



“Can I Play Too?” Reading Comprehension Questions

“Can I Play Too?” is an article about the history of youth athletics in Renton. It focuses specifically on what barriers and opportunities existed for both girls and Black players from 1909 through the 1960s, and highlights the careers of several of Renton’s most accomplished Black and female athletes.

This activity is designed for readers in 7th grade and above. Questions can be used for discussion or as writing prompts. You can find the original article from September 2020 [on Renton History Museum’s Newsletters Page](#).

1. A primary source is an original object, document or image that contains direct evidence related to a historical topic. Name two types of primary sources mentioned in the article that tell us about the early history of girls’ basketball in Renton. What kinds of information can we learn from studying these sources?
2. Why did parents and teachers decide to do away with competitive girls’ basketball at Renton High School in 1926?
3. Immediately after girls’ competitive basketball at Renton High School was discontinued, how did girls stay involved in athletics?
4. George Reed was the first of six professional athletes to come from the Hilltop neighborhood in the Renton Highlands. How was he able to become a successful athlete, and what did he accomplish during his career?
5. Who did the City of Renton honor on March 27, 1965? What were this person’s talents and achievements?
6. When did equality in girls’ and boys’ school sports become a federal requirement? What law is responsible for this change?



7. How did Marcia Cosgrove pursue her passion for track and field in 1955-58?

8. Why do you think the Angels Track Club was created in 1968?

Essay Question: What are some of the barriers to participation and other challenges that the athletes mentioned in the article had to overcome in order to play sports? Provide specific examples.

Creative Essay Question: Imagine that you are a painter who designs murals. Using a blank piece of paper, draft a design for a mural that showcases one or more of Renton's former student athletes. Then write a paragraph describing what you drew. Who did you choose to feature on your mural and why? How does the action shown in your picture convey a message about that person's achievements to the audience?



Answer Guide for Parents & Teachers

1. Name two types of primary sources mentioned in the article that tell us about the early history of girls' basketball in Renton. What kinds of information can we learn from studying these sources?

Photographs and yearbooks are two types of primary sources that can tell us about girls' basketball in Renton as far back as 1909. From photographs, we can determine how many players were on a team, their approximate ages, and what kinds of uniforms they wore. From the text of yearbooks, we can learn the names of players, where they played, and what championships they won. Comparing photos over time helps us understand how uniforms evolved with changing attitudes about sports.

2. Why did parents and teachers decide to do away with competitive girls' basketball at Renton High School in 1926?

In 1924 RHS senior Verda Carr died unexpectedly from a tonsil infection. She was a member of the basketball team who also played field hockey, ran track, was editor of the school paper, and participated in drama. The team continued to play and won two more championships. However, in 1926, another basketball player, Annie Agnesani, also died suddenly. Similar to Verda, she had also participated in other sports, the school paper, and school plays. According to Verda's sister Bessie, parents and teachers at RHS felt it would be best to stop the games because they "connected that the athletics was too much for the girls," and felt that it would be too hard on the players to continue after the loss of two teammates. Although the deaths were not caused by sports, parents and teachers became nervous and cancelled girls' basketball games played against other school teams.

3. Immediately after girls' competitive basketball at Renton High School was discontinued, how did girls stay involved in athletics?

Girls at RHS continued playing tennis competitively against other schools. They also participated in smaller intramural competitions against members of their own school, and occasionally participated in "play days" where several schools gathered for a one-day tournament. Verda Carr's younger sister Mildred and Annie Agnesani's younger sister Tilda both participated in multiple sports.

4. George Reed was the first of six professional athletes to come from the Hilltop neighborhood in the Renton Highlands. How was he able to become a successful athlete, and what did he accomplish during his career?

While he also enjoyed basketball and baseball, George Reed decided to focus on football in high school in order to pursue a college scholarship. George credits his coach, John Suzick, for helping him through high school. Suzick acknowledged that it was George's hardworking attitude that helped him surpass other players. In 1958 George obtained a scholarship to Washington State University, where he starred as the Cougars' running back. This led him to a career in the Canadian Football League, where he racked up yards and accolades, including an induction into the Canadian Football Hall of Fame.

