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The Center for Justice  
Education at Eastern State  
Presents:

EDUCATOR GUIDE:  
**UNLOCKING HISTORY:  
SPORTS AT EASTERN  
STATE PENITENTIARY**

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**EASTERN STATE  
PENITENTIARY**

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## **UNLOCKING HISTORY EDUCATOR GUIDE: SPORTS**

This guide supports a classroom viewing of [“Unlocking History: Sports at Eastern State Penitentiary”](#) [runtime 3 minutes].

This episode explores the role of sports at Eastern State Penitentiary, focusing on how athletic activities were used to engage prisoners in team settings. Special attention is given to the penitentiary’s integrated baseball teams and the story of Charles “Jack” Blackburn, a legendary boxer who played baseball at Eastern State, and recreation in prisons today. The video provides perspectives on prison life, revealing how sports can be used for both rehabilitation and social integration.

### **Grade Levels:**

9th through 12th

### **Number of Class Periods:**

One period

### **Author:**

Designed by the Eastern State Education Team.

## **Learning Objectives:**

- Understand the role of sports at Eastern State Penitentiary and in prisons today, as well as how sports intersect with prison life and reform.
- Explore the historic significance of integrated baseball teams in a prison environment and their role in social integration and rehabilitation.
- Learn about Charles “Jack” Blackburn and his contributions to the legacy of sports at Eastern State.
- Analyze how sports can influence identity, socialization, and rehabilitation within correctional facilities.

## **Guiding Questions for Viewing:**

- Why might sports have been a significant part of life at Eastern State Penitentiary?
- What impact could organized sports have on the behavior and social dynamics of people both living and working in prisons?
- How did baseball at Eastern State contribute to the integration of the prison during a time of racial segregation in the United States?
- How does this story of integration in a prison reflect broader themes of racial and social integration in American history?
- How might Jack Blackburn’s participation in baseball at Eastern State have impacted how others viewed him?
- Can sports be an effective tool for rehabilitation and social reform in prisons today? What are the benefits and potential drawbacks of incorporating sports programs in modern correctional facilities?

## Activities and Extensions:

### Research Project:

- Have students research the history of sports in prisons, focusing on other notable athletes or teams who have been incarcerated, or the history of baseball in the correctional system. Students could look at the role of sports in modern prisons or famous prison sports programs, like San Quentin's basketball team.

### Classroom Discussion:

- Hold a classroom discussion on the following prompt: "Should people in prison be allowed to play sports?" Students can explore both the potential benefits (team-building, rehabilitation, physical health) and challenges (security concerns, resource allocation) of integrating sports into prison life.

### Reflection Essay:

- Ask students to write a short essay