She may be small at 5’2” but Mamie “Peanut” Johnson is a powerhouse when it comes to baseball, and keeping her dream alive despite segregation and discrimination in the 1940s and 1950s. At ten years old, she knows that she has to play baseball no matter what. And, she does. First in the neighborhood, at school, and in the sandlots; then for an all-white Police League; and finally, with a professional Negro Leagues team, the Indianapolis Clowns. As the Negro Leagues begin to disband, Mamie starts a new career as a registered nurse, but never loses her love of the game.

Selected Awards

- NCSS Notable Book
- Children’s Choice Award
- Carter G. Woodson Honor Book

About the Author

Michelle Y. Green is a Baltimore Orioles fan who lives and writes in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. She has written an award-winning children’s book series, Willie Pearl, which is based on the life of her mother. To help Mamie Johnson tell her story in A Strong Right Arm, Green followed Mamie around for over two years to baseball games, practices, and baseball card shows.
Think About What You Know

**Baseball**  Lead students to understand how unique it was for a woman like Mamie Johnson to play professional baseball, especially in the 1950s:

- Have students brainstorm what they know about baseball. Record their ideas in a semantic map using the categories Teams, Equipment, Rules, and Players.
- Prompt students to name any famous baseball players they know. Confirm that most of the players they mention are male. Ask if they know any female players.
- Hold up the book cover as you explain: In the 1950s, people didn’t expect women to play sports as well as men. But, they were wrong. There were several women who played professional baseball. One of those women was Mamie “Peanut” Johnson.
- Next, have students use **Student Journal, page 3** to tell what they think about Mamie Johnson playing professional baseball.

Preview and Predict

Have students look at the front cover, read the title, and then read the summary on the back cover. Say:

- Who is Mamie Johnson? Why was it tough for her make her dream come true?

Then point out The Exchange question on the title page: *What makes someone courageous?* Explain that when they finish reading, they’ll share their ideas about this and other questions with a group.

Next, have students complete **Student Journal, page 3** to preview the book and make predictions about how Mamie Johnson accomplished her dream.

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**Prepare to Read**

**Think About What You Know**

Tell what you think about Mamie Johnson playing professional baseball. Was it a brave thing to do? Why or why not?

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**Preview and Predict**

- Look at the front cover.
- Read the book summary on the back cover.
- Read The Exchange question on the title page.
- Read the Introduction and page 11.

1. The author helped Mamie write this autobiography about her own life. How can you tell that Mamie shares her own personal thoughts and feelings?

2. What is Mamie Johnson like? What did she have to do to make her dream come true?
Use a Reading Strategy

**Sequence Chain** Preview the graphic organizer on Student Journal, page 4 with students. Explain that as they read *A Strong Right Arm* they can complete the Chain to show the sequence of events. Have students add to their Chains after they finish reading each section.

**Use a Reading Strategy**

**Use a Sequence Chain**

As you read each part of *A Strong Right Arm*, use a Sequence Chain to show the order of events in Mamie's life.

**Chapters 1–3**
- Mamie played baseball with her uncle, Bones. Her grandma died.

**Chapters 4–5**
- Mamie moved to New Jersey. She played baseball for the Police Athletic League.

**Chapters 6–7**
- Mamie wanted to try out for a white league, but couldn't. The Negro Leagues asked her to try out.

**Chapters 8–9**
- Mamie played for the Indianapolis Clowns. She traveled with them.

**Chapter 10**
- Mamie pitched for many games. Later, she stopped playing and became a nurse.

**Chapter 11**
- Now, Mamie works at the Negro Leagues Baseball Shop. She wants to rebuild Miller's Field.
Read the Book

Form the group that will read *A Strong Right Arm*. Plan how the group will read and respond. Some options are:

- **Read with a Group** Group members read an agreed-upon number of pages, complete the corresponding *Student Journal* page(s) and meet to discuss. When they finish the book, they meet again for *The Exchange*. The group can use the planner on *Student Journal, page 2* to establish meeting times.

- **Read Independently** Group members read the book on their own and then meet for *The Exchange*. The group can use the planner on *Student Journal, page 2* to establish the meeting time.

- **Guided Reading** Read aloud the summary at the beginning of each chapter to give students an overview of the chapter. Use the *Before You Move On* questions to check comprehension as students read. Use *Look Ahead* to set a focus for reading the next set of pages. At the end of each section, assign the appropriate *Student Journal* page. Discuss the page before starting the next section. Establish a date for *The Exchange* and record it on the planner.

Whichever option you choose, use pages 5–9 for an at-a-glance view of *Student Journal* pages, as well as answers to the *Before You Move On* questions.

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**Student Journal, page 2**

**Plan Your Schedule**

My group members are: _____________________________

We plan to read *A Strong Right Arm* and meet on these dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Date We Will Finish Reading</th>
<th>Date We Will Discuss</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1–3</td>
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</table>

*Our Exchange meeting will be on this date:_________________
Chapters 1–3

ANSWERS TO “BEFORE YOU MOVE ON”

PAGE 12
1. Inference Why is “Mamie” the only woman’s name to appear on the Negro Leagues Wall of Fame?
   Not very many women played on the teams; or the women weren’t as good as Mamie.

