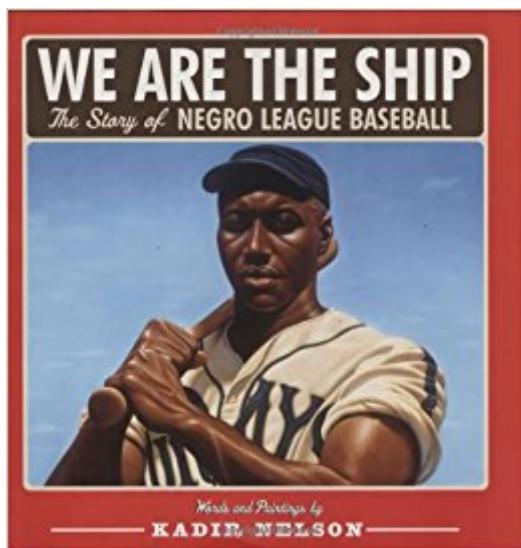


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# We Are The Ship: The Story Of Negro League Baseball



## Synopsis

"We are the ship; all else the sea."-Rube Foster, founder of the Negro National League The story of Negro League baseball is the story of gifted athletes and determined owners; of racial discrimination and international sportsmanship; of fortunes won and lost; of triumphs and defeats on and off the field. It is a perfect mirror for the social and political history of black America in the first half of the twentieth century. But most of all, the story of the Negro Leagues is about hundreds of unsung heroes who overcame segregation, hatred, terrible conditions, and low pay to do the one thing they loved more than anything else in the world: play ball. Using an "Everyman" player as his narrator, Kadir Nelson tells the story of Negro League baseball from its beginnings in the 1920s through its decline after Jackie Robinson crossed over to the majors in 1947. The voice is so authentic, you will feel as if you are sitting on dusty bleachers listening intently to the memories of a man who has known the great ballplayers of that time and shared their experiences. But what makes this book so outstanding are the dozens of full-page and double-page oil paintings-breathtaking in their perspectives, rich in emotion, and created with understanding and affection for these lost heroes of our national game. *We Are the Ship* is a tour de force for baseball lovers of all ages.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 900L (What's this?)

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Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 86 customer reviews

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 3 Up—A lost piece of American history comes to life in Kadir Nelson's elegant and eloquent history (Hyperion/Jump at the Sun, 2008) of the Negro Leagues and its gifted baseball players. The history of the Leagues echoes the social and political struggles of black America during the first half of the 20th century. There were scores of ballplayers who never became as famous as Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb and were almost lost in obscurity because of segregation—and Nelson recreates their history here. The narrative is divided into nine innings, beginning with Rube Foster and his formation of the first Negro League in 1920 and closing with Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier into white major league baseball. In between are fascinating snippets of the events and men who formed the Negro Leagues. Listeners glimpse the pain black Americans endured because of bigotry and segregation, but the true center of this story is the joy of baseball and the joy men felt at being able to play the game. Hall of Famer Hank Aaron, who began playing with the Negro Leagues, provides the foreword. Eloquent narration is performed by actor Dion Graham, and a bluesy guitar introduction and conclusion is reminiscent of the time period. Nelson's stunning oil paintings are included on a CD—but make sure to have the book available as well. Social studies teachers and baseball fans of all ages will covet this delightful winner of the 2009 Coretta Scott King author award and illustrator Honor award.

—Tricia Melgaard, Centennial Middle School, Broken Arrow, OK Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

\*Starred Review\* Award-winning illustrator and first-time author Nelson's history of the Negro Leagues, told from the vantage point of an unnamed narrator, reads like an old-timer regaling his grandchildren with tales of baseball greats Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, and others who forged the path toward breaking the race barrier before Jackie Robinson made his historic debut. The narrative showcases the pride and comradery of the Negro Leagues, celebrates triumphing on one's own terms and embracing adversity, even as it clearly shows the "us" and "them" mentality bred by segregation. If the story is the pitch, though, it's the artwork that blasts the book into the stands. Nelson often works from a straight-on vantage point, as if the players took time out of the action to peer at the viewer from history, eyes leveled and challenging, before turning back to the field of play. With enormous blue skies and jam-packed grandstands backing them, these players look like the giants they are. The stories and artwork are a tribute to the spirit of the Negro Leaguers, who were much more than also-rans and deserve a more prominent place on baseball's history shelves. For students

and fans (and those even older than the suggested grade level), this is the book to accomplish just that. Grades 5-8. --Ian Chipman

This is a beautiful book! Kadir Nelson is a gifted visual artist who is also a wonderful storyteller. I especially like the flair, toughness, strength, and determination that shows through in his illustrations of real people. My nephew likes it but he's more into mythical superheroes, for now.

