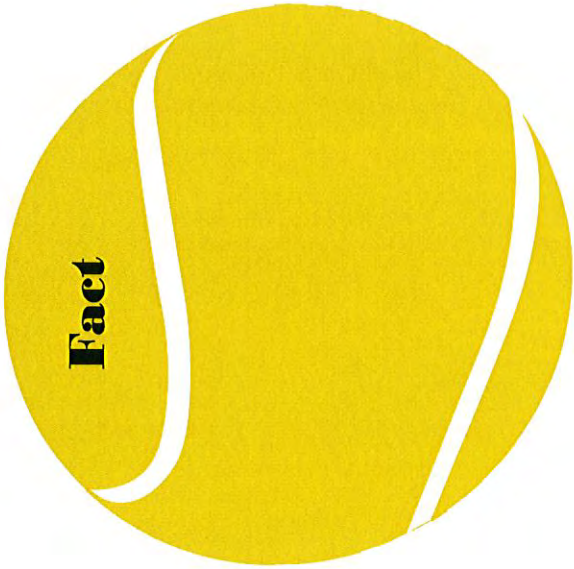
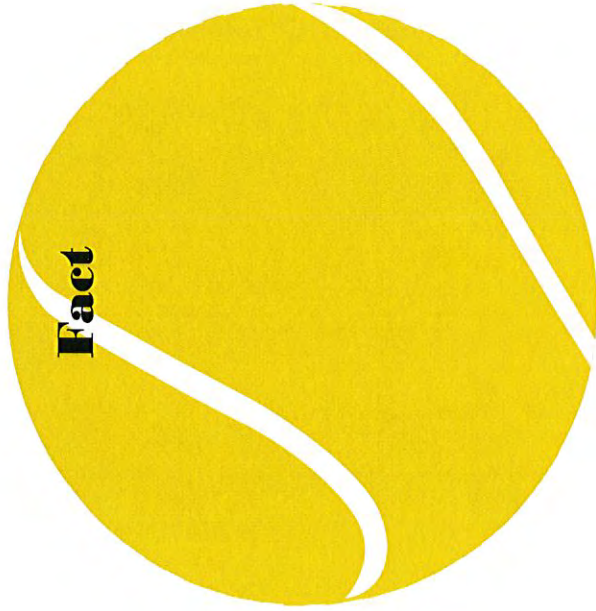
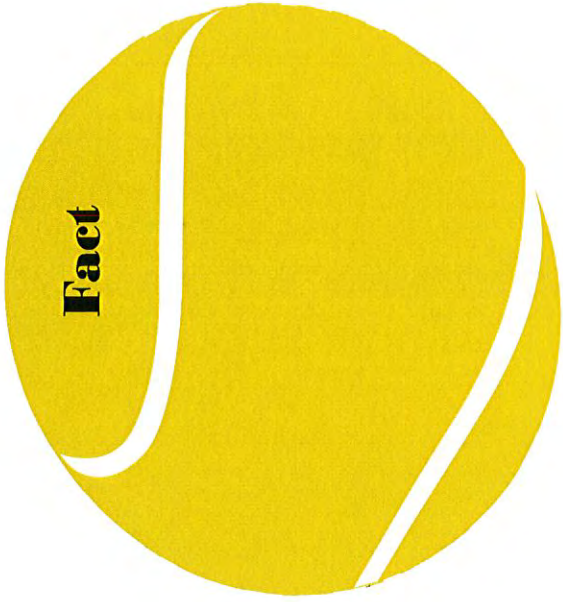
Directions: Each Group will be given a different test regarding Althea Gibson. Please answer the following questions using evidence from the test that your group has been given.

What is one fact that you learned about Althea Gibson?

Who wrote the text that you read?

In no more than three sentences tell me what your text was about?

Using evidence from the text please explain a specific obstacle that Althea Gibson had to overcome?



Nothing but Trouble

The Story of Althea Gibson

★ "An affecting tribute to a great athlete,
and a story to both enjoy and inspire."

—*School Library Journal*, Starred



by Sue Stauffacher illustrated by Greg Couch

...from American Lawn Tennis Editorial "A Vital Issue" by Alice Marble July 1950
page 14

[This] subject has been on my mind for some months, and I consider the opportunity to speak my piece a privilege.

