The Summer King
by Daniel Sonenberg

ADULT STUDY GUIDE

MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE
Department of Education and Community Programs
www.MichiganOpera.org
## Table of Contents

Character & Synopsis 3  
The Composer & Librettists 7  
Josh Gibson 8  
Key Words & Historical Timeline 10  
What does it mean to “break the color barrier?” 13  
The Negro Leagues 14  
Further Reading 17  
Advice on talking about race 20  
Michigan Opera Theatre 24  
Contact & Resources 26
THE SUMMER KING CHARACTERS & SYNOPSIS

“Mr. Sonenberg hears Gibson’s story in the musical language of grand opera.”
- The Wall Street Journal

Characters

Josh Gibson (baritone)
Helen Gibson, Josh’s wife (soprano)
Grace, Josh’s lover (mezzo-soprano)
Sam Bankhead, Josh’s best friend and teammate (bass)
Wendell Smith, a young black reporter (tenor)
Elder Barber, a former ballplayer (tenor)
Younger Barber (baritone)
Radio Announcer (tenor)
Branch Rickey, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers (tenor)
Broadway Connie Rector, a player (mute)
Gus Greenlee, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords (tenor)
Scribe, Gus’s assistant (high lyric tenor)
Clark Griffith, owner of the Washington Senators, (tenor)
Calvin Griffith, Clark’s nephew and protégé (baritone)
Señor Alcalde, Mayor of Vera Cruz, Mexico (high lyric tenor)
Trash Talking Player (tenor)
Hattie, a fan and sometime girlfriend to players (soprano)
Judy Johnson, Josh’s teammate (tenor)
Cool Papa Bell, Josh’s teammate (baritone)
Double Duty Radcliffe, Josh’s teammate (tenor)
Dave Hoskins, Josh’s younger teammate (baritone)
SETTING
A barbershop in the 1950s and the world of Josh Gibson in the 1930s and 1940s.

SYNOPSIS
Overview
A barber in 1957 remembers the story of Josh Gibson. The audience is taken back in time and shown the life and struggles of the famous Negro League baseball player.

Act I
Scene 1: Cut Off Man barbershop, Brooklyn, NY 1957
Boys are playing stickball and hit a ball into a barbershop. The Elder and Younger Barbers argue about the Negro League and the legacy of Josh Gibson. The Elder Barber remembers Gibson’s incredible accomplishments and describes the day that Gibson hit a ball completely out of Yankee Stadium.

Scene 2: Yankee Stadium, NY 1930
The Elder Barber describes the epic battle between pitcher Broadway Connie Rector and a young Josh Gibson.

Scene 3: A park in Homestead, PA 1930
Spectators respond to Josh’s home run. Josh and Helen look to their future and Helen tells Josh that she is pregnant. After a dark musical interlude, Josh reflects on Helen’s death giving birth to their twin children. He tells of his remaining love, the game of baseball.

Scene 4: Crawford Grill, Pittsburgh, PA 1935
Players and fans of the Pittsburgh Crawfords celebrate the team’s owner. Josh arrives with Hattie. Wendell Smith introduces himself to Josh. The daily number is called and the winner is a woman named Grace—who coincidentally bet 440, Josh’s batting average the previous season. Smith suggests that with numbers like that, Josh might make history by playing for a white team and breaking the color barrier, an idea his teammates disdain. Josh and his teammates scoff at Smith’s idea, but Josh is secretly intrigued by it. Grace persuades him to consider it.

Scene 5: Wendell Smith’s office, Pittsburgh Courier, March 1938
Wendell “Smitty” Smith asks Josh to consider working together to break the color barrier. Smith recalls his experience with segregation in college and admits that he was never “lightning” like Josh. Smith says Josh could change everything. Josh commits to think about it.
Scene 6: Josh’s apartment, Pittsburgh, PA, March 1938
Josh and Grace, now a couple, return from a night on the town. She scolds him, describes his greatness, and urges him to broaden his dreams.

Scene 7: Owner’s office, Griffith Stadium, Washington, DC, April 1940
Clark Griffith and his nephew meet with Josh and dangle the notion of playing for the Washington Senators. The meeting has clearly been set up to appease the black press. After complimenting Josh’s skills, they warn him about the consequences of playing in the majors. The exchange grows threatening. The Griffiths pompously describe their responsibility and their foremost concern with Josh’s best interests, making it clear they have no intention of signing him. Clark walks Josh to the door and tells him, “Boy, there’s a colored facility at the top of the stairs.”