5. Who did the City of Renton honor on March 27, 1965? What were this person's talents and achievements?



The City of Renton declared March 27, 1965 Clancy Williams Day, in honor of the Renton High School graduate who played for the L.A. Rams for eight seasons. Clarence “Clancy” Williams was a fast runner, known for being able to play both offense and defense well. During his high school years, he helped RHS win the Puget Sound League championship, and went on to earn a scholarship to play football for WSU, where he is regarded as one of the all-time greatest players in the school’s history. He was drafted to the NFL in 1965.

6. When did equality in men and women’s school sports become a federal requirement? What law is responsible for this change?

Title IX was the federal law that mandated equal access to school sports for women and girls in 1972. It prohibited gender-based discrimination in publicly funded programs. This extended to school sports programs. Nevertheless, it has taken many years for women and girls to gain equal opportunities in sports, and the fight continues.

7. How did Marcia Cosgrove pursue her passion for track and field in 1955-58?

After Liberty Park’s athletic director Jim Lord saw Marcia Cosgrove run, he referred her to Seattle Pacific College’s Coach Ken Foreman. Because Renton High had no girls’ track team and no coach, Marcia trained in hurdles and long jump after school with the boys’ track team. She also trained with Coach Foreman at his college. This led to top-three finishes for Marcia in competitions in several U.S. cities, as well as her participation in the Olympic Trials in 1956.

8. Why do you think the Angels Track Club was created in 1968?

As a result of Marcia Cosgrove’s achievements in the late 1950s, people in the Seattle area started paying more attention to women’s track events. The Seattle Amateur Athletic Union’s president Jim Cain acknowledged the lack of track events for young girls. Yet even a decade later in 1968, there still was no girls’ track team at RHS. Girls were not allowed to use the track at Renton Stadium, and the only opportunity for girls like Patty Van Wolvelaere to run was during the “play days” of intramurals. Since there were no formal opportunities for girls’ track events in local schools, the Angels Track Club was created as a private group to train girls from various schools in the Seattle area to succeed in track events.

Essay Question: What are some of the barriers to participation and other challenges that the athletes mentioned in the article had to overcome in order to play sports? Provide specific examples.

Example Answer: School sports provide kids and teens an opportunity to gain confidence, learn about teamwork and leadership, and improve their physical health; without equal access to these childhood advantages, many young people miss out on the best start in life. In the late 1920s Mildred Carr, Tilda Agnesani, and their teammates lost access to competitive basketball when Renton High School’s girls’ basketball team was shut down following the deaths of Carr and Agnesari’s sisters in 1924 and 1926 because of fears about the effects of sports on girls. Mildred and Tilda and many other girls stayed active, nevertheless, participating in multiple intramural sports and demonstrating the benefits of sports for young women. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Clancy Williams played football, basketball, and participated in track events. He was the only Black player on his team, and other players sometimes bullied him because of the color of his skin. Clancy’s mother encouraged him not to let others degrade



him. He went on to receive a football scholarship to WSU and played for the Rams for eight seasons in the NFL. During the same timeframe, girls at Renton High School did not have access to sports like track and field; only the truly determined could succeed. With the help of a college coach, Marcia Cosgrove practiced with the boys' team and competed against college students. She made it to the Olympic Trials in 1956, placing fourth and stimulating interest in track programs for girls. However, by 1968 there was still no girls' track team at Renton High School. The Angels Track Club was available as an alternative, but the girls did not have the same privileges as the boys' track team did. They were given the boys' used track shoes and practiced on a small track in the woods. Despite these challenges, the Angels successfully learned skills for track and field events. One of the members of the Angels Track Club was Patty Van Wolvelaere, who went on to become an Olympic athlete. While Title IX began to chip away at sports discrimination in 1972, much work remains to be done to ensure that all young people have access to the benefits of participating fully in sports.