On my current lecture tours...there are [many] who want to know if Althea Gibson will be permitted to play in the [U.S.] Nationals this year...I couldn't answer their questions, but I came back to New York determined to find out. When I directed this question at a committee member of long standing, his answer...was in the negative.

The attitude of the committee will be that Miss Gibson has not sufficiently proven herself...It is my opinion that Miss Gibson performed beautifully under the circumstances. Considering how little play she has had in top competition, her win over a seasoned veteran...seems to me a real triumph.

Nevertheless the committee...insists that in order to qualify for the Nationals, Miss Gibson must also make a strong showing in the major Eastern tournaments to be played between now and the date set for Forest Hills [the site of the U.S. Nationals]. Most of these major tournaments...are invitational, of course. If she is not invited to participate in them, as my committee member freely predicted, then she obviously will be unable to prove anything at all, and it will be the reluctant duty of the committee to reject her entry at Forest Hills.

I think it's time we faced a few facts. If tennis is a game for ladies and gentlemen, it's also time we acted a little more like gentlepeople and less like sanctimonious hypocrites. If there is anything left in the name of sportsmanship, it's more than time to display what it means to us. If Althea Gibson represents a challenge to the present crop of women players, it's only fair that that they should meet that challenge on the courts, where tennis is played. I know these girls, and I can't think of one who would refuse to meet Miss Gibson in competition. She might be soundly beaten for a while - but she has a much better chance on the courts than in the inner sanctum of the committee, where a different kind of game is played.

... Whether she can achieve championship status here or abroad depends no more on her lovely strokes than on what Althea Gibson finds within herself when the chips are down. If she can do it, a proud new chapter will have been added to the history of tennis. If she cannot, we will have seen nothing more and nothing less than one more youngster who failed to live up to her initial promise. But if she is refused a chance to succeed or to fail, there then is an ineradicable mark against a game to which I have devoted most of my life, and I would be bitterly ashamed.

We can accept the evasions; ignore the fact that no one will be honest enough to shoulder the responsibility for Althea Gibson's probable exclusion from the Nationals. We can just "not think about it." Or we can face the issue squarely and honestly. It so

happens that I tan heavily in the summer – but I doubt that anyone ever questioned my right to play in the Nationals because of it...The committee would have felt pretty foolish saying, “Alice Marble can’t play because of that tan.”...It’s just as ridiculous to reject Althea Gibson on the same basis – and that’s the truth of it. She is not being judged by the yardstick of ability but by the fact that her pigmentation is somewhat different.

If the field of sports has got to pave the way for all of civilization, let’s do it. At this moment tennis is privileged to take its place among the pioneers for a true democracy, if it will accept that privilege. If it declines to do so, the honor will fall to the next generation, perhaps – but someone will break the ground...The committee at Forest Hills has the power to stifle the efforts of one Althea Gibson, who may or may not be the stuff of which champions are made, but eventually she will be succeeded by others of her race who have equal or superior ability. They will knock on the door as she has done. Eventually the tennis world will rise up en masse to protest the injustices perpetuated by our policy-makers. Eventually – why not now?

from American Lawn Tennis "As I See It: An open letter to Althea Gibson"
November 1950, pages 19 and 32

Dear Althea,

The 1950 Nationals are over. As in other years, some of us are elated, some are licking our wounds, and others are saying, "I had him in that first set. If only--"

You ought to be in the first-mentioned group, a very proud girl. You made history in your own right, which is quite a burden of honor for twenty-three-year-old shoulders to carry, and you bore your responsibility well. You also played some remarkably good tennis, considering that you had only played on grass three times previous to Forest Hills.

...I was surprised by the number of persons who erroneously congratulated *me* after that match [against Louise Brough, which Althea Gibson lost, but played very well]. They labored under the delusion that you had performed so brilliantly against Miss Brough because I coached you, which is ridiculous....It's kind of your fans to include me in your moral triumph, but I can't take any credit for your performance.

...It isn't easy for a kid of twenty-three, of course. I am long past competitive tennis, and I still don't know who my friends are. I only know, after this year at Forest Hills, who my friends aren't...They remember...an article I wrote, saying that a good tennis player named Althea Gibson ought to play in the Nationals. Things certainly are tough all over, aren't they?

