



Educator's Guide

Perfect Match: The Story of Althea Gibson and Angela Buxton

Written by Lori Dubbin

Illustrated by Amanda Quartey

Kar-Ben Publishing

Note: this nonfiction picture book can be used in classrooms from lower to upper elementary, so two levels of questions and activities are included here: K-2 and 3-5.

About the Book

When Althea Gibson first dreamed of joining the big American tennis leagues, she was denied because she was Black. Angela Buxton dreamed of joining the best tennis clubs in Britain, but she was rejected because she was Jewish. When Angela heard that Althea was coming to Britain to compete, she skipped school to see the match. If Althea didn't let hatred stop her from playing the game she loved, Angela wouldn't either. At the French Championships in 1956, Angela told Althea about her dream of winning Wimbledon with a doubles partner. To win as a team, they would have to stick to their strengths together. And they did.

About the Author

Lori Dubbin is a writer and former early childhood educator. She enjoys researching and writing about people just outside the framework of history who have made extraordinary contributions to the world and who model kindness, compassion, and perseverance for young readers. When Lori isn't researching or writing, she likes walking through unfamiliar cities and solving crossword puzzles, but not at the same time. Her children's picture book, *Perfect Match, The Story of Althea Gibson and Angela Buxton*, with illustrator Amanda Quartey, is a Junior Library Guild Selection.

About the Illustrator

Amanda Quartey was born and raised in London. At age 14, she moved to Ghana, where she studied art, returning to the UK to study graphic design. Amanda has built a professional illustration portfolio and loves every bit of her illustration career!

Grades K-2

Objective

Students will listen to the teacher read the book aloud, extend vocabulary, participate in a class discussion, and complete independent activities based on the book.

Pre-reading discussion questions

Show the cover of the book, point out the different elements (title, author, illustrator, publisher, cover illustration) and ask:

- Can you guess what the story is about by looking at this cover illustration?
- Who are the author and the illustrator of the book? Do you know what authors and illustrators do?
- Who is the publisher of the book? Do you know what a publisher does?
- Do you play tennis? What do you know about the game of tennis? Have you ever watched a game of tennis, either in person or on television?

As you are reading the book aloud, ask students to point out unfamiliar words. Give a brief definition and continue reading.

Post-reading discussion questions

What was this story about? Do you have anything in common with the people in the story? Have you ever felt excluded or left out? Do you have a best friend who sticks up for you? Do you have a friend who plays sports or does other activities with you?

Have you read other books that remind you of this one? How are they alike?
(*Examples: themes of friendship, girls or women, sports, racism, overcoming challenges.*)

What is the difference between a fiction book and a nonfiction book? Which type of story do you like better? What are some other nonfiction books you have read? Which do you like better, nonfiction books about people and history, or nonfiction books about animals and nature?

Did you like the illustrations in the book? Do you think the illustrator did a good job of helping to tell the story of Althea and Angela? Would you have enjoyed the story as much if the book had photographs or cartoons instead of these illustrations?

Would you rather be an author or an illustrator? Would you like to draw or tell true stories, or ones you make up using your imagination?

Why were Althea and Angela not allowed to join big tennis leagues in their countries? Do you agree that they were unfairly treated? Why is it wrong to treat someone badly because of the color of their skin or their religious beliefs?

Althea and Angela were both tennis players. In what other ways were they alike? Can you imagine becoming friends with someone from another country, who might like the same books, games or television shows as you do?

Activities: Writing, Vocabulary, and Art

1. Write a one-sentence definition of these 5 words from the story:

- Stadium
- Champions
- Teammates
- Spectators
- Tournament

Then draw a picture of each word's definition, or draw one big picture using all of them.

2. Write a paragraph about why you liked, or disliked, this book. "I liked this book because..."

3. Choose one of these sentences, complete it and then write a paragraph giving more details:

- I like to read, and my favorite kind of book is...
- After reading this book, I am very curious about...
- I would like to be friends with Althea because...
- I would like to be friends with Angela because...
- I think Angela and Althea were treated unfairly because...

4. Read this sentence from the book: "Althea just wanted to play the game she loved." Now draw a picture of yourself playing a game that YOU love.

5. Write a poem about the feelings of being left out or treated badly because you are different.

Grades 3-5

Objective

Students will read this nonfiction book independently, extend vocabulary, and participate in a class discussion. They will complete individual research and writing exercises based on the book, making oral and/or digital presentations from their work.