Scene 8: Outside the Griffith Office, and Crawford Grill, April 1940
Josh, demoralized and frustrated, says all he ever wanted was his wife Helen and the game. He arrives at the Crawford Grill, where players are discussing a lucrative offer from Mexico that hinges on Josh’s participation. Smith wants Josh to stay and fight, but Josh eagerly accepts the deal. Grace agrees, “as long as it’s temporary.”

Act II

Scene 1: Escambron Stadium, Vera Cruz Mexico, October 1941
A tremendous celebration; Josh is heralded as player of the year by mayor of Vera Cruz, Señor Alcalde. Out of his earshot, Sam tells Josh that another offer has come in from back home matching the Mexican pay they receive. Grace is excited to return home, but Josh celebrates the good life he and the other players enjoy in Mexico. As the revelers bring their party off stage, Grace tells him he can do what he likes, but she’s not staying in Mexico. The partiers return, and Grace leaves disappointedly. Josh complains that his head isn’t feeling so well, and as the celebration begins to spin out of control, Josh proclaims his need to go home, and then loses his balance and collapses.

Scene 2: Wendell Smith’s Office, Pittsburgh Courier, March 1945
Branch Rickey, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, visits Smith in his office, telling him that he is proudly ready to hire a black player for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He tells Smith he needs someone “with the spirit to fight back, but...the guts not to.” Smith tells Rickey, “I may have a name for you.”

Scene 3: An empty ball field, Homestead, PA, October 1945
Josh stands alone on a field hitting balls deep into the outfield, lamenting that nothing’s changed for him in the four years since Mexico. Players engage in a pickup game of sorts, where younger Trash Talking Player takes a turn at bat with Josh catching behind him. The two trade insults. Sam urges the younger players to respect Josh. Smith then arrives, excitedly informing the players of the news that Jackie Robinson has been hired to join the Dodgers’ Montreal farm team. Josh is crestfallen leaves, while the others pepper Smith with questions and celebrate the news.
Scene 4: The Old Crawford Grill, now closed, Later that day, October 1945
On a tip from Sam, Grace finds Josh. She chides that it should have been him making the news today. Josh talks of imaginary conversations he has had with Joe DiMaggio, and Grace tells him that her husband is returning from war, and their relationship must end. Grace realizes that she now has to face up to her real life and abandon her fantasies about a life with Josh. She leaves him there.

Scene 5: Josh's bedroom, Homestead, PA, January 1947
Josh, with frenzied intensity, speaks directly to an imagined Joe DiMaggio. He then announces, “I'm going to die tonight.” Sam enters to pay his respects to his dying friend, and to tell him the news that Jackie Robinson is going to break camp with the big league Dodgers. They listen to a news report about it on the radio, as Josh withdraws into his own delirium. He is visited by the ghost of Helen. Josh realizes where he is, and speaks to Sam about his fabled Yankee Stadium Home Run, and then dies. Sam sings an aria about the fallen Summer King, who led all Negro Leaguers to the Promised Land, but was denied entry himself. He then contemplates his own plight, and that of his contemporaries. We see that the Elder Barber is an example of just the kind of player about which Sam sings. The Elder Barber again extolls Josh Gibson's greatness, as Sam asks “did we need to be greater men than our king to avoid our king’s fate?” A chorus of Negro League ballplayers accompanies Sam's final lines.

Scene 6: The Cutoff Man Barbershop, Brooklyn, 1957 [but overlapping with the previous scene]
Elder Barber and Younger Barber briefly continue their age-old argument before the Elder Barber has the Young put on “the damn game.”

Epilogue Outside Yankee Stadium, NY, 1930
When the radio is switched on, lights immediately dim on the barbershop and come up on the children's stickball field that we saw at the beginning of the opera, although now it is located directly outside of Yankee Stadium. The Radio Announcer reprises his call of the legendary home run. We hear the crack of the bat, and the Streets Kids freeze, looking straight up to the sky, as the Radio Announcer asks “Where'd it go? Is it fair? Is it fair?...” The Street Kids scatter to the side, and one - the same boy who chased the ball at the outset of the opera (in 1957) - emerges with the baseball, as the Street Kids sing a final chorus of “Did ya see?
THE COMPOSER

Daniel Sonenberg (b. 1970)

“Sonenberg’s vocal writing is demanding – he favors extremes of the range – but almost always idiomatic and gratifying.” – Opera News

Daniel Sonnenberg holds a BA from Bard College, an MA from Queens College, and a DMA from the City University of New York. His teachers have included Joan Tower, Daron Hagen, and David Del Tredici. Sonenberg lives in Portland, Maine where he is an associate professor and composer at the University of Southern Maine.

