From We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball

By Kadir Nelson, page 47-51

…But the most famous of all pitchers was Leroy “Satchel” Paige. He got his nickname “Satchel” when he was a boy. He used to work at the train depot, carrying folks’ bags and satchels. Satchel was a masterful pitcher, and by far the greatest showman. People came out by the thousands to see him pitch. If a team needed some cash, Wilkinson would send him out there to pitch a few innings for them. Satchel made a lot of money doing that. He pitched for more than 250 teams. That fellow was something else. We’d be waiting around for Satchel to show up for a game, and he was nowhere to be found. Then he’d arrive just a few minutes before game time with a police escort, sirens blazing and all. He always kept us laughing. He would walk real slow to the mound and let his long arms dangle. Satchel didn’t believe in running. A few times he called in the outfield and struck out the side without giving a single hit. He was tall and skinny. If he turned sideways, he’d disappear. His arms were just as skinny around his biceps as his wrists. We used to say they were like rubber hoses, or long black snakes.

Nowadays, pitchers pitch maybe once or twice a week and rest a few days in between. Not Satchel. He pitched every day. He lived on that mound. He said he kept his arm young by taking boiling hot showers. He would tie a big Turkish towel around his arm and let the hot water run over it. Nowadays, pitchers use ice for their arms; but back then, they used heat. He also rubbed his arm with this real hot snake oil that some American Indian fellow gave him. He wouldn’t give up that secret formula for anything. When Satchel pitched, he raised his big foot high, let it come down, and then whipped the ball by you. Satchel was nothing but fastball. Even his slow stuff was fast. We knew it was coming, but we still couldn’t hit it. The ball would be moving so fast it looked like a little white pill by the time it got to the plate. And it would jump a little bit before it got to you, just enough to make you miss it. Satchel wasn’t legendary only for his speed, but also for his control. He could put the ball wherever he wanted to put it. Most pitchers warmed up by throwing over home plate or a glove, but Satchel used a candy wrapper or a bottle cap. A catcher only had to hold up his glove, and Satchel would hit it.

TEACHER NOTES

* First read- blue questions (key ideas and details)
* Second read- orange questions (craft and structure)
* Third read (if necessary)- purple questions (integration of knowledge and ideas)

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What is a satchel? What clues from the text helped you figure that out?

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Why would Satchel walk slowly? What effect would that have on his teammates? On his opponents? Why walk so slowly after getting a police escort?

Why would he need a police escort?

How could Satchel bring in cash for a team just by pitching? How do you know?

What does it mean to “call in the outfield”?

What does it mean by “kept his arm young”?

Nowadays, pitchers pitch maybe once or twice a week and rest a few days in between. Not Satchel. He pitched every day. He lived on that mound. He said he kept his arm young by taking boiling hot showers. He would tie a big Turkish towel around his arm and let the hot water run over it. Nowadays, pitchers use ice for their arms; but back then, they used heat. He also rubbed his arm with this real hot snake oil that some American Indian fellow gave him. He wouldn’t give up that secret formula for anything. When Satchel pitched, he raised his big foot high, let it come down, and then whipped the ball by you. Satchel was nothing but fastball. Even his slow stuff was fast. We knew it was coming, but we still couldn’t hit it. The ball would be moving so fast it looked like a little white pill by the time it got to the plate. And it would jump a little bit before it got to you, just enough to make you miss it. Satchel wasn’t legendary only for his speed, but also for his control. He could put the ball wherever he wanted to put it. Most pitchers warmed up by throwing over home plate or a glove, but Satchel used a candy wrapper or a bottle cap. A catcher only had to hold up his glove, and Satchel would hit it.

What did he hope the hot towel would do for him? If it was “young,” what does that mean?

In what way(s) was Satchel Paige like Jackie Robinson? How were they different? Support your response with evidence from the texts.

What words could you use to describe Satchel Paige as a pitcher? What words could you use to describe Satchel Paige as just a man…as a person? Use evidence from the text to support your response.

How does the narrator feel about Satchel Paige? Support your response with evidence from the text.

Why does the author describe Satchel’s pitching stance this way? What does that do for the reader?

Why would he use a candy wrapper or bottle cap?