2. Paraphrase What did Mamie mean when she said her life has been about “tearing down walls to build something better.”
   She had to work against prejudice to make things better for herself and others.

PAGE 18
1. Comparisons Reread page 16. What made Mamie different from most other girls her age?
   Mamie was tough and athletic. She threw baseballs like boys and was very determined.

2. Conclusions Mamie loved getting packages from her mother. How do you know they were important?
   They were the only thing she liked better than baseball.

PAGE 22
1. Cause and Effect Mamie’s grandma died. What effect did this have on Mamie?
   Mamie felt sad. She worried about where she would live and who would care for her.

2. Details Reread pages 21–22. What details show how Mamie felt when her grandma died?
   She cried. She couldn’t sleep. She thought stars were missing.

Respond to Chapters 1–3
Sequence Chain

Think it Over
Think about what you read and answer these questions.
1. Personal Response Mamie said that she must have been born with a baseball in her hand. That meant she could play baseball well naturally.
   What is something that you can do well? Why do you like it?

2. Author’s Purpose The author wrote the story as if Mamie was telling it to someone. Why do you think the author chose to write this way?
   It is easier for readers to imagine what happened. They feel as if they are listening to Mamie.

3. Generalization Mamie’s life changed in a big way because her grandmother died. How can big changes in life be good and bad?
   They can be bad because they can make you sad or angry. They can be good because you can find new opportunities or things could turn out better than before.
A Strong Right Arm

Chapters 4–5

ANSWERS TO “BEFORE YOU MOVE ON”

PAGE 30

1. **Cause and Effect** Reread pages 28–30. Bones gave Mamie a baseball. How did it make her feel?
   She felt happy and magical. She liked the way the baseball felt in her hand.

2. **Inference** Why couldn’t Mamie go to live with her mother?
   Her mother couldn’t afford to care for her. She had to work too much.

PAGE 38

1. **Comparisons** Reread pages 31–32. How was softball different from baseball?
   The ball was bigger; Mamie had to pitch underhand; most of the players were not very good.

2. **Details** Reread page 35. The boys didn’t think Mamie could play baseball. What were their reasons?
   She was a girl. She was not white. She was from the South and talked differently than they did.

PAGE 47

1. **Details** Mamie went to the police station for two reasons. What were they?
   She wanted to know if it was legal for her to play baseball and to sign up for the team.

2. **Cause and Effect** What effect did Jackie Robinson have on the major leagues and all Americans?
   He showed whites that black people could play, too. More black players might be able to play because he did.

Respond to Chapters 4–5

Sequence Chain


Think It Over

Think about what you read and answer these questions.

1. **Personal Response** When Jackie Robinson played on television, it changed Mamie’s world. Tell about one news event that affected your life. How did it change you?

2. **Cause and Effect** Mamie moved to Long Branch after her Grandma died. How did moving affect Mamie?
   Mamie left Bones and her friends; she could not play baseball with them anymore. She had to struggle to play baseball in New Jersey.

3. **Paraphrase** Reread page 37. Mamie’s grandma used to say, “The truth will set you free.” Tell in your own words what she meant.
   If you tell the truth and are honest about things, you will have more freedom. You will be able to do what you want to if people know the truth about you.
**A Strong Right Arm**

**Chapters 6–7**

**ANSWERS TO “BEFORE YOU MOVE ON”**

**PAGE 53**

1. **Summarize** Reread pages 49–50. When did the women’s league start? Why did it start?
   
   It started during World War II because male baseball players were at war.

2. **Paraphrase** Reread page 51. Tell in your own words what this sentence means: "If we can’t see them, they’ll just disappear.”
   
   White people thought that if they ignored black people, they wouldn’t have to deal with them or their needs.

**PAGE 58**

1. **Details** Mamie and Rita weren’t allowed to try out for the league. Why not?
   
   The All-American Girl’s League was all white.

2. **Comparisons** Rita and Mamie acted differently when they were told to leave. What did this show about them?
   
   Rita started to leave. Mamie threw a long pitch to show her strength. Mamie was proud and determined, but Rita gave up quickly.

**PAGE 65**

1. **Main Idea** Reread pages 63–64. Many black athletes played at Bannecker Field. Why?
   
   Because of segregation, it was one of the only places black people could play.

2. **Comparisons** What were some ways life was different for black people and white people when Mamie was young?
   
   Black people had to sit in certain places at the ball park, but white people didn’t. Whites could play sports anywhere, but black people couldn’t.

**PAGE 74**

1. **Conclusions** Reread pages 66–67 and 71. Mamie was not as strong or big as the men. What helped her compete with them?
   
   The men didn’t think she was smart because she was a girl. She used her brain to compete with them.