Sonenberg has been a lifelong fan of professional baseball and is especially interested in the pre-integration Negro Leagues. He began work on the opera at the age of 33, when he was struck by the tragedy of Josh Gibson’s life, believing that Josh was an ideal figure for an opera. Sonenberg felt that Josh’s death a mere three months before Jackie Robinson broke Major League Baseball’s color barrier and Josh’s mental difficulties later in life provided an enticing story to be told through the medium of opera. He calls *The Summer King* the “defining creative project of my life.”

THE LIBRETTISTS

Daniel Nester (b. 1968)

Daniel Nester (b. February 9, 1968) is from Maple Shade, New Jersey. He majored in English as an undergraduate student at Rutgers-Camden before attending graduate school at New York University for creative writing. Nester’s most recent works include *Shader: 99 Notes on Car Washes, Making Out in Church, Grief, and Other Unlearnable Subjects*. His previous books include *How to Be Inappropriate* (Soft Skull, 2010), *God Save My Queen I and II*, and *The Incredible Sestina Anthology*, which he edited. His writing has appeared in the *New York Times, BuzzFeed, The Atlantic*, and the Poetry Foundation website, and collected in *Best American Poetry, Third Rail: The Poetry of Rock and Roll*, and *Now Write! Nonfiction*. He is associate professor of English at The College of Saint Rose in Albany, NY.

Mark Campbell

Mark Campbell has written for more than 15 operas. In *The Summer King*, Campbell served as a dramaturge and provided additional lyrics. He is best known for his work on *Silent Night*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in music in 2012. Other operas include: *Later the Same Evening, The Manchurian Candidate, The Shining*, and *Volpone*. 
Joshua Gibson (December 21, 1911 - January 20, 1974) was born in Georgia and moved to Pittsburgh in his teens. While in Pittsburgh, Josh attended pre-vocational training to become an electrician. His first experience with baseball was at the age of 16, when he played third base for a team sponsored by the Gimbels department store.

Josh became a professional by accident. On July 25, 1930 he was sitting in the stands when Homestead Grays catcher Buck Ewing injured his hand. Josh was invited to replace Ewing because he was already well known in Pittsburgh. He was quickly recruited by the Pittsburgh Crawfords, and at the age of 18 he began to play for the Homestead Grays. Between 1932 and 1949, Gibson played for the Pittsburgh Crawfords, the Homestead Grays, and also spent time playing for leagues in Dominican Republic and Mexico.

He was known as the “black Babe Ruth,” but some fans at the time who saw both Babe Ruth and Josh Gibson play asserted that Babe Ruth was the “white Josh Gibson.” Josh was never able to play in the major leagues because of the unwritten rules of segregation.
His Hall of Fame plaque declares that he hit close to 800 home runs during his 17-year career. One of the most defining moments of Josh’s career was when he hit a ball nearly out of Yankee Stadium during a Negro league game—marking a distance of about 580 feet from the home plate.

Josh was often characterized as an alcoholic and a drug user who was unable to escape his inability to make it to the major leagues. Gibson died three months before Jackie Robinson first took the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Baseball historians believe that Gibson is one of the best hitters and catchers of any league. He was the second Negro league player to be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1972.
## KEY WORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bias – Explicit Bias</td>
<td>The attitudes or stereotypes that we hold in a conscious manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bias – Implicit Bias</td>
<td>The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Codes</td>
<td>Laws passed in the South that were meant to restrict African Americans (1865-1866)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
<td>The rights of citizens to political and social freedom and equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color line or Color bar</td>
<td>A social system in which a group of (non-white) people are denied access to the same opportunities and rights as others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentleman’s Agreement</td>
<td>An unwritten understanding ‘enforced’ until 1947 that racial segregation existed in professional baseball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectionality</td>
<td>The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Crow Laws</td>
<td>Laws enforcing racial segregation in the Southern United States that developed during the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microaggressions</td>
<td>The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, insults that may be intentional or unintentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAACP</td>
<td>National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: Founded in 1909 to ensure political, educational, social, and economic equality for all people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>Holding a judgment about a person due to their physical appearance, beliefs, and other attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Equity</td>
<td>Actions that address historic burdens and work to remove present day barriers to fairness and justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Inequity</td>
<td>Where the benefits of progress are reaching some sectors of society but not all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>A variety of practiced beliefs that work together to produce a social structure which yields superiority, power, and privilege for some, and discrimination &amp; oppression for others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstruction Era</td>
<td>Time period following the Civil War (1865-1877)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HISTORICAL TIMELINE

