**The Orlando Cepeda Story**

Author Bruce Markusen

Jacket illustration and design by Ken Bullock

Photo courtesy of the San Francisco Giants/Archives

Publisher Piñata Books, an Imprint of Arte Público Press, University of Houston

Curriculum Guide by Sergio Barrera, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

**Summary:**

Orlando Cepeda, son of Perucho “The Bull” Cepeda, a Puerto Rican baseball star, had his eye set on being as great as his father in the game of baseball during the late 1950s and up to the 1970s. Orlando’s accomplishments surpassed those of his father while playing for six major league teams in nearly twenty years in the United States. His accomplishments, though, did not come easily for he began playing in a time where racism was dominant in the states. This played a tremendous role in his career. Aside from feeling alienated and discriminated, Orlando faced a birth deformity that set him back in many occasions and that caused many health incidents in his career. Despite having health and legal issues, Cepeda managed to be the second player to unanimously be elected for Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player. *The Orlando Cepeda Story* provides many challenging experiences and statistics throughout the good and bad times of a National Baseball Hall of famer.

**About the Author:**

**Teaching Overview:**

This biographical story tells about the life of a hopeful Puerto Rican who wishes to be as great as his father in the game of baseball. Orlando must fight through many challenges throughout his career including challenges imposed by society, the media, and his health. Orlando’s life lends itself to analyze the struggles of becoming a Major League Baseball player as a foreigner from a humble home and a poor community. Since Orlando’s career takes off before the Civil Rights movement, this book portrays the struggles of not only being a dark skinned, but also Latino. Orlando’s story debunk the myths about African Americans being the only ones discriminated against and offers a broader spectrum of racial discrimination that also included many Latinos. The multiple personal experiences of segregation, discrimination and alienation not only in local restaurants, but also in the baseball locker rooms, resonate with the life experiences of many people during the 1960s. His life also embodies resilience and perseverance when bad times struck him. Because this book speak of the good and the bad career decisions that he made the story stays true to the humane character of making mistakes and moving past them even when people portray you negatively.

**Texas State Standards:**

This curriculum guide includes activities that can help students expand their knowledge and skills expected for their respective grade level in Texas.

Relevant standards for ELAR Grade 6 include: §110.18(b)(2)(A)-the development of reading and vocabulary; §110.18(b)(7)-the reading and comprehension of literary text and literary nonfiction; §110.18(b)(9)-the reading and comprehension of culture and history; §110.18(b)(14)-the writing process; §110.18(b)(15)(A)-the writing of imaginative stories; §110.18(b)(26, 27, and 28)-listening, speaking and teamwork.

Relevant standards for ELAR Grade 7 include: §110.19(b)(2)(A)-the development of reading and vocabulary; §110.19(b)(7)-the reading and comprehension of literary text and literary nonfiction; §110.19(b)(9)-the reading and comprehension of culture and history; §110.19(b)(14)-the writing process; §110.19(b)(15)(A)-the writing of imaginative stories; §110.19(b)(16)-the writing of about students’ personal experiences; §110.19(b)(26, 27 and 28)-listening, speaking and teamwork.

Relevant standards of ELAR Grade 8 include: §110.20(b)(2)(A)-the development of reading and vocabulary; §110.20(b)(7)-the comprehension of literary nonfiction; §110.20(b)(8)-the comprehension of culture and history; §110.20(b)(14)-the writing process; §110.20(b)(15)(A)-the writing of an imaginative story; §110.20(b)(16)-the writing of students’ personal experiences; §110.20(b)(26, 27, and 28)-listening, speaking and teamwork.

Relevant standards of ELAR Grade 9 include: §110.31(b)(1)(A)-the development of reading and vocabulary; §110.31(b)(6)-the reading and comprehension of literary nonfiction; §110.31(b)(13)-the writing process; §110.31(b)(14)(C)-the writing of a script with a specific theme and details that contribute to the mood or tone; §110.31(b)(15)(D)-the production of a multimedia presentation; §110.31(b)(24, 25, and 26)-listening, speaking and teamwork.