Creative Essay Question: Imagine that you are a painter who designs murals. Using a blank piece of paper, draft a design for a mural that showcases one or more of Renton's former student athletes. Then, write a paragraph describing what you drew. Who did you choose to feature on your mural and why? How does the action shown in your picture convey a message about that person's achievements to the audience?

For this essay option, students are encouraged to use their creativity and visual design sense to create a small-scale version of a mural that features student athletes from Renton. Encourage students to go back to the article and highlight, underline, or take notes about the athletes they would like to feature on their murals. These notes can also be used as an outline to help them write their follow-up paragraph after their artwork is finished.

You may also want to show some examples of real-life sports murals and have a discussion about how murals are made and composed. The following short video contains a talk with sports muralist Jonas Never about why sports are an important theme of his art: <https://youtu.be/fsFop81VL6I>

The links on this webpage contain a few local examples of various murals from Renton, including one of boxer Boone Kirkman: <https://rentondowntown.com/arts/murals/>

Supplemental Resources (all available at no cost)

Title IX and School Sports

License to Thrive: Title IX at 35 – This film was made in 2008 to commemorate the 35th anniversary of Title IX, a federal civil rights law which prohibits gender discrimination in schools and other publicly funded programs. The film recounts the passage of Title IX and the resulting changes to school sports through a series of interviews. It also explores how Title IX has impacted education and increased career opportunities for women in areas such as government and STEM fields. This streaming video is available for free with a KCLS library card. <https://kcls.bibliocommons.com/item/show/2130631082>



Understanding the Importance of Title IX – This Ohio State University infographic explains Title IX using simple text and illustrations. It contains numerical figures and graphs that show how both boys’ and girls’ participation in school sports have increased since the passing of Title IX, and a timeline showing Title IX’s impact on history. <https://onlinemasters.ohio.edu/blog/understanding-the-importance-of-title-ix/>

Critical Thinking Questions: How would you summarize Title IX in your own words? Why was Title IX controversial when it was passed? How does Title IX impact students today? Despite Title IX being a very broad and general anti-discrimination law, it is often associated with sports. Why do you think this is?

Local and School Sports in Washington State

RHM’s Hometown Teams Pinterest Board – Our Pinterest board has additional historical newspaper and magazine articles about Clancy Williams, George Reed, and Marcia Cosgrove. It also contains a variety of online articles relating to local sports topics. <https://pin.it/4uGl2BJ>

Shanaman Sports Museum Website – This sports-themed museum is located nearby in Tacoma, but many of the objects and photos in their catalog can be accessed online for free. They also have a page dedicated to scans of historic school sports programs and scrapbooks. <https://www.tacomasporthmuseum.com/>

National High School Hall of Fame – There are five athletes from Washington who have been inducted into the National High School Hall of fame: Jeanne Eggart Helfer (1994), Cash Stone (1997), Barbara Twardus (2001), Joyce Walker (2004) Ed Pepple (2010), and Mike Burton (2015). Biographies for inductees through 2010 can be accessed in PDF format by clicking the link to the 30th Anniversary Program. <https://www.nfhs.org/resources/hall-of-fame/>

Critical Thinking Questions: Choose a sport and compare and contrast the programs available to students in Washington in the 1950s and 1960s with the ones that are available today. What similarities and differences do you notice? How can sports programs and scrapbooks tell us about the lives of student athletes? How and why do other members of the community besides students get involved in school sports? Explain how one of Washington’s High School Hall of Fame inductees made an impact in their sport. Why do you think they were chosen to be honored?