RECONSTRUCTION

April 9, 1865 - Civil War ends with Appomattox surrender.
January 31, 1865 - 13th Amendment: Abolishes slavery
1865 - Southern Legislature approves Black Codes to control freed slaves.
March 2, 1867 - Reconstruction Acts laid out the process for readmitting southern states into the Union, and outlined how new state constitutions and governments would be established.
July 9, 1868 - 14th amendment: Grants citizenship to “all persons born or naturalized in the United States” (including freed slaves and African American men) and allows all citizens equal protection under the law.
February 26, 1869 - 15th Amendment: Grants African American men the right to vote
April 24, 1877 - Federal military intervention ends, closing Reconstruction era

JIM CROW LAWS

1883 - U.S. Supreme Court allows segregation in business services.
1890 - Legislature approves first Jim Crow law, requiring separate railroad cars.
1896 - U.S. Supreme Court sanctions “separate but equal.”
1898 - New constitution uses literacy or property ownership requirements to bar black people from voting.
July 26, 1948 - Executive Order 9981: President Truman orders racial equality in armed services.
May 17, 1954 - Brown V. Board of Education: U.S. Supreme Court rules segregated schools unconstitutional
CIVIL RIGHTS

1954 - Brown vs. Board of Education outlaws school segregation.
1955 - Rosa Parks triggers Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott.
1957 - Troops enforce integration at Central High School, Little Rock, Ark.
1960 - Sit-ins and boycotts all over the South.
1961 - Freedom Riders register black voters in the South.

**June 24, 1963** - Martin Luther King leads a march in Detroit down Woodward Avenue, culminating in the first “I Have a Dream Speech” which takes place at Cobo Arena.

1963 - Martin Luther King leads the March on Washington.
1965 - Voting rights act signed.
1968 - Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “BREAK THE COLOR BARRIER?”

Josh Gibson made it possible for athletes like Jackie Robinson to break what is called “the color barrier.” The name, “the color barrier,” might make you think about an actual barrier—something like a fence or a wall—but it was not something that could be taken down with saws and hammers. When we talk about someone breaking “the color barrier,” we are most often talking about an African American who was the first to be a part of an activity or sport that had only allowed white Americans to participate.

For example, in 1947 Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play baseball on a team that was made up only of White people, the Brooklyn Dodgers. When he joined the team, he broke an invisible barrier and paved the way for other African Americans to participate.

But why did the color barrier exist in the first place? It is mostly because even after slavery was abolished, African Americans were still seen as not equal to their fellow white Americans. They were forced to live their lives separately from white Americans for no real reason other than the color of their skin.

This is called “segregation.” Until the 1960s, there were many laws that said African Americans could not do things like eat in the same restaurant as White Americans. African Americans also had to deal with social segregation. This means that the segregation was not a law, it was just something that people did and learned to do while they were kids. The color barrier existed because of segregation.

We can think of Josh as starting to push the barrier over. His talent made it difficult for white Americans to justify why he should not be allowed to play in the major leagues. Many white Americans at the time believed that having an African American on the team would make the team worse. People like Josh Gibson had to work extra hard to prove that African Americans are the same as everyone else. Because of Josh’s success, people like Jackie Robinson had an easier time breaking the barrier.

Most Americans today understand that the color of your skin, where you are from, what language you speak, or any other identities you may have, do not make you better or worse at something. Unfortunately, there are still many color barriers to be broken.

For example, one of the best string quartets in the world, the Julliard String Quartet, has existed since 1946. They did not have an African American (or woman) member until 2015 when Astrid Schween joined! Astrid successfully “broke the color barrier.” Astrid is hopeful that it is her talent and work ethic that will matter, not her gender or the color of her skin.
THE NEGRO LEAGUES

by Alyssa Wells

At a Boston Red Sox game on September 13, 2017, a group of activists unfurled a banner that read “Racism is as American as Baseball” over the Green Monster before the fourth inning. The protesters asserted that their action was a response to racial slurs and peanuts being hurled at Baltimore Orioles center-fielder Adam Jones earlier in the season, as well as an attempt to draw attention to how racism is as much of a part of American culture as baseball.

Many of the articles that followed in The York Times, ESPN, Fox Sports, and CBS failed to acknowledge what the opera The Summer King draws our attention to: the historical entanglement of American baseball with racist and discriminatory practices. In turning to the history of Negro leagues baseball in the United States, we can see how inextricably intertwined the history of baseball is with racist and discriminatory practices.

Integrated baseball teams first became off limits in 1867, twenty-two years after gameplay was standardized in 1845, and two years before the Cincinnati Red Stockings (a white team) became the first club to pay all its players, signaling the beginning of professional baseball. The initial ban against integrated teams lasted only five years, ending in 1871 with the first black professional player being John “Bud” Fowler in 1872.