Pre-reading

Ask students to keep a list of words that are unfamiliar to them as they are reading. Encourage them to first try to figure out the meanings from the text and pictures, and then to consult a dictionary.

Post-reading discussion questions

1. Prior to reading this book, had you ever heard of Althea Gibson or Angela Buxton? How did you feel about the challenges they faced? Did you find the story interesting? Inspiring? Believable? Was it more impactful because it was a true story? Do you enjoy reading nonfiction books? Do you enjoy reading about history?
2. In the author's note, at the back of the book, she shares more information about Angela and Althea, and provides photographs of the two women. Did you enjoy seeing real pictures of this book's characters? How can illustrations tell a story in a different way than photographs can? Do you prefer nonfiction books to have photographs or illustrations?
3. Can you name some other historical figures you've read about, or studied, who faced challenges because of their race or religious beliefs? Do you know what *racism* and *anti-Semitism* are? What have you studied about Black history and Jewish history?
4. Do you believe these prejudices are only in the past or is this something people still face today? What lessons can we learn from studying the past? Looking at current events, can you name some groups of people who are still experiencing hate and discrimination? In what ways? Have you personally experienced prejudice or discrimination?
5. The events in this book take place during the 1950's. Do you know anything about the culture, politics and society of this time period? In terms of racism and anti-Semitism, do you think things are better now? In what other ways have things improved since then?

6. What are some of the parallels between what happened to each of these woman? Do you think Angela and Althea's challenges were magnified because they were women? Because they were good at sports? How did each of them contribute to opening doors for other women in sports?
7. What did you know about the game of tennis before reading this book? Are you a player? Does anyone in your family play tennis? Even if you play a different sport, could you identify with the dedication Althea and Angela gave to their talent? Did you learn anything new about tennis?
8. The author writes: "Angela and Althea trained hard to become a team." What are some other sports where teamwork is important? Can you think of any other famous examples of two athletes who played together?
9. The author's note says that Althea began entering tennis tournaments as a teen, "with the support of her Harlem community." Why was this important to launch her career? How far could she have gotten without adult support? Do you think kids can suffer from age discrimination?

Activities:

Writing, Vocabulary, Art

1. Consult your list of unfamiliar vocabulary words from the story. After confirming the definitions for all, use each of them in a sentence.
2. Imagine that it's 1956, and you are a sports journalist. Your editor at the newspaper has given you the assignment to write an article about the Wimbledon women's doubles match. Write the article, using this book and some additional online and print sources (see below for a bibliography).
3. The United States Lawn Tennis Association finally admitted Althea Gibson after a white tennis star, Alice Marble, wrote a letter advocating for her. If you had been a member of the Association, what would you have said to help convince them? Write your own letter to the Association, and read your letter aloud to the class.
4. The author of this book used many active sports words and phrases, as you might expect in a story filled with sports action: *drilled*, *slammed*, *pounding*, *"ace serve,"* *"solid swing,"* and *"swift slams."* Use some of these words or phrases, and add some of your own, to write a poem or draw a comic panel.
5. Find another picture book with a theme in common with *Perfect Match*. Write a report comparing the two books.

6. Write an essay suggesting ways that contemporary kids can fight racism, anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination. Turn some of your suggestions into action items and design a poster to share with the class.
7. Memory game link <https://interacty.me/projects/1f3f94f10d576ba6>

Research and Report

Choose one of the following topics, conduct research, and complete a written report.

- The life of Althea Gibson
- The life of Angela Buxton
- The United States Lawn Tennis Association
- The American Tennis Association
- The Wimbledon Championships
- Serena and Venus Williams, contemporary African American tennis champions

Conduct research on other sports figures who were barred from playing because they were Black or Jewish. Choose two, write a report about them, and present your report to the class.

Research and write a report about contemporary racism in sports, and share it with the class orally.

Collect photographs of Althea and Angela from a variety of sources. Caption them, and create a digital presentation to share with your class.

Expanded Author's Note and Bibliography

Althea Gibson was born in 1927 in the small town of Silver, South Carolina. Her parents were sharecroppers, poor farmers. When Althea was three years old, she was sent to live with her aunt in Harlem, a mostly Black neighborhood of New York City.

