

Session – Arthur Ashe

Worksheet 1 – Arthur Ashe: A Hero

Arthur Ashe

By A.B., Grade 4, Martin Luther King School, Piscataway, N.J.

Arthur Ashe was the first African-American to win a major tennis tournament. He was born on July 10, 1943 in Richmond, Virginia. He died February 6, 1993 in New York City.

Ashe spent his early years with his mother, Mattie Cordell Cunningham Ashe. He was taught to read at the age of 5. When he was six, his mother died of heart disease. Though heartbroken, Arthur's memory of his beloved mother was a source of inspiration throughout his life. Ashe's father, Arthur Ashe Sr., worked as a caretaker for a park named Brookfield in suburban North Richmond in Virginia. Both lived on the grounds that had four tennis courts, a pool and three baseball diamonds.

Arthur's nickname was 'Skinny' or 'Bones' as he was thin growing up but he grew up to be six feet and one inch tall. Ashe started playing tennis when he was six years old and received training from R. Walter 'Whirlwind' Jhonson, an African-American doctor who opened his home in the summer to tennis prospects. Jhonson used military-style methods to teach Ashe tennis skills and also to stress the code of sportsmanship like respect, a sharp appearance and not to cheat.

Arthur Ashe graduated from high school in 1961, and was good enough to earn a tennis scholarship to UCLA. It was at UCLA that Arthur earned recognition for his tennis abilities on a national level, culminating with an individual and team NCAA championship in 1965. He was also growing as a person as well, graduating in 1966 with a BA in Business Administration.

Ashe was selected in 1963 to represent the United States in Davis Cup play, an honor in which he took great pride. He also became the first African-American to be selected to play for the United States team. Ashe served in the army for two years during which he was assigned time to play for tennis competitions.

In 1968, Ashe won the US Open and created a tennis program for US inner cities.

Arthur Ashe was a trailblazer (leader) for African-American males in tennis every time he succeeded on the tennis court despite being an outcast in a historically white sport. Arthur Ashe influenced me because he was the first African American to win a tennis tournament.

I adore tennis because it is my favorite sport. Some connections are that we both live on the East coast and love tennis. He is my African American hero.

Worksheet 2 – Arthur Ashe Quotes

“Not the tennis court but the arena of protest and politics would be the single most significant testing ground for me in the middle years of my life.”

— Arthur Ashe

“True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.”

— Arthur Ashe

“I was bent on telling the story of AIDS so that as many people as possible would be aware of its dangers, its myths and realities.”

— Arthur Ashe

“I have tried to keep on with my striving because this is the only hope I have of ever achieving anything worthwhile and lasting.”

— Arthur Ashe

“If you're paid before you walk on the court, what's the point in playing as if your life depended on it?”

— Arthur Ashe

“As never before, our moral, intellectual, and material wealth will depend on the strength, skills and productivity of our youth.”

— Arthur Ashe

“For every hour you spend on the athletic field, spend two in the library.”

— Arthur Ashe

“From what we get, we make a living; what we give makes a life.”

— Arthur Ashe