Bud Fowler (center, back row) with his Keokuk, Iowa team in 1885

Moses Fleetwood “Fleet” Walker’s 1889 season marked the last time a black player would play for a Major League team until Jackie Robinson was signed to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. African-American players, such as the protagonist of The Summer King, Josh Gibson, were barred from playing on Major League Baseball (MLB) teams from the late-nineteenth century through integration in the late 1940s. During this time, white managers engaged in a “Gentlemen’s agreement” wherein they refused to let black baseball players join MLB teams or allow black or integrated teams play against white teams.

As Josh Gibson’s story tells us, tremendous talent, skill, and work ethic had little bearing on the ability of African-American baseball players to transcend racism and segregation in baseball, much less in everyday American society. Historian Neil Sullivan points out that MLB
managers and officials often sacrificed success to uphold the ban of black players, despite devoting their lives to winning. The Pittsburgh Pirates exemplified this in the 1930s when they were in desperate need of a catcher. Despite signing several white men throughout the decade, none of them helped escape a dismal record. Already having achieved notoriety as a power hitter and catcher, Josh Gibson could have proved to be a solution to the problems the Pirates faced because for most of the 1930s, Gibson resided in Pittsburgh while playing for the Homestead Grays.

While it is not certain that Gibson would have led the Pirates to the World Series, it is no understatement to say that the ideological commitment to white supremacy ensured Pirates would fail to be any more successful.

Andrew “Rube” Foster responded to exclusion from the MLB with his creation of the first all-black baseball team in 1920. The all-black teams and leagues that would be founded in the following years would grow into the Negro leagues. The Negro leagues became integral to African Americans because they provided structures that celebrated black culture and created opportunities that were otherwise denied. The Negro leagues were particularly notable for how their gameplay differed from the MLB. It would have been common to witness Josh Gibson and his teammates stealing bases and engaging in all-around more exciting and daring gameplay than their white contemporaries. Although the Negro leagues afforded opportunities to black players that would have otherwise not existed, as The Summer King shows, these teams still often faced many difficulties relating to travel and securing facilities due to their existence in a systemically oppressive society.

Integration in the MLB was not welcomed by all players and fans of Negro leagues teams. Black-owned and operated newspapers such as the Pittsburgh Courier argued that black players were not signed by white MLB managers to end discrimination, but rather, out of a desire to capitalize on their talent. Brooklyn Dodgers’ manager Branch Rickey made this apparent when he declared that he only signed Jackie Robinson in 1947 so that the Dodgers would have a chance of winning a pennant. Leaders within black communities were also concerned that white audience members would expect similar degrading and stereotyped antics from black baseball players as had been common in black-face minstrelsy and popular culture.
Furthermore, some managers and members of Negro leagues teams were skeptical of integration because they felt they had succeeded in building an institution that supported the endeavors of African Americans during the Jim Crow era.

Attendance grew despite the initial fears by MLB owners that much of their white fan base would be lost due to integration. The financial imperative to sign African-American players to the MLB led to all teams integrating within twelve years. Josh Gibson’s life shows us the dismal salary prospects players in the Negro leagues faced; integration amplified the exploitation of black baseball players. Leagues and teams within the Negro leagues suffered as many of their fans fled to MLB stadiums to see black players be successful in a white-dominated space. Managers from Negro leagues teams suffered the most, often losing their jobs when their knowledge and expertise was not acknowledged or capitalized upon by the MLB. The last Negro leagues season played was in 1951.

The experience of racialized aggression by fans may have decreased significantly since Jackie Robinson’s signing to the MLB, but it has certainly not ceased, as the experience of Orioles center-fielder Adam Jones testifies. The history of baseball shows us that while racism may be as American as baseball, baseball is as marred by the history of racism as America. Although Josh Gibson tragically missed his opportunity to play in the MLB by dying three months before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier, had he lived longer, he certainly would not have played in a post-racial society.
For the Early Reader

*Just like Josh Gibson* by Angela Johnson and Beth Peck
Unfortunately, no matter how well a girl growing up in the 1940s played the game of baseball, she would have faced tremendous challenges. These challenges are not unlike those met by the legendary Josh Gibson, arguably the best Negro League player never to make it into the majors.

*Strictly No Elephants*  
by Lisa Mantchev and Taeeun Yoo  
A wonderful lesson about inclusion and acceptance is learned when a boy and his pet are excluded from the neighborhood Pet Club. This book can help young readers address the discrimination that Josh Gibson faced and that many people of color face today.

---

*The Great Migration: An American Story* by Jacob Lawrence
In 1941, Jacob Lawrence painted 60 paintings with captions that represented the Great Migration of African American communities leaving the Southern states. Published in 1993, the artwork creates a bridge between today’s students and the families who struggled in 1920’s America.