2. **Sequence** Reread pages 73–74. What happened after Mamie struck out Savoy?
   
   The man in the suit shook her hand and asked her to try out for a Negro Leagues team in Indianapolis.
A Strong Right Arm

Chapters 8–9

ANSWERS TO “BEFORE YOU MOVE ON”

PAGE 82
1. Conclusions Reread pages 80–82. Why was Mamie asked to join the Clowns?
   She showed them that she could pitch, catch the ball, and bat well. She impressed them.
2. Inference Why did Mamie say it took her seventeen years to play for the Clowns?
   She had always wanted to play professionally; everything she did prepared her to play for the Clowns.

PAGE 90
1. Summarize Reread pages 83–84. What did Mamie like about playing with the Indianapolis Clowns?
   She liked that it wasn’t an all-girls team. She liked the uniforms and that the men didn’t give her special treatment.
2. Conclusions Reread pages 86–89. How did Toni’s story about her first day on the team help Mamie prepare?
   It let her know that the men might not be nice to her. It let her know what to expect from them.

PAGE 97
1. Main Idea Mamie had to learn which drinking fountain to use and what stores she could go to. Why?
   The South was segregated and blacks couldn’t use the same facilities as whites.
2. Paraphrase Mamie said, “I had two strikes against me.” Use your own words to tell what this means.
   She was black and a woman. She was not able to do many things because of this.
Chapter 10

ANSWERS TO “BEFORE YOU MOVE ON”

PAGE 105

1. Cause and Effect  Reread pages 99–100. What are two reasons Mamie took college classes?
   The baseball season didn’t last all year long. She wanted to prepare for a future career.

2. Inference  Why did Mamie keep playing baseball even though it was so hard for black players?
   She loved baseball so much that nothing would stop her. The black fans made her feel good.

PAGE 115

1. Inference  Reread pages 108–109. Why did Paige want to teach Mamie how to pitch?
   He wanted to support black players; he was impressed by Mamie’s talent and wanted to help her.

2. Cause and Effect  Reread pages 114–115. Why did it get harder to play in the Negro Leagues?
   The majors had taken many players from the Negro Leagues; the fans followed the players, so they lost money.

Respond to Chapter 10

Sequence Chain

Think It Over
Think about what you read and answer these questions.

1. Personal Response  Mamie told the story of her nickname, Peanut. Do you have a fun nickname? Explain what it means. If you do not have a nickname, what would you like to be called? Why?

2. Opinion  Mamie said that the men on her team became like brothers. Do you think she was wise to play on a team made mostly of men? Why or why not?

3. Cause and Effect  Reread pages 102–103. What are two reasons that people went to see the Negro Leagues games?
   They liked to see the games because they liked baseball, and they liked proving that skin color didn’t matter.

Chapter 11

ANSWERS TO “BEFORE YOU MOVE ON”

PAGE 123

1. Sequence  Reread pages 118–119. What has changed for African American people since Mamie left the Clowns?
   Schools were desegregated; civil rights laws were passed; blacks have more opportunities; the Negro Leagues ended.

2. Generalization  Why are stories like Mamie’s important?
   They tell about history; they encourage children to stick with their dreams.

Respond to Chapter 11

Sequence Chain

Think It Over
Think about what you read and answer these questions.

1. Personal Response  Mamie now teaches young people about baseball and history. What is something you would like to teach people about someday? Why?

2. Opinion  Mamie is not often recognized for what she accomplished. Some people would be angry about that, but Mamie is not. Do you think she should be angry? Why or why not?

3. Author’s Purpose  Why do you think the author wrote this book?
   She wanted to inform others about the struggles of women athletes who were African American; she was inspired by Mamie’s story and thought it would be a good book.
Allow time for groups to meet for *The Exchange*. If you plan to participate, use these tips for guiding students in discussing the big question:

**What makes someone courageous?**

- **How would Mamie answer this question?** Who were courageous people that she knew? Give examples from the book.
  
  Mamie would say that you have to believe in yourself and work hard to be courageous. She would say that her mother, grandmother, uncle, Jackie Robinson, and Toni Stone were courageous.

- **What other qualities help people solve problems or achieve their goals?** Why?
  
  Being creative and patient because you can find new ways to get your dreams and have patience to wait until they come true.

- **Mamie said that her life had been about “tearing down walls to build something better.”** What kind of walls do you face in life? How do you deal with them?

### Extend the Reading

**Write a Book Review**

Have students use the first paragraph to give the title and author, and a summary of what the book is mostly about. Then they can tell how they feel about the book, and why they believe someone else should read it.

**Game Announcers**

Invite partners to imagine they are sports announcers and give a play-by-play description of one of Mamie’s games for the class. Suggest they use the chapter “Call Me Peanut” for ideas.

**Team Webbing**

Form teams to make word webs for Mamie Johnson. Give each team a large piece of paper and each student a different colored marker. Each student on the team writes a trait, and rotates the paper for the next student to add a different trait.