This book is simply gorgeous. And I mean that in the truest sense of the words. It is simply written, and the artwork is gorgeous. I read it in one sitting, not difficult. The pictures are more telling than the text. Of course, learning about Rube and the business of "Negro League" baseball were interesting, but there are many more in-depth accounts if that is what you are after. The same goes for the players. Stories about Josh and Satchel are funny, sad, and endless. But again, it is the artwork that sets this book apart from the other histories of this time in the game's history. One of the unique aspects of this book is that it avoids the hyperbole so common as regards the truly great players who were denied their rightful place in the Bigs. However, one account from a white umpire did strike me. He said that if the players in the (white) major leagues played like this, they would have to make the parks and stadiums bigger, so many more people would come out to see the games. Not an exact quote, but that was the gist of it, and it rings true. Pete Rose was known for hustle, but he would have been just another player in these leagues, because they all played their heart out. And for not much money. It has the appearance of a coffee table book, but it is so much more. It is a work of art. For any true fan of the game, it is a must-own.

This is a wonderful introduction to the history of the Negro Leagues. Nelson has so completely captured in his art and writing the essence of the era. I'm torn between feelings of anger and frustration that these leagues existed because of the injustice of the times and feelings of admiration for the excellence the players and teams because these leagues existed. It is listed as a children's book, but it is a "must have" in the libraries of people of all ages. The artwork alone is worth the price of admission. Well written, well researched, and enormously informative.

I heard an interview with the author on the radio a few months ago and kind of tucked this book into the back of my mind as possibly interesting. Then when I ran across it in the bookstore I had to buy it. Kadir Nelson tells the story of Negro League baseball in a wonderful way that highlights both the joys the players had in playing as well as the challenges they faced - everything from lumpy

ballparks and crowded team buses to the difficulties imposed by segregation and prejudice. He tells it from the "we" perspective that gives it an atmosphere of a voice speaking from the past but also makes it sound personal. He introduces us to many of the greats, men who would have been stars in any league, like Satchel Paige, "Cool Papa" Bell, "Judy" Johnson, Josh Gibson - the "black Babe Ruth" (or was Babe the "white Josh Gibson?") - and many, many others. He includes information on those who made the Negro League possible, like Rube Foster, and some of the team owners. I also thought numbering the chapters as Innings (with "Extra Innings" for the final chapter) was a clever touch. But the text alone isn't what makes this book so great. The artwork is stunning in this oversize book, and hardly a page goes by that doesn't have a full page painting (including one fold-out). Some are simple poses of the men on the field and a few show them getting off trains or riding on the bus, but my favorites are the ones that show the action of the game. Several would be good enough to hang on the wall (as reprints, of course, not cut from the book). It has a look and style of the old depression-era artwork that was used in murals and public places. My little-league son and I have been reading the book and have both learned a lot. Of course, segregation is a recurrent theme, and it's embarrassing to me that this is how things used to be, but I think it's important that my children understand how it affected real people. But we both enjoy reading not only of the challenges faced, but also the joys they had in playing the game we both love and their triumphs. The forward by Hank Aaron and the part about Jackie Robinson are nice in that regard. This is a beautiful book that baseball fans of any color will enjoy.

This is an interesting book about "Negro Baseball Leagues." This book gives an account to the start of baseball that most people have never heard. It tells of the struggles that they went through to form their own leagues since they were not allowed to play on a major league team. It is a historical account of how they were treated by spectators because of the color of their skin. It is a great story of perseverance. Even though this book is about baseball, the history of how things were in the United States at the turn of the century, through the Great Depression, up until the last day of the leagues in 1960 is important for everyone to know. This is a different perspective on the history of the United States and could be a great supplement for students to read. This book is written as if the players are telling the story. The paintings are so detailed and lifelike that it is like watching a movie. I can hear the voices of the players. I can see the plays happening. It is a historical work of art.

Got this book from a book store a few years ago. Just ordered it for a friend who's a long-time baseball fan. It's not just a book -- it's an experience. I couldn't hold back the tears. A very personal

account of what it was like to be a player in the Negro Leagues. What these guys had to put up with is sad and embarrassing. Somehow this was classified as a children's book? I never got that sense when I was reading it. Masterfully written & illustrated.

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