School Sports in U.S. Communities

When My Louisiana School and Its Football Team Finally Desegregated – This article is written by Jeré Longman, a sports writer and former student of Eunice High School in Louisiana. It contains his recollections of playing on his school’s football team in 1969, the year the school became integrated and enrolled its first Black students. Longman also interviewed fellow alumnus Darrel Brown about his bond with their coach, Joe Nagata, who drew on his own experiences as a Japanese American player during World War II to create a team environment that extended respect to all players. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/04/sports/1969-desegregation-football.html>

Wilma Rudolph and Other Black Women Track and Field Olympians Could Have Been College Basketball Stars – Wilma Rudolph is best known for her achievements in track events at the 1956 and 1960 Summer Olympics, but she was also an avid basketball player in high school. This article contains



quotes from Rudolph's autobiography that highlight her early love of basketball and her high school basketball career, as well as an explanation for her transition to track. The author of the article points out how the lack of collegiate and professional basketball for Black women in the 1960s led many of the best players to instead pursue track, resulting in a "lost generation" of potential women's basketball stars. <https://www.swishappeal.com/ncaa/2020/4/1/21201012/ncaaw-womens-basketball-history-wilma-rudolph-clarksville-tennessee-state-tuskegee-olympics>

Billie Jean King Biography – Presented by PBS as part of their *American Masters* series, this website contains a biography and videos about Billie Jean King, the first woman to receive *Sports Illustrated's* Person of the Year Award. As a student, King played softball and tennis, winning her first tennis championship at the age of 14. She later became an advocate for Title IX and equal pay for men and women in professional sports. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/billie-jean-king-filmmaker-essay-on-billie-jean-king/>

Q&A with Billy Mills; Remembering the Haskell Institute, Olympic Race and the Future – This is an interview with Billy Mills, an Oglala Lakota former track and field athlete who won a gold medal in the 10,000 meter run at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. In this interview, Mills recounts his time as a student athlete at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, the Haskell Institute, and the University of Kansas. He also talks about his experiences as an Olympian and his ongoing youth and community outreach efforts. <http://www.ndnsports.com/q-remembering-haskell-institute-olympic-race-and-the-future/>

Sports Illustrated Interview with Arshay Cooper – Arshay Cooper was a member of the first all-Black high school rowing team in the United States. In this interview, Cooper discusses how rowing for his high school in Chicago changed his outlook on life, the bonds he formed with his teammates, and how he uses rowing to try to bring about positive change his community. <https://www.si.com/more-sports/2020/06/29/arshay-cooper-a-most-beautiful-thing-first-all-black-high-school-rowing-team>

Megan Rapinoe's Long Road Back – This ESPN article, archived from their website in 2012, discusses United States National Soccer Team player Megan Rapinoe's performance during the 2011 FIFA World Cup and the lead-up to the 2012 Summer Olympics. It also summarizes her lifelong journey to become a member of the national team, including playing for Elk Grove United as a student, and the significance of her coming out in July of 2021. Rapinoe is known today as a leader in the fight for equal pay for women in sports and LGBTQ+ rights. https://web.archive.org/web/20120728085354/http://espn.go.com/olympics/summer/2012/soccer/story/_/id/8193185/olympics-megan-rapinoe-ready-london-games-jeff-carlisle

Heritage Association Spotlight: Amy Rodriguez – Amy Rodriguez is a former member of the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team and a gold medalist. In this interview, she talks about her experiences playing soccer as a student, from elementary school through college. <https://usctrojans.com/news/2018/5/22/trojan-athletic-fund-heritage-association-spotlight-amy-rodriguez.aspx>

Ibtihaj Muhammad: Finding a Home in the (White) World of Fencing – In this excerpt from her book *Proud: My Fight for an Unlikely American Dream*, Ibtihaj Muhammad recounts the first time she attended a fencing class at the Peter Westbrook Foundation and the impact it had on her as a young



Black athlete. Muhammed was a member of her high school's fencing team and went on to become a three-time All-American champion and Olympic bronze medalist in saber. <https://lithub.com/ibtihaj-muhammad-finding-a-home-in-the-white-world-of-fencing/>

Critical Thinking Questions: Choose an article about an athlete to read and summarize. You may use one of the above or find an article about an athlete that you look up to. How were the athlete(s) in your chosen article influenced by their experiences playing sports as students? What impact did high school and college sports have on their careers later in life? What roles, if any, did coaches and family members play in the development of these athletes?