**Reading Comprehension Strategies:**

**Before:**

1) Have students discuss their knowledge on professional sports. Encourage them to speak about minorities in sports. Since baseball is known to be a very “American” sport because of the history it has, have the students discuss if the challenges of being an athlete from a minority group while playing a game that is predominantly white.

2) Have the students discuss the differences between a biography and an autobiography. Determine which one is better in their personal opinion. Have students reflect upon the personal narratives or *testimonios* presented in this text and discuss what role they play for the development of the biography.

**During:**

1) As the students are reading, have them create a detailed timeline highlighting the various struggles that Cepeda endured throughout his life and also have them look for the ways in which he coped with or resolved these struggles. Have them reflect upon the many obstacles a person can endure and highlight the importance of perseverance.

2) Cepeda was known to have a steady batting average throughout his season. Although sometimes he fell below his average it was due to exterior things. Have students locate the graph that is at the ending of the text. Once they have done so, ask them to select the top three batting averages and the lowest three. As they are reading have them write down some of the things that were happening during these years and these teams and how that reflects on his averages.

**After:**

1) Hand out copies of the U.S. map with Puerto Rico included. Have students come together in small groups to map Cepeda’s trajectory throughout the U.S. with the multiple baseball teams beginning from his native land, Puerto Rico. Destinations in order: Puerto Rico, New York, California, Missouri, Georgia, California, Massachusetts, and Missouri. Once they have located the eight locations, have them discuss the pros and cons of constantly moving homes.

2) Have students discuss how the life of Cepeda reflects the lives of many people who are not U.S. citizens in past and present times. We see that Cepeda was judged for his actions and was treated poorly for being himself. What has changed since the 1960s? Do we continue to face the same stereotypes?

**Writing/Composition Prompts:**

1) Orlando Cepeda was an athlete during an era of racism, segregation and continuous discrimination. Although he was not of African descent, his dark skin played a major role in how he was perceived in society. Do you think Orlando’s life as an athlete or recent immigrant into the states would be different in present date? Why or why not?

2) The media played an important role in the career and personality development of Orlando. The media has a way of shaping the ideas that people get from a person or certain community. Based on your experiences give examples of ways in which the media (television, internet, newspapers etc.) have affected a certain person or community negatively and positively. Reference the tragic deaths o young black men in policy custody, the lack of justice for these incidents, and the unequal media coverage of people of color in the United States.

3) Orlando was offered many second chances throughout his career during his baseball years and after. Describe a time where you were given a second chance at something and how you felt. If you have not received a second chance at something, explain how you feel about people who give and people who received the second chances.

**Vocabulary/Word Study:**

“idolized” (3)- to worship as a god

“intrigue” (4)- appeal strongly to

“chastising” (6)- to severely criticize

“contingent” (7)- a group of individuals

“prominent” (12)- standing out so as to be seen easily

“pudgy” (13)- short and thick

“typified” (20)- to serve as a typical example

“interim” (27)- temporary or provisional arrangement

“barrage” (31)- an overwhelming quantity or explosion, as of words, blows or criticisms

“skeptics” (44)- a person who questions validity or authenticity of something

“ailment” (45)- a physical disorder or illness

“insinuated” (49)- to suggest or hint slyly

“tinker” (50)- to work unskillfully or clumsily at anything

“rigorous” (55)- rigidly severe or harsh

“dispute” (60)- to engage in an argument or debate

“boastful” (65)- full of exaggeration and excessive pride

“measly” (67)- contemptibly small, meager or slight

“insurmountable” (75)- incapable of being surmounted, passed over, or overcome; insuperable

“berth” (85)- to allot to a certain space at which to anchor or tie up

“stride” (102)- to walk with long steps

**Discussion Questions:**

1) How does Orlando’s attitude change from the beginning to the end of the career when it came to the decisions that his managers made? If you think it changed, why do you think he changed his attitude?

