



BREAKING THE COLOUR BARRIER:
AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE
CHATHAM COLOURED ALL-STARS (1932-1939)

Breaking the Colour Barrier Curriculum Materials

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Greater Essex County District School Board

Origins and Citizenship: The History of a Canadian Ethnic Group

- ❖ Grade 11
- ❖ Open Level

Ontario
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Grade 11 Lesson Plan

Course: Origins and Citizenship: The History of a Canadian Ethnic Group, Grade 11

Level: Open

Time: 1-2 75 minute classes

Curriculum Expectations

Students will:

D2.2 analyse challenges that institutionalized racism and prejudice in Canada have presented to some ethnic groups, with a particular focus, where applicable, on the selected ethnic group (*e.g., with reference to segregation, discrimination in jobs and/or housing, antisemitism, assimilation, stereotypes, streaming students, racial profiling, internment*)

D3.1 describe the contributions from various ethnic groups, including the specific ethnic group under study, to their own communities and to the development of culture and identity in Canada (*e.g., with reference to literature, art, film, television, politics, the media, education, science and technology, sports, business*)

Description

Students will analyse primary and secondary source documents about the 1934 Chatham Coloured All-Stars. They will read three articles and view one photograph. Upon completion, they will complete the analysis worksheets.

Students can access more documents at the Chatham Coloured All-Stars' online exhibit at:

<http://cdigs.uwindsor.ca/BreakingColourBarrier/>

Prerequisite Skills

- the difference between primary and secondary sources
- definitions of racism, prejudice, segregation, discrimination

Please note:

It is beneficial for students to know that in the early 1800s, five Black families settled along McGregor's Creek in the tiny town of Chatham, then known as "the Forks". The village soon became a haven for runaway slaves who were escaping slavery and oppression in the United States. By 1850, a third of Chatham's population was Black.

Once here, Blacks in Chatham thrived in business, education, medicine, sport, and literary and cultural arts. News of their success attracted Blacks to the area from across North America.

The history of Blacks in early Chatham is not only of local significance; the years of Black contribution and participation in Southwestern Ontario left a fundamental impression on the national landscape.

Please visit <https://ckbhs.org/> for further information on Black history in Chatham.

It is important to note that the terms “coloured” and “negro” are no longer acceptable terms. “Black” and “African Canadian” are used to refer to Canadians of African descent.

Materials/Resources

- assignment outline
- photograph of the 1934 Chatham Coloured All Stars
- *Boomer Harding, One Great Guy* interview/article
- *All Stars* article
- *If Battered Glove Could Only Talk* article
- ‘Analysing Primary and Secondary Source Documents’ worksheets

Evaluation

Worksheets can be assessed for understanding.

Getting Started

Introduce students to the 1934 Chatham Coloured All-Stars. Inform them that they are going to learn about their experiences, challenges, and ground-breaking success. To do this, they will analyse three documents and one photograph.

Working on It

Students will analyse the photo and three articles. Then, they will complete the worksheets that follow.

Extension Activities

Students can rewrite one of the articles as though it was written today.

Students can develop 10 interview questions to ask the Chatham Coloured All-Stars. Then, they will assume the role of the team and accurately respond to the questions.

Analysing Primary and Secondary Source Documents

Origins and Citizenship: The History of a Canadian Ethnic Group

Name _____

The Chatham Coloured All-Stars began in 1933 with various exhibition games. In 1934, the All-Stars entered the Ontario Baseball Association league. Despite the racial discrimination they faced, the All-Stars had a very successful season, becoming the first all-black team to win the OBA Championship.

Analyse the four documents related to the Chatham Coloured All-Stars and answer the questions that follow.



Photograph of the 1934 Chatham Coloured All-Stars

Analysing a Primary Source

1. What are your first impressions?	
2. What type of photo is it?	
3. Who do you see?	
4. What objects do you see?	
5. What is going on?	
6. In one sentence, summarize the photo.	
7. Who do you think took this photo? Why?	
8. Why do you think this photo was taken? Use evidence to explain.	
9. When do you think it was taken?	
10. What did you find out from this photo that you did not know before?	
11. What questions do you have?	
12. Give this photograph a caption.	

BOOMER HARDING- ONE GREAT GUY

CHATHAM- Ask anybody here about Wilfred (Boomer) Harding and they'll tell you the man who delivered mail to their doors for 35 years is one of the finest human beings they've ever met.

Compassionate. never an unkind word, they say- unassuming. Loves dogs and kids. outwardly friendly and inwardly shy. Nice man. everybody says Boomer Harding is a gentleman.

Few people here, however, rarely mention Boomer's standing as one of the city's most outstanding athletes over four decades...even in knowing his basement is a virtual sports hall of fame.