*The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson and E.B. Lewis  
This book is a great introduction to the topics of segregation, tolerance, and interpersonal relationships.

*Jackie and Me* by Dan Gutman  
Travel back in time with Joey Stoshak as he learns about Jackie Robinson, the challenges he faced, and his accomplishments.

---

For the Young Reader

*Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh  
This illustrated book thoughtfully addresses the issue of segregation as it pertains to schools. The 1947 California court ruling is used as a way to discuss segregation and racism.
In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson by Bette Bao Lord
Set in post-WWII Brooklyn, this story of what it feels like to be an outsider - told by a young Chinese-American girl named Shirley Temple Wong - is as relevant today as it was when it came out in the '80s. Shirley finds a kindred spirit in Jackie Robinson, and through him learns how to love herself and what makes her different from her classmates. Even kids who are familiar with Robinson's story may not realize what a total revolutionary he was, and this book brings his story and his struggles to life.

Through My Eyes by Ruby Bridges
In this nonfiction book, Ruby Bridges tells her story of the discrimination she faced and helped to overcome as she attended a white school as a 6-year old.

A Big Day for Baseball (Magic Tree House Series) by Mary Pope Osborne and AG Ford
Jack and Annie are given magical baseball hats by Morgan the librarian to make them expert ball players. When the Tree House whisks them back to 1947 to be batboys in a game, the siblings only have nine innings to figure out what makes this game so special.

For the Middle Grade Reader
Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson
Written in verse, Jacqueline Wooden describes a life divided between the North and the South, learning about the civil rights movement, and discovering a passion for writing stories.

Heat by Mike Lucia
Twelve-year-old little league pitcher, Michael, throws serious heat on the field but has had many fires to contend with at home ever since his father died after their family escaped from Cuba.

Counting Descent by Clint Smith
This book allows readers to explore issues of prejudice that people face. Some of the most powerful poems in this collection explore stereotypes that black males encounter at the hands of police, cab drivers, and school systems. Other poems celebrate love, family, and the emotions that connect all people.

Soar by Joan Bauer
In this book by Newbery Honor-winner and tween favorite, Joan Bauer, we meet Jeremiah, a huge baseball fan who dreams of going pro. But those dreams clash with reality when he learns that he is unable to play due to a physical problem. When Jeremiah moves to a new town, he puts his love of baseball into action as a coach and makes a dramatic impact on his new community. A story of friendship and tragedy that is a good reminder of how sports and sports leaders can bring out the best in everyone.
For Teen Readers

*Josh Gibson (Sports Heroes & Legends)* by Carrie Golus
Golus takes a look at the life of Josh Gibson in this book that explores the challenges he faced and the legend he became.

*Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* by Leon Litwack
This book provides an exceptional, unvarnished history of the Jim Crow South. This book reminds us how our nation’s history requires strong education about these topics.

*Jackie Robinson: Baseball Great & Civil Rights Activist* by Charles E. Pederson
This is a non-fictional account of Jackie Robinson’s life. It tells the story of how his athletic talents allowed him to become a Civil Rights activist and baseball legend.

*The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
A timely and powerful story that is all too realistic as a teenage girl and her city cannot hide from the issues of race, class, and police brutality.

For Adult Readers

*A Complete History of the Negro Leagues, 1884 to 1955* by Mark Ribowsky
Ribowsky’s book takes a no-nonsense look at the history of the Negro Leagues in the United States. Ribowsky pays special attention to the business of black baseball for its ingenious and often inspired financial manipulation and chides major league baseball about the fact that there are no black executives in the Hall of Fame. Ribowsky also looks at the hypocrisy of the white baseball hierarchy, who would not employ black players but who, like the New York Yankees, would rent out their stadiums to blacks at more than $100,000 a year.

*Plié Ball!: Baseball Meets Dance on Stage and Screen* by Jeffrey Katz
Covering more than a century of dancing ballplayers and baseball-inspired dance, this entertaining study examines the connection in film and television, in theatrical productions and in choreography created for some of the greatest dancers and dance companies in the world.

*Power, Privilege, and Difference* by Allan G. Johnson
This thoughtful book describes how privilege is created, how it functions, thrives, and how it can be overcome. It also discusses paradoxes and myths with ideas of power and privilege.

*Josh Gibson: The Power and the Darkness* by Mark Ribowsky
In this book, Ribowsky chronicles the life of Josh Gibson. He highlights how Gibson is remembered in the shadow of Jackie Robinson. This is a thorough and authoritative account of the life of black ball’s greatest hitter, and one of its most important stars.
Great teachers are experts at difficult conversations. Here’s their advice to America on talking about race.