As a young girl, Althea excelled at many sports, from basketball to boxing to tennis. As her tennis game improved, adults in the Harlem community bought her a used tennis racket, found her a teacher (one of those adults was Buddy Walker, a part-time bandleader and part-time recreational leader), and helped her pay for lessons and tournaments (boxing icons Sugar Ray Robinson and Joe Louis).

Starting in her teens, Althea competed in tournaments for the American Tennis Association (ATA), the only tennis league open to Black players. Althea also received housing and financial support from two African-American physicians. One was Dr. Robert Walter Johnson, who dedicated his life to supporting black tennis players (he also helped a young Arthur Ashe beginning in 1953). The other was Dr. Hubert Eaton, a

successful surgeon who had been an ATA doubles champion. Drs. Johnson and Eaton both believed Althea was “a key to unlock the door” toward integrating the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) and enabling black players to compete against all players on the national and international level.

The prestigious United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA, now USTA), on the other hand, repeatedly denied Althea’s applications for membership because of racial discrimination. When Alice Marble, a white tennis champion, pushed for Althea’s admission, the USLTA finally made her a member in 1950.

Here's are some of Alice Marble’s words from her editorial in support of Althea.

“I think it’s time we faced facts,” she wrote. “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 she is refused a chance to succeed or to fail, then...I would be bitterly ashamed.”

Angela Buxton was born in 1934 in Liverpool, England, part of the United Kingdom. Her father was a successful businessman who supported Angela’s passion for tennis. After numerous country clubs refused to admit her because she was Jewish, eighteen-year-old Angela traveled to Los Angeles, California, to improve her skills. But American country clubs also rejected her applications because she was Jewish. Angela’s father paid for a retired American tennis pro to coach Angela privately.

When Angela returned to the UK, she found a new coach and began winning tournaments. In 1955, she represented the UK in the Asian Goodwill Tour, where she and Althea met and became friends.

After the Asian tour, Althea considered joining the Army, but Angela encouraged Althea to keep entering international tournaments, so she could improve her game without having to face segregation in the United States. Althea followed Angela’s advice and won sixteen of the eighteen tournaments she entered in Europe and Asia, showing she could compete with the best, all thanks to Angela’s encouragement.

In 1956, Angela and Althea played together in the French Championships (now called the French Open) and won their first doubles title. But they also competed against each other in the women’s singles semifinal. At the end of the second set, they were tied. Suddenly, Althea’s undergarment shoulder strap broke. Angela shielded Althea from the jeering crowd and rushed her off to the locker room to change.

The authorities wanted to disqualify Althea for stepping off the court. They wanted Angela to play in the final, even though she had left the court too. Angela refused. She would play against Althea or she wouldn’t play at all.

The referees finally let Angela and Althea finish their match. Althea beat Angela and became the first Black American to advance to the French final. Angela was so happy for her friend. In the final, Althea beat another Angela, Angela Mortimer, and became the first Black American to win a Grand Slam championship [the championships played in Australia, France, Britain (Wimbledon), and the United States].

In June of 1956, the same year Angela and Althea won the Wimbledon doubles title, Angela reached the singles final at Wimbledon. But she lost in the finals.

After Wimbledon, Angela suffered a wrist injury and retired from tennis in late 1956. For many years afterward, she worked as a freelance tennis journalist. Althea continued to play and stayed with Angela whenever she was in the London for tournaments.

In 1957, Althea became the first Black American to win the singles title at Wimbledon. She was honored with a ticker tape parade in New York City! Althea won the singles title at Wimbledon again in 1958. In both competitions, she wore outfits created by Angela, who loved fashion and was a gifted designer.

Althea retired from tennis in 1958. She later worked as a sports commentator, a singer, and a professional golfer. In the 1990s, she suffered serious health problems and struggled to pay her many medical expenses. Angela spread the word about Althea's situation by helping to get an editorial placed in Tennis Week Magazine. In response, players and journalists all over the world sent donations to help Althea cover her bills.

Althea Gibson died in 2003 at age seventy-six. Angela committed herself to honoring and publicizing Althea's achievements. She successfully fought for the creation of a monument honoring Althea. In 2019, the monument was unveiled at the start of the US Open at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. Angela attended the unveiling ceremony and spoke about her long friendship with Althea. It was Angela's last public appearance. She passed away in 2020, just before her eighty-sixth birthday.

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