More than 60 trophies, three boxes of newspaper clippings and an end wall smothered with Chenille crests, medals and pictures of teams he played for, confirm his athletic prowess.

Anyone would be flattered to be so decorated. To Boomer Harding however, the memorabilia is simply that. memories. Good ones. Some ones. reminders only of the fun he had and the lasting friendships he developed over 40-plus years of competition.

Ah, there's a great old photo. the 1954 Colored All-Stars baseball team- Chatham's first Ontario champions.

"It was strictly a fun thing with team." Boomer said. "There was no TV in those days. few people had radios and hardly anybody who grew up in the east end around Stirling Park had a car. if a young fella didn't get himself into baseball he generally got himself into jail. The game was a kind of release from it all for most of us. Gosh, what a great time we had..."

The colored All-Stars operated on a financial shoestring. we had even less than that," Boomer said. "We had to go on the road and sort of barnstorm across the province to pick up enough money to buy our bats. we were an all colored team, of course and something of an attraction from that standpoint but we had an exceptionally good team too.

WE We travelled in borrowed cars and maybe without knowing it even stolen cars. I don't know. A lot of the trips were made with the whole team riding in the back of a Taylor's Mill flour ~~pickup~~ truck. we'd go anywhere, anytime for a ballgame... and a dollar or two."

Earl (Flat) Chase, Don East Washington, a lefthanded third baseman by the name of King Terrell and Don Taborn were the acknowledged stars. Oldtimers in the area contend these four had major league potential. None of them were ever considered, of course, because blacks were barred from playing with the pros.

"We had an exhibition game one day against a Detroit team which include several of the Tigers," Boomer said. "When the Detroit manager found out we were colored he threatened to call off the game. Luckily he found out one of our players was an Indian chap by the name of Wally Shognosh. At that the Detroit manager said we'd better all be Indians in a hurry or his guys wouldn't take the field. So...for a day we were Indian."

Flat was unquestionably the most gifted player in the country at the time. His batting feats are legendary from Detroit to Penatanguishene.

"If you were in Welland today and told anybody you were from Chatham, the first thing they'd tell you would be about the homerun Flat hit there one day." Boomer said. "It was one of my greatest moments because I was on first base when he hit it. The ball not only cleared the right field fence, it cleared a building way behind the fence. People in Welland later said the ball ended up downtown. Flat was the most gifted hitter I've ever seen. There's no question in anybody's mind who ever saw him that he would have been a major

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leaguer had it not been for the color barrier.

Flat was also an accomplished pitcher. He outdueled Phil Marchildon in the 34 Ontario championships series. Marchildon later went on to pitch for Connie Mack's old ~~XXXXX~~ American League Philadelphia Athletics before World War II finished his career.

"Bad feelings throughout the series," Boomer said. "They wouldn't allow us to stay overnight in Penatanguishene because we were colored so we drove over ~~the~~ to Midland. We split ~~up~~ the first two games and the third one at Guelph was called off on account of darkness. You wouldn't have believed it. We had by five or six runs in the fourth inning. It was 4:30 in the afternoon and the sun was shining brightly. We had the bases loaded and none out - and the umpires called the game. The plate ump just said too dark too continue and ran off the field.

"There was a lot of internal fighting with the OBA at the time over when the deciding game would be played. Penatang wanted it delayed one week so that Marchildon could pitch again. The OBA ruled against the delay and we played with two days rest on as Sunday in Guelph again. Marchildon started for them and Don Taborn started for us. He threw four wild pitches to the first batter. Flat came in from second base, took the ball from Taborn and pitched the rest of the game - fourth game in something like ~~xxxxx days~~ six days. He beat Marchildon too. Flat was strong, strong man. Winning was great but the big thing was we had fun - King playing the piano and Flat dancing and singing."

The all stars won three successive OBA titles ~~xxxxxxx~~ and while most of the players retired Boomer went on to play with three more senior OBA championship teams from Chatham.

Boomer Harding was also an out standing hockey player. He started on the city's outdoor rinks at Stirling and Tecumseh Parks and graduated Windsor Staffords of the old International League.

Boomer didn't make the Chatham ~~the~~ club. Some of the players didn't want coloreds on their team either.

"Adam Brown, who played with the Red Wings at the time, got me a tryout with the Detroit Auto Club," Boomer said. "When they found out about the color thing they traded me to Windsor. We played in Detroit though.

"I remember going to Olympia one day for public skating. The guy at the gate stopped me. I reminded him the sign outside said public skating. He told me the sign didn't really mean what it said.

Olympia officials gave away miniature hats to any player scoring three goals in a game. Boomer a centre who had great scoring skills and always near the top of the points race in any league he played in never scored three goals in a game at Detroit.