2) Orlando’s father loved the sport but decided not to influence his children and let them love the sport for themselves. Do you think that Perucho, his father, did the right thing when he did not want to impose baseball on his children?

3) What were some of the acts of humility shown by Orlando?

4) How is the media both good and bad for the image of all athletes? How important was the media’s role for Orlando’s career?

5) If you were Orlando’s manager would you have let him go to another team after because of his injury? How would you approach the situation?

6) What were some of the accusations made by the fans, media and even manager towards Orlando’s health? How would you react to this harsh criticism and stereotypes?

7) What were some of the great outcomes from Orlando’s positivity towards his team? Do you think that sportsmanship and positivity shape a teams relationship?

8) After being in prison Cepeda was one of the most disliked players of the time. Do you think that the Giant’s manager did the right thing to hire Orlando as an ambassador to speak about his personal experiences after being in prison?

9) Do you think it is easier or more difficult now to be of Hispanic or Latino descent and make it into the professional leagues of sports? What makes you think like this?

**Extensions: (3-5 activities)**

**Writing**

1) Imagine that you are Orlando Cepeda, receiving the Hall of Fame award. Based on what you have read in the text, create a thank you speech for this prestigious award. Explain the different things that mattered most throughout your career and everyone who impacted you.

2) Have students pair up and ask them to interview each other about a specific memory that they would like to relive. Make sure that the interviewer is taking notes of citations he/she might use later on. After both students have done this, ask them to write a biography about the memory that their partner shared and to include some of the language that they recorded in their notes.

**Creative/Arts**

1) In a group of 3-4 students, have the students create their own baseball team. They have to come up with a name, colors, mascot and logo. Make sure to emphasize that all of the components of this team have to be inclusive to all members of society. Therefore it would be strategic to have both female and male students in one group, and if possible from different ethnicities and/or backgrounds.

2) Have students write a script and act out an interview. Make sure there are 1 athlete, 1 reporter and 1 cameraman. Have them picture a scenario where they just lost the world championship after a very successful season and how this will take a toll on the team but also what they felt was needed to have achieved that championship.

**Related Media/Literary Tools:**

National Baseball Hall of Fame-Orlando Cepeda’s Profile

<http://baseballhall.org/hof/cepeda-orlando>

Orlando Cepeda Hall of Fame 1999 Induction Speech- Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RaEsZIyF9T0>

Segregation in the Southern USA (Jim Crow Laws Period Photos)-Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-7eNRB2_0Q>

**Further Reading:**

Lou Hernandez’s *Memories of Winter Ball: Interviews with Players in the Latin American Winter Leagues of the 1950s.* (2013)

An oral history of the Latin American baseball leagues in the mid-20th century. The text includes interviews with many former major league players that took part in the winter leagues of many Latin American countries.

Luis J. Rodriguez’s *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.* (2005)

This text is an award-winning and bestselling classic memoir about a young Chicano gang member surviving the dangerous streets of East Los Angeles.

Rafael Hermoso’s *Speak English! The Rise of Latinos in Baseball* (2013)

Latinos are one of the groups that dominate baseball today, and this text speaks about how much and how little things have changed since the first Latino played in the 19th century. This text also provides a collection of photographs that capture some of the greatest Latino players of all time.

Orlando Cepeda’s *Baby Bull: From Hardball to Hard Time and Back* (1998)

Cepeda enjoyed a stellar baseball career in the late 1950s and throughout the 60s but after it ended his life nearly fell apart. In this text Cepeda shares his story for the first time and reflects upon his career and his struggle to rebuild his life and reputation.

Francisco Jimenez’s *Reaching Out* (2009)

Jimenez is a scholar who grew up in a migrant farm working family in California. He speaks about his life as he reflects on his young adult life. He states his daily issues for wanting to continue his education coming from the Mexican American farm working community.