BY CHALKBEAT STAFF · JULY 8, 2016

Every day, teachers lead conversations that most of us are too afraid to have. Whether the topic is race, police violence, or guns, the best teachers are skilled at helping mere humans – young humans! – have difficult conversations with openness, honesty, and respect.

So as Americans struggle to talk about racism this week, who better to ask for advice than teachers? We spoke with seven educators across the country and compiled their suggestions below.

**Start by understanding yourself.**

*Jaishri Shankar, teacher in Kingstree, S.C. for the last three years:*

These conversations have to be founded in your relationships with students. It’s uncomfortable – and it’s tougher if you’re coming from a distant place and you don’t already have a good relationship with your kids.
Another piece is understanding yourself and your identity. I am an Indian-American woman and the identities of most of my students have been African-American. Many share an identity with victims of police brutality ... I’ve learned my role is to listen and learn.

The instant that stands out the most was the killing of Eric Garner. One of my students lived around the corner and she’d frequently come over and we’d sit on my porch and just hang out. We had just been talking about police brutality right before he was killed.

A couple of days [later] the audio was released, where he’s saying, ‘I cannot breathe.’ I looked around and I realized they could not care less about the layers of the Earth that day. What was more important was turning the classroom into what my kids needed. That day they didn’t need to know the layers of the Earth. They needed the space and time to process what was happening and what it means to them as students of color.

**Defy your fear.**

*Jade Anderson, first-grade teacher at Memphis Business Academy:*

Don’t be afraid. Your students want to hear what people are saying. They look up to you, they admire you. I think we are afraid to talk about social issues, but the kids do understand. Be bold and be honest. Acknowledge what’s going on.

*Tyrone C. Howard, associate dean of equity, diversity, & inclusion and director, UCLA Black Male Institute:*

I’m often surprised when things occur and teachers don’t say a word. They say, I teach chemistry, or what does this have to do with algebra. What exemplary teachers do is acknowledge it. Kids see these things on social media, and on the news media. And so the teachers create a space. They help them separate fact from fiction.

Teachers can provide a real sense of calming, and provide a real space for students to share what they’re feeling and thinking. When students are feeling scared for their own safety, they can provide that space.

And teachers have to inform themselves. They [have to] know what’s happening, so they can have a conversation. Not that they need to take sides, but so that they can help students make meaning.

How we get more teachers to get to do that is the million dollar question. We all just need a lot of understanding. This is a time for healing and empathy and love. And it sounds cliché, but we’re in a precarious time, and students need us more than they’ve needed us in a long time.

**Move from sorrow to action.**

*Faith Benson, teacher at Wright Middle School in Nashville, Tenn.:*

I think the first priority as a teacher is to talk about it.
When I go into the classroom after things like this happen – the events over the last week – my first priority is to make sure I am not retraumatizing my students. [This week] teachers acknowledged what happened but they did so in a way that really avoided the harsh details.

The ones who already knew about it, had been talking to their families about it – it was a gentle reminder that this is still important. Even though we’re in school, if you want to talk about it, you can. ... If you’re ready to talk about it in the academic way, I think it’s important to carry it through academics.

My first year of teaching I saw the value of bringing things like this into the classroom. That year it was the death of Michael Brown. But the mistake I made, I kind of left my students … just thinking, ‘Wow. Things are really bad.’ And the important next step is yeah, it’s really bad. But here’s how you can become an advocate.

It’s kind of a tough place to be in, where you so deeply care about what happens in the world, but the world is telling you you’re too young to make a difference.

Remember: everyone lives in a context.

*Rico Munn, superintendent of Aurora Public Schools in Colorado:*

I’m a black man in America. That has some context in these stories. I’m the father of a young boy. That has its own context. And then I do think about it as an American and how it affects the children in my community.

The schools are part of the community. These aren’t school issues. These are larger societal issues. And schools tend to be a reflection of our society.

I think in any classroom setting, our teachers and teachers everywhere need to be aware of the experiences of their students – both individually and collectively. Good teaching takes those experiences and helps put it into context. Good teaching helps students understand the world around them, and how they can effect change in the world around them.

**Push for evidence.**

*Rich Milner, Helen Faison Professor of Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh:*

What happens with students is they tend to adopt whatever their parents do on particular issues. What the educational system can do is really provide a space for students to think about and question their views on particular issues.

Play devil’s advocate, so there’s not just one narrative that is provided in the classroom. And really push students for evidence. Really early in their development, teachers should encourage students to substantiate their views.

The best teachers don’t always have the conversations only when there’s a catastrophe. They create the kind of classroom from the very beginning that is open to discourse and conversation. They position themselves as learners, not coming in as the arbiters of all knowledge. They express views, ask questions, situate their desks and chairs in ways that
allow for a more communal conversation. Teachers also empower and equip students to lead the conversations on their own.