"I could generally get a couple early in the game but for some strange reason I never got on the ice after that. Our coach didn't want to chance getting hanged if I was out there long enough to score three." he said.

Baseball, hockey, best pole vaulter at WOSSA meets, bowler, captain and star forward with the Ontario champion Legion 28 soccer team... the list is endless. He was second last year in the nationals doubles championships as a member of the Ontario team.

And an umpire too - baseball, ~~xxxxxy~~ softball, soccer and hockey referee. Today at 63 years young, Boomer Harding still officiates six days a week for whoever needs him.

"I get my biggest out of working the kids games around Dover Centre," Boomer said. "I'll pass up a big game in Chatham to work with the kids. They're great. They never cease to amaze me."

Still when the big game arrives the call goes out to Boomer Harding. His integrity is without question and his judgments without dispute. His competence is without challenge.

I guess what it all boils down to is respect...on and off the field.



By Win Miller of The Free Press
 Wilfred (Boomer) Harding looks over just one small part of a vast collection of memorabilia collected during his 40-plus years of sports in Chatham.

Boomer Harding — one great guy

CHATHAM — Ask anybody here about Wilfred (Boomer) Harding and they'll tell you the man who delivered mail to their doors for 35 years is one of the finest human beings they've ever met.

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Ah, there's a great ol' photo. The 1934 Colored All-Stars baseball team — Chatham's first Ontario champions. "It was strictly a fun thing with that team," Boomer said. "There was no TV in those days. Few people had radios and hardly anybody who grew up in the east end around Stirling Park had a car. If a young fella didn't get himself into baseball he generally got himself into jail. The game was a kind of release from it all for most of us. Gosh, what a great time we had . . ."

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Ernie Miller

Boomer Harding One Great Guy
Analysing a Primary Source Document

Title	
Type	
Date	
Participants	
What was the main message?	
What historical facts did you learn? Write at least three.	
What does this document reveal about Black Canadian identity at the time?	
Is there any bias? Explain.	
Whose perspective or voice is missing?	
What questions do you still have?	

All-Stars shine again

London Free Press Sat. July 13, 2002



THE 1934 CHATHAM COLOURED ALL-STARS: Left to right, front row: Stanton Robbins, batboy Jack Robinson and Len Harding. Middle row: Hyle Robbins, Earl (Flat) Chase, King Terrell, Don Washington, Don Tabron, Ross Talbot and Cliff Olbey. Back row: Louis Pryor, Guoy Ladd, Sagasta Harding, Wilfred (Boomer) Harding and coach Percy Parker.

London Free Press
Sat. July 13, 2002

ALL-STARS: Familiar with discrimination

From Page E1

Horace Chase of Chatham remembers his father as a strong man with a Mike Tyson build, a pitcher for the All-Stars.

Chase will represent his dad, Earl (Flat) Chase, in today's ceremony. Others on the team agreed the pitcher-infielder was the team's best player and would have been the top candidate for the major leagues.

Players said as many as five teammates deserved a shot at the major leagues. But the colour line — not broken by Jackie Robinson until 1947 — meant the majors were an impossible dream for the All-Stars. None of the All-Stars played in the Negro leagues and the team never played in a separate league for blacks-only.

However, they were familiar with discrimination. Some players had trouble getting work because of their skin colour. On the road, the team was sometimes turned away from hotels and restaurants.

"Some smaller towns carried racism a bit far," team member Cliff Olbey said during a civic ceremony honouring the team in 1984. "We just stuck together

as a team. It wasn't anything but a part of life then."

Art Cartier, who spent 21 years on London's board of control and is currently a Thames Valley District School Board trustee, was a 19-year-old sports reporter for the Border City (now Windsor) Star in 1934, covering Chatham.

"We just stuck together as a team. It (discrimination) wasn't anything but a part of life then."

Cliff Olbey of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars, speaking in 1984

"They were almost a novelty in those days in parts of Ontario," he recalled yesterday. "There was a real friendship among them. They made as much noise playing ball as anyone else — they were chattering all the time — but it was all part of the game. The point is, they were damn good and damn good sportsmen."

The All-Stars, formed in 1932, spent much of the decade travelling across Ontario for exhibition and league games.

They were the first black team to enter the OBA playdowns.

In 1934, they played in the Chatham city league and rolled to the title with just a single loss. They also kept their exhibition schedule, often playing up to five nights a week.

The All-Stars began the '34 OBA intermediate B playoffs by knocking out Sarnia, Welland and Milton. The best-of-three final was against the Penetang Shipbuilders, who were led by future big-leaguer Phil Marchildon.

The teams split the first two games. After the third game ended controversially in the 11th inning because of darkness, Chatham won the rematch 13-7 Oct. 23 in Guelph.

