Teaching history from
DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

AAVEd
Asian American Voices for Education

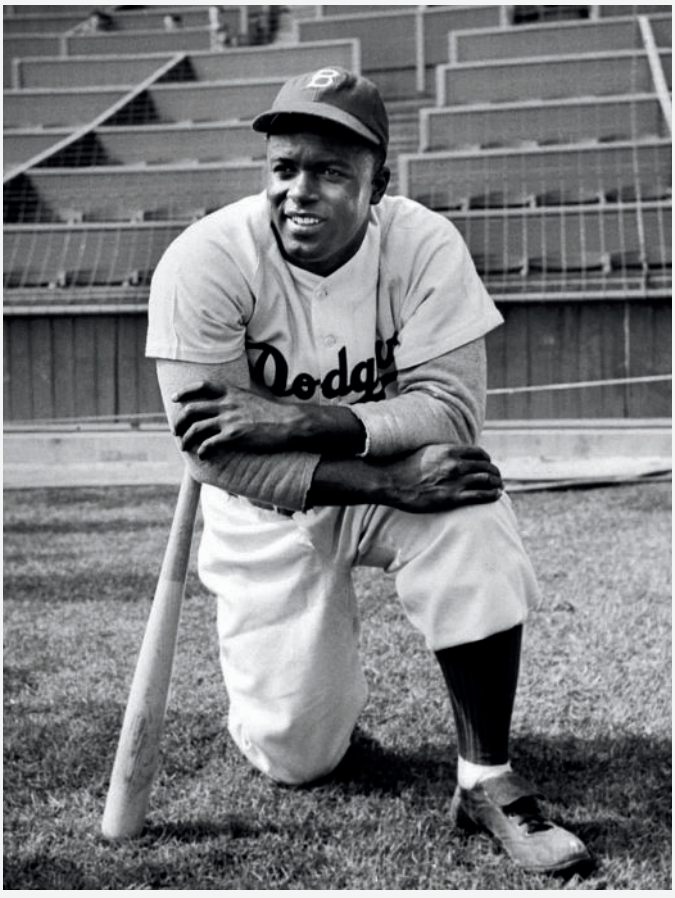
2nd Grade Lesson Plan on
How Jackie Robinson and Sammy Lee Changed Sports

Georgia Social Studies Standards

SS2H1 Describe the lives and contributions of historical figures in Georgia history.
c. Jackie Robinson (sportsmanship and civil rights)

Background Information: Sports and Civil RIghts

After learning about Georgia native Jackie Robinson, students expand their understanding of sportsmanship and civil rights by studying Dr. Sammy Lee (1920–2016). Like Jackie Robinson, Sammy Lee faced, fought, and overcame racial discrimination in sports. Both men used their platforms to advocate for a fairer, more inclusive society.



Sammy Lee was born in California in 1920 to immigrant parents from Korea. He grew up in a racially segregated society, facing racial discrimination from an early age. Despite his talent for diving, he had trouble finding a place to practice because the public pool was segregated. Asians and other people of color could only swim in the pool one day a week. Lee did not let this stop him. He found a coach who trained him over a sand pit.

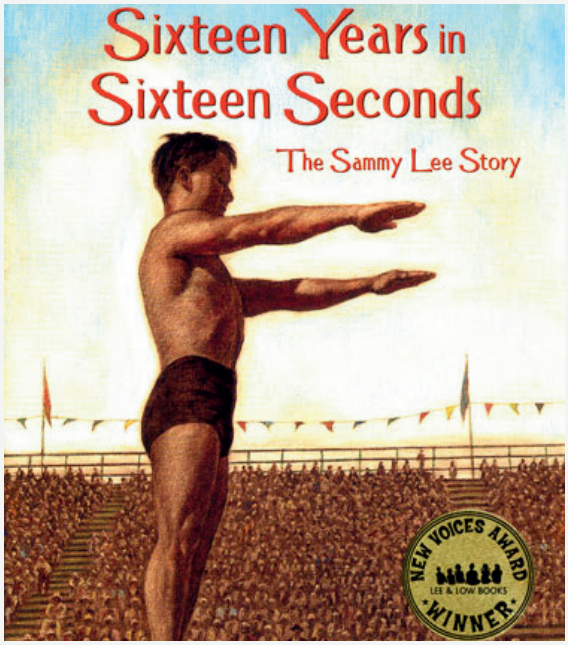
In high school, Lee became a diving champion; he served as student body president and graduated first in his class. Yet he could not attend the prom because the place where the prom was held did not allow people of color. Meanwhile, Lee earned a scholarship to study medicine at Occidental College. Due to World War II, an urgent need for doctors arose. He enrolled in an accelerated program and received his medical degree from the University of Southern California Medical School in 1947. Then, he served as a Major in the U.S. Army Medical Corps. During his education and military service, Lee would squeeze in diving practice when he could.



In 1948, Lee made history at the London Olympics by winning gold in the 10-meter platform event. In the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, he once again won gold in the 10-meter platform. In 1954 Lee traveled throughout Asia as a goodwill ambassador for the U.S. Lee spoke about his diving achievements and talked about how discrimination and racism were being addressed in the United States. Yet, he and his family still faced racial discrimination. They were not able to buy a home in a certain neighborhood due to racism.

While practicing as a physician, he remained active in diving. He coached the 1960 U.S. Olympic team as well as several diving champions. In 1968 Lee was elected to the International Swimming Hall of Fame. He was a flag bearer for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and became a member of the United States Olympic Hall of Fame in 1990. Throughout his life, he remained an advocate for diversity and inclusion in sports and society.





Complete Article and Lesson Plan

Photo Credit:
(Top to Bottom, Left to Right)

1. Jackie Robinson posing during filming of The Jackie Robinson Story (1950). Allan Grant The LIFE Picture Collection/ Shutterstock
2. 1952 Press Photo. PJ Capilla, S Lee & G Haase win Olympic diving event. Associated Press.
3. Yoo, Paula. Sixteen Years in Sixteen Seconds: The Sammy Lee Story. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2005.



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History is the context of "**now**", "**why**", and "**how**".

Teach interwoven history.

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