I have no quarrel with the committee at Forest Hills. They accepted your application because you had proven yourself qualified to play, which rested entirely with their judgement. The others, those who made things difficult for you or for me, have no conception of sportsmanship regardless of how many times they walk onto a tennis court. I would not unwrite a word of that controversial article of mine for the company of all of [them] in the world - I'm only glad to know who they are - and you must not play your tennis any differently because of them.

...So...the summing up, Althea, You were blessed with more natural ability than any woman on the courts today; you're a bold player, and you have that rare spark. Without discounting the years you have given to this labor of love, I tell you now that you must work even harder to gain the mechanics, the fundamentals, to harness those assets and direct them into the proper channels in order to become a champion worthy of the name.

Forget the people. Forget your almost-upset of Miss Brough., which is past history. Concentrate on learning and playing the very best tennis of which you are capable - and that's fine tennis, indeed. Don't bother to tell 'em who you are; prove it, instead. See you in 1951. On center court, I hope.

Sincerely,

Alice Marble

...from American Lawn Tennis "Dear Miss Marble: Althea Gibson writes in reply to Alice Marble's open letter" February 1951 pages 15 and 28

Your open letter in the November issue of *American Lawn Tennis* magazine was read with a mixed feeling of sorrow and elation. It gives me an opportunity to clear many angles involving my tennis career and another opportunity to openly thank you for the campaign you made in my cause.

I am elated over the opportunity I had to play at Forest Hills but I am sorry for the slurs you received and the friends you lost. I do believe that you gained more true respectful friends than you lost by writing the very fine article you wrote in my behalf in the Tennis magazine. I believe it was because of this article that the officers thought you had an influence over me. They were right: I would have listened to you, but would the people? It was like mob hysteria. Everybody was surprised and some happy. I am happy that you have no regrets. Again I say I believe the new friends who believe in fair play and democracy will outnumber the few old ones you lost...

Miss Marble, I know you were no weak champion. Weak champions run from competition. In the white tournaments I played in last summer I was agreeably surprised at the friendship and courtesies shown me by everybody from ball boys up. I anticipated some resentment from some players but got none. Now when I think of how nice everybody was to min the tournaments, I can't see why some officials object and try so hard to keep up out of them. I was handicapped by not having my partner to play with, but in each tournament I was fortunate in being teamed with a doubles or mixed doubles partner. Not like playing with your own partner, but the spirit and willingness of the players to play with me was more than I expected.

Miss Marble, if you find things really tough, imagine how I find them. I wanted to play in other tournaments; Mr. Frances and Mr. Baker tried to get applications for me to play in them. Some gave applications, some promised to send them, but either forgot, or, as in one case a committee chairman's wife had to go to the hospital so he forgot to send the application for me to play in the tournament.

...Miss Marble, I learned a wonderful lesson from [a loss early in her career]; I was defeated by experience. That's why I didn't feel bad when Miss Brough defeated me. She used her experience and confidence to out-think and out-play me. I agree Miss Brough had every right to win and I was pulling for her to win the tournament.

After that defeat [earlier in her career]...a man came up to me and asked: "How would you like to play at Forest Hills?" I couldn't believe my ears and naturally thought it was a joke until I looked at the expression on his face, then I knew he meant what he was saying. My answer was, and I'll never forget it: "Of course I would like to play at Forest Hills, but you know that is impossible." He replied: "It is impossible now, but if you are willing to work hard enough, I believe you are the key

to unlock the door.” I told him I would do anything to be able to play at Forest Hills. I was talking to Dr. R. Walter Johnson of Lynchburg, Virginia. He said the first thing I would have to do is get some education. He told me he thought he could arrange for me to get some education and play tennis also...I was told that I was to go to school in Wilmington, North Carolina during the school months. During the summer months I was to stay with Dr. Johnson....Miss Marble, can you imagine being picked out of the “slums” of New York and placed in a home of luxury? Well that happened to me...

Miss Mable, I believe that most of the colored people watching my match had never attended a tennis match before. It was something new to them...

I do believe that we are going to see many changes next year. I wait with hopeful anticipation for what 1951 might bring.

Sincerely yours,

Althea Gibson