

Little People, BIG DREAMS™

TEACHERS' GUIDE



Billie Jean King

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Written by Maria Isabel Sanchez Vegara

Illustrated by Miranda Sofroniou

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LEARNING OBJECTIVE:

Just as soon as she tried it, Billie Jean King loved playing tennis. Running, hitting a ball, playing with both girls and boys—the sport had all the things she loved. Winning her first championship when she was a teenager, Billie Jean went on to dominate the sport and become the number one women’s player in the world! Through it all, she stayed true to her conviction that boys and girls should be treated equally, in sports and in life. Her remarkable achievements are proof that perseverance, dedication, and belief in yourself can help create lasting change and turn your dream into a reality.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS IN THIS UNIT

1. Why is Billie Jean King famous?
2. What sport did Billie Jean originally want to play?
3. Why did Billie Jean choose to play tennis?
4. Why was it important to Billie Jean that boys and girls be able to play the same sports?
5. Who won the famous tennis match between Billie Jean and Bobbie Riggs?
6. Of all her accomplishments, which made Billie Jean the happiest?

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Although Billie Jean loved playing baseball, she quickly realized that “she was the only girl on the field. And there was no place for her past the kids’ games.” Ask the class why they think that was. How do they think Billie Jean felt about it? Do they think it is fair for boys to be able to play some games, but not girls? Why or why not?

2. Billie Jean loved tennis right away. The book explains that “after her first lesson, Billie Jean knew what she wanted to do in life.” (p.11) Ask the students if they have ever felt that way or have ever met someone who knew exactly what they wanted to be. Why do they think Billie Jean was so certain?
3. The book explains that Billie was “pushed aside from a team photo because she was wearing shorts, not a skirt.” (p.13) Ask the class why they think others didn’t like the way she dressed. Why do they think some people in tennis believed that girls must wear skirts and boys must wear shorts? Do they think that thinking is fair, and why?
4. Although she was a world champion tennis player, the book explains that “the day the first sports scholarships were given to women, Billie Jean felt happier than she had lifting any trophy.” (p.25) Ask the class why they think this was so important to Billie Jean. What did it mean for women in her sport?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. Billie Jean was tough and stood up for herself as a female tennis player, but the road was not easy. Have students research the history of sports. Why do they think girls were often excluded from playing sports? What sports can they play now? How did Billie Jean help pass Title IX, which prohibits discrimination in all federally funded school programs, including sports?
2. The book explains that “Billie Jean did lots of gardening and housework to save enough money to buy her first tennis racquet.” (p.27) Have the students think about what activities they enjoy doing. Ask them to consider what equipment they need for that activity and, using the internet as a resource, find out what that equipment costs. Are students willing to spend money on the activities that are important to them?
3. Give tennis a go! Ask your school’s physical education department if they have tennis rackets and balls you can use. If not, ask your class parents or a local tennis club if they have equipment to borrow. Have students sign up to take the equipment home on weekends. Help them locate public tennis courts or school courts in your district and ask them to hit the ball with a relative or friend. Afterwards, ask them about their experiences. Did they have fun? You never know – you just might inspire the next tennis great!
4. Ask the students to look at the book’s artwork once more. Point out how the illustrator used different layers of paint to create shadow, depth, and texture. Ask the students to select their favorite sport, then have them paint it using the book’s style as their inspiration.

Guide created by Shannon Gallagher

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