The thing is about deep self-reflection. Not just thinking about others, but starting with the self.

**Resist the temptation to shut down.**

*Noelle Ford, high school Spanish teacher in Baltimore area:*

Trayvon Martin happened when I was teaching, and what we did in my class, we read current event articles from five different media sources and we talked about bias, and they had to go through what is a fact, what happened.

I think it’s extremely important to have conversations. But it’s stronger when the students have those conversations between themselves, rather than me telling them what to think.

I taught for three years in South Carolina ... It was a pretty diverse school. So things can get tense. We had the Emmanuel shootings [in Charleston, SC] happen when I was teaching. We had a lot of racial tension.

The first year I struggled to allow my students have honest conversations without it being guided by prejudice. But we strived as a team and a community to constantly have those conversations about tension. It’s better to bring it to light versus shutting it down.
Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT), the state of Michigan’s premier opera company, which, through its commitment to producing and presenting the very best professional productions of opera, dance, musical theater, and arts education programming, serves as a statewide cultural resource.

The vision of Founder and Artistic Director Dr. David DiChiera, and led by President and Chief Executive Officer Wayne S. Brown, MOT offers an essential, vibrant contribution to the quality of life for Detroit-area residents and to communities throughout the region. This dynamic cultural resource exemplifies artistic excellence. Since its founding in 1971, MOT has offered southeast Michigan the finest arts and cultural performances, concerts, education, and entertainment. By presenting culturally significant productions relative to the diverse populace of the region, such as Porgy and Bess, Anoush, King Roger, Dead Man Walking, and the world premiere production of Margaret Garner, MOT has brought the magic of live theatre to thousands of people.

In April of 1996, on the Company’s twenty-fifth anniversary, the ribbon was cut for the grand opening of the Detroit Opera House. Michigan Opera Theatre joined the ranks of major opera companies worldwide with the multi-million renovation of a 1922 movie palace. Michigan Opera Theatre is one of only a few opera companies in the United States to own its own opera house. The product of Dr. DiChiera’s dream, the Detroit Opera House is comparable to the world’s greatest houses in visual and acoustical beauty.

Our Mission
Michigan Opera Theatre is the premier multi-disciplined producer and presenter for opera, musical theatre, and dance in the Great Lakes Region. Based in the city of Detroit, the organization engages artists of national and international stature for stellar main stage and outreach performances, and provides compelling cultural enrichment programs for the diverse audiences and communities that it serves, making it one of Detroit’s pillars of arts and culture.
SELECT AWARDS & HONORS INCLUDE
Best Opera: Cyrano, Wilde Awards 2017 | Best Opera: The Passenger, Wilde Awards 2016 | Best Opera, Elektra, Wilde Awards, 2015 | Founder and Artistic Director Dr. David DiChiera named the 2013 Kresge Eminent Artist | Opera Honors Award to Dr. David DiChiera, National Endowment for the Arts, 2010 | Outstanding Service in the Field of Opera for Youth, National Opera Society, 2006 | Success in Education Award, Opera America, 2002

MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE’S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS
The Department of Education and Community Programs has brought its varied musical programs to every age group in Michigan for nearly 40 years. Artists visit schools, community centers, and stages throughout Michigan, performing shows that range from lively children’s operas to musical revues. Founded by Karen V. DiChiera, the Department of Education and Community Programs serves the entire state with quality entertainment and education.

Since its inception, the Department of Education and Community Programs has been honored with awards and recognitions including the Governor’s Arts Award, a Spirit of Detroit Award, and multiple Philo T. Farnsworth Awards for Excellence in Community Programming, among others. Touring productions, concerts, workshops, and residencies have reached many thousands of people throughout the state of Michigan, and programs have extended as far as Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and Canada. With an ever-growing repertoire of productions, an exciting roster of up-and-coming singers, and a circle of experienced and passionate teaching artists, the Department of Education and Community Programs continues to provide people of all ages with opportunities for access, growth, and learning through the arts.
CONTACT

For more info about the Department of Education and Community Programs please contact:
ANDREA SCOBIE Manager of Education and Community Programs 313.237.3429 | ascobie@motopera.org

Visit us online: Website: www.michiganopera.org
Facebook: Michigan Opera Theatre
Instagram: @MichiganOpera
Twitter: @DetOperaHouse

SOURCES

Oxford Music Online
www.oxfordmusiconline.com

Facing History
www.facinghistory.org

Society for American Baseball Research
https://sabr.org

Negro Leagues Baseball Museum
www.nlbm.com