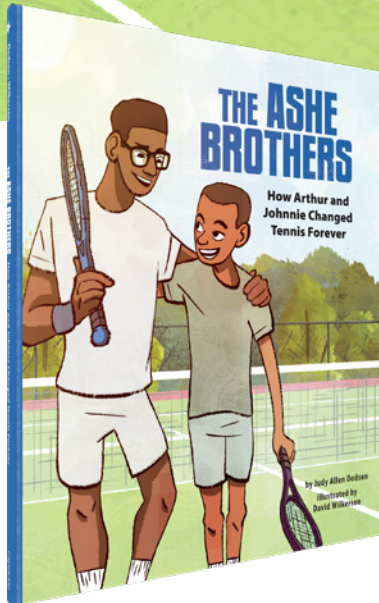


# THE ASHE BROTHERS

## How Arthur and Johnnie Changed Tennis Forever

### Educator's Guide



#### ABOUT THE BOOK

In 1968, Arthur Ashe climbed his way to the top of the tennis world in a time filled with racial tension and segregation. But his success didn't happen without help. Arthur's close relationship with his younger brother, Johnnie, was key to Arthur becoming the first Black man to break the color barrier in men's tennis. A layered story full of love, teamwork, and unconditional support, *The Ashe Brothers* tells the little-known story behind Arthur's Grand Slam win.



**Judy Allen  
Dodson**

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Judy Allen Dodson is all about the book, reading it as a librarian, preserving it as an archivist, and writing it as a children's book author. Judy is the winner of the SCBWI On-the-Verge Emerging Voices and the Out from the Margin (OMA) Awards, the recipient of multiple North Carolina Arts Council grants, a Highlights Foundation Diversity Fellow in Children's Literature, and the regional co-

ambassador for the Authors Guild. She's the author of the Junior Library Guild selection, *Escape From Hurricane Katrina*. Judy has a passion for celebrating diverse children's literature and teaching young readers about history. She lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, with her family. [judyalldodson.com](http://judyalldodson.com)



**David  
Wilkerson**

#### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

David Wilkerson is a Black American illustrator who was born in Denver, Colorado and is currently based in Maryland. He believes that there is healing in storytelling, and that it is the job of creatives to contribute to that cause. His career began in the animation industry, working as a character designer, prop designer, and background designer. David

developed a love for illustration during his time at the Savannah College of Art and Design. He believes that creation itself is what we live in, and he's spent the last 20+ years creating the most authentic version of himself as possible. [theartofdlw.com](http://theartofdlw.com)

## Before Reading Discussion

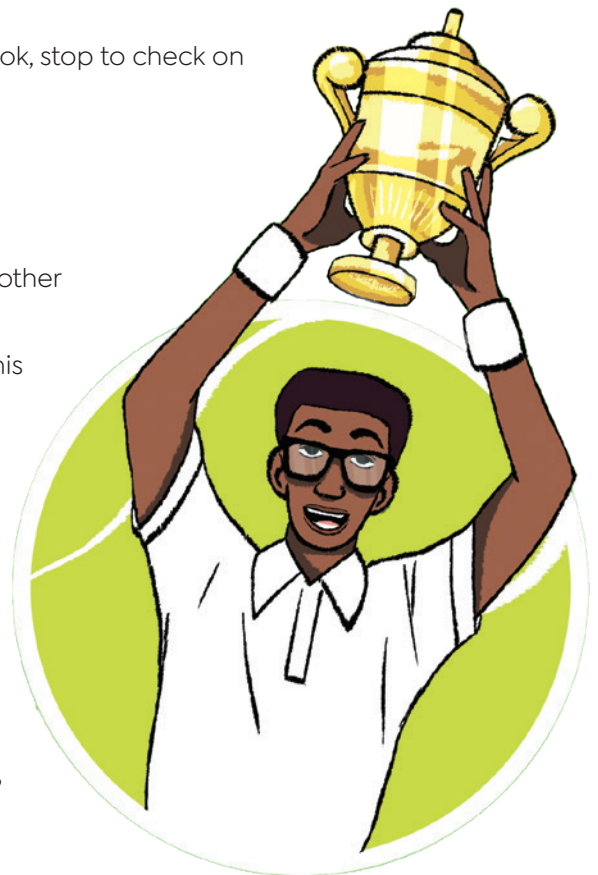
1. What do you know about segregation? What did segregation mean for sports and athletes?
2. What is a “Grand Slam title?” *(Take this opportunity to do some pre-teaching about tennis. There are four major tennis championships known as the Grand Slam tournaments: the Australian Open in January, the French Open from late May to early June, Wimbledon in late June to early July, and the US Open in August to September, with each played over two weeks. Officially, winning a Grand Slam means winning all four of these tournaments in a calendar year. In the book, the author refers to Arthur winning a “Grand Slam title,” when Arthur wins the US Open in 1968. He won several single Grand Slam titles over his career, but never won all four in a calendar year.)*
3. How do you help the people around you? How often do you do something for someone else, without expecting anything in return?
4. In this true story, the main people lose someone important to them. How do you cope when you feel sad?

## During Reading

1. How did Arthur cope with his mother’s passing? How did tennis help?
2. Why was it important for Arthur to find new opponents? How did segregation make this difficult?
3. Johnnie supported Arthur in big and small ways, what are some examples you see in the book?
4. What were Arthur Ashe Sr.’s rules? Why did he stress these rules to his sons, on and off the court?
5. How does the author show Arthur was a great tennis player? Do you think Johnnie was a good tennis player? Why or why not?
6. What does “break the color barrier” mean?
7. There are examples of multiple-meaning words throughout the book, stop to check on understanding of these words: sailed, fan, train, tour, match.

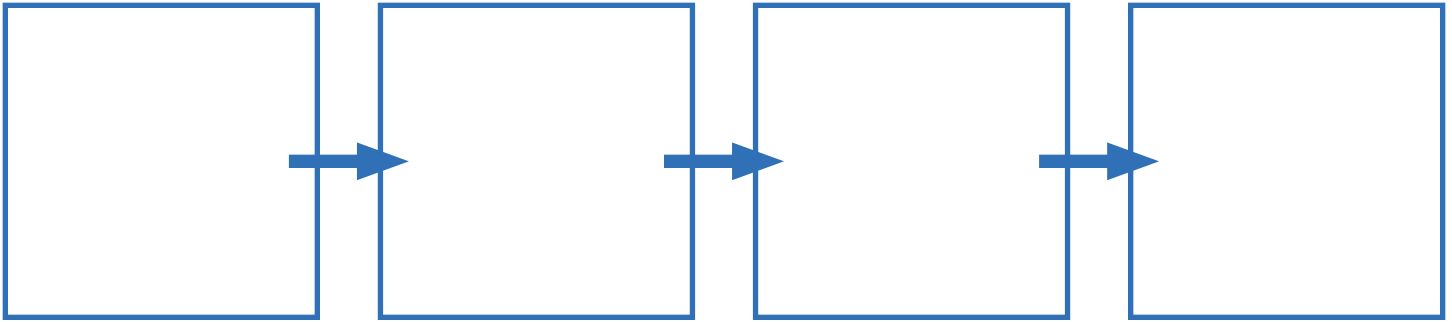
## After Reading

1. Why did the author choose to tell this story about Arthur and his brother Johnnie?
2. What was Arthur’s goal? What are some ways Arthur works toward his goal?
3. Do you have a big dream or goal? What are small steps you can take towards meeting your goal? (See Activity 1)
4. Arthur was able to achieve his goals because of some things his brother Johnnie did. Is there someone who helps you achieve your goals? (See Activity 2)
5. What major events were happening in the world as Arthur was working towards his goals? Why is it important in Arthur’s story to understand what was happening in the world during this time?
6. If you could talk to Arthur or Johnnie Ashe, who would you choose? What questions would you ask them?



## Activities

1. **Make a Goal Map:** As a class, use Arthur Ashe's goals and the steps he took to meet his goal in the goal map. Ask students to write their big dream or goal in the final box. Then have them work their way backwards or forwards to fill in the small steps they need to take to meet their goal.



2. **Personal Connections:** Have students draw and/or write about someone who helps them meet their goals. How do they show support? Extend further by having students think about who they can be the “Johnnie” for, someone they can show support for and encourage.
3. **Social-Emotional:** Have students pretend to be Johnnie Ashe and write a letter to Arthur using encouraging words to show how they believe in him. Tell students they can't use the word “tennis” in the letter. After students have finished, replace Arthur's name with the student's name and return it to the student. Students can read it to themselves to practice and discuss positive self-affirmation.
4. **Key Details:** As a class or individually, read this summary of the book and fill in the missing key words. Provide a word bank OR let students fill in based on what they read to check for understanding of key details.

**Vietnam**

**US Open**

**brother**

**Grand Slam**

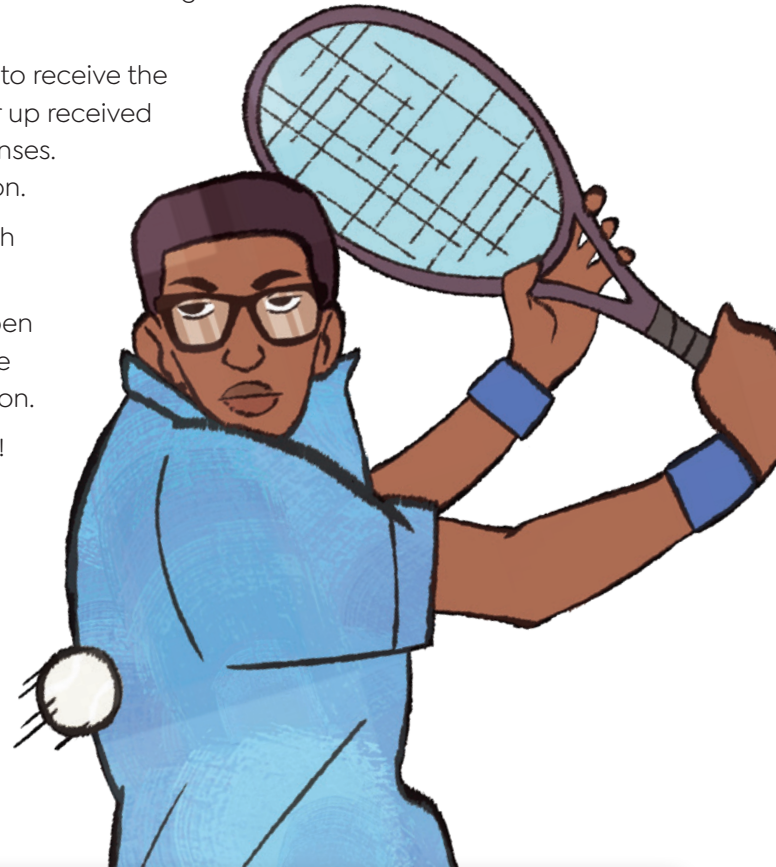
**tennis**

**segregated**

Arthur Ashe loved to play \_\_\_\_\_. He started to play as a young child after his mom passed away. His \_\_\_\_\_, Johnnie, practiced with him and encouraged him. Eventually Arthur needed more competition, but struggled to find competitors because his city was still \_\_\_\_\_. Arthur had to leave home to train, and eventually became the first Black player selected for the US Davis Cup Team, and won! Arthur's brother Johnnie went to war in \_\_\_\_\_. Johnnie re-enlisted so Arthur could continue to play tennis, and compete for a \_\_\_\_\_ title. In 1968, Arthur became the first Black man to win the \_\_\_\_\_!

## Fun Tennis Facts

- Arthur Ashe was the first Black man to win the US Open (1968), the Australian Open (1970), and Wimbledon (1975). He never won the French Open singles tournament, but he did win the doubles French Open!
- Tennis was originally known as “lawn tennis,” but Wimbledon is the only Grand Slam tournament still played on grass. The US Open and Australian Open are played on hard surface, and the French Open is played on clay courts.
- The oldest tournament, Wimbledon, requires players to wear white clothing on grass courts.
- Because of his amateur status, Arthur Ashe was not eligible to receive the \$14,000 prize money after winning the US Open. The runner up received it instead. Arthur received a meager \$280 to cover his expenses. Today’s prize money for both women and men is \$2.6 million.
- The original tennis ball was made of leather and stuffed with wool or hair.
- Before 1972, tennis balls were typically white. The first US Open Championship in 1968 used white balls on a grass court. The tennis ball color was changed to show up better on television.
- Originally, tennis was played on an hourglass-shaped court!
- In 2023, marking the 55<sup>th</sup> year after his historic 1968 win, Arthur Ashe remains the only American Black man to ever win the US Open.
- Venus and Serena Williams were the first ever set of sisters to win Olympic gold medals in tennis. They won at the Sydney 2000 Olympics.
- The Arthur Ashe Stadium is the largest stadium in the world, seating 23,771 fans. It was built in 1997, in the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, in Queens, New York. It’s the main stadium of the US Open tennis tournament.
- Pioneering champion Althea Gibson, the first Black woman to break the color barrier in tennis, won the French Open in 1956. She won the 1957 US Nationals (before the US Open). In 2019, USTA unveiled her sculpture outside of the Arthur Ashe Stadium. It honored her talent, strength, and achievements.



Johnnie wouldn't let Arthur quit. He knew his brother was special.

So special that by age fifteen, Arthur was ranked the fifth best player in the United States in his age group.

Just two years earlier, in 1956, Althea Gibson had become the first Black woman to win a Grand Slam title. But no Black man had defeated the all-white men's tennis establishment.



Arthur's father, neighbors, and coaches were convinced Arthur could do it. He could be the one to break the color barrier in men's tennis.

That filled Johnnie with pride. He thought Arthur could do it too.