The team was greeted by almost 2,000 fans on Fifth Street. The fans and players paraded to the William Pitt Hotel.

"Chatham will win other ball championships, but we'll always remember the coloured boys led the way," Mayor Isaac Davis said at the time.

(Chatham Daily News)

With files from Eric Bender and Steve Green, Free Press Sports Reporters

All-Stars Shine Again

Analysing a Secondary Source Document

Title	
Type	
Date	
Authors	
What was the main message?	
What historical facts did you learn? Write at least three.	
How would this article be written differently today?	
Is there any bias? Explain.	
Whose perspective or voice is missing?	
Who was the audience?	

Our Heritage

If battered glove could only talk

Black team saw glory and woe

It's not really much to look at. It's just an old, beat-up rather pitiful looking baseball glove. In fact, it's so different in appearance from a modern day glove that it almost has a surreal look to it.

It now rests in "retirement" at Chatham's W.I.S.H. Centre in the Heritage Room, but we're sure it's aching to come out of its forced leisure and tell of the days when it was the property of one Kingsley Terrell and the things it saw in the 1930s.

Kingsley Terrell was a third basemen who sometimes took his turn on the pitching mound for the legendary Chatham Coloured All Stars.

He was one of the black athletes of the day who decided that they should put their talents together, form a ball team, find a park to play in (Stirling Park) and enter into some serious competition. In 1933 the Chatham All Stars



LISA and JIM GILBERT

made it to the finals of the Ontario Baseball Association Intermediate playoffs and they knew that with a little more luck they had a real shot at going all the way.

During their 1934 pursuit of an Ontario championship, the team got to travel around a good portion of Ontario and if they had not known it before they soon realized that they were not your normal baseball team.

Everywhere they went they were treated differently. On the field they were always the heroes and had huge crowd appeal. In every ball park they played in, the crowds came out to see them and, for the most part, to cheer them.

However, once they left the baseball diamond, it was a whole new story.

The Chatham Coloured All

Stars were not welcome to eat at many restaurants.

Long road trips had to be planned well in advance to ensure that the locality had a restaurant that would serve them.

Trying to find a place to spend the night for the team also presented some real problems.

Some motels refused to have them stay at all while others insisted that they arrive well after dark in order that their white guests would never know that blacks were also staying at the same place.

When fall of 1934 rolled around the All Stars were down to the Ontario finals playing against a strong team from Penetang.

The first two games were split and, the third ended in a 2-2 tie. The final game was played in neutral territory, in Guelph, and the All Stars came ready to play.

The final score of the deciding Ontario Championship game was 13-7 in favour of the Chatham All Stars.

Pitching that day for Chatham was Earl (Flat) Chase who out-pitched Penetang's pitching sensation Phil Marchildon, and in later years, went on to have a long and

illustrious career in the American League playing for the Philadelphia Athletics.

This fact, of course, begs the question: How many of the Chatham All Stars were good enough to play in the big leagues if there had not been a colour barrier?

Teammates of Terrell and Chase including Wilf (Boomer) Harding, Len Harding, Goy Ladd and Ross Talbot unfortunately never got their chance to at least be denied a spot in the majors due to their performance. Their ineligibility was never in question.

When the Ontario champions arrived back home from Guelph after their victory that evening it was near midnight.

Nevertheless, their motorcade was met by hundreds at the city limits and escorted to the site of the old Fifth Street Bridge.

Here, Chatham Mayor Isaac Davis stood on the hood of a car and greeted the new champions. In his brief speech, he stated that "Chatham will win other ball championships but we'll always remember it was the coloured boys who led the way."

At a civic reception held later on

that fall, the coach of the All Stars, Happy Parker, stood up and graciously thanked the City of Chatham for its support of the team.

He then went on to voice what many of the 175 black families living in Chatham's east end and the many other families at Buxton, Dresden and other locales must have had on their minds for a long time.

"We thank you," Coach Parker began, "for the fine banquet and the wonderful support ... now would it be too much to ask if you could give these same boys a chance to work at some of the places they just can't get into now?"

An affirmative answer to that question took a long time coming and some might contend that a totally positive response is still being awaited.

Is it any wonder then that Kingsley Terrell's glove, although full of sweet memories, still looks slightly battered and more than a little forlorn?

• Lisa and Jim Gilbert are local historians.

Flashbacks

If Battered Glove Could Only Talk
Analysing a Secondary Source Document

Title	
Type	
Date	
Authors	
What was the main message?	
What historical facts did you learn? Write at least three.	
What does this document reveal about what life was like for Black Canadians in the 1930s?	
Does the author's language support a certain perspective? Explain.	
Whose perspective or voice is missing?	
Write some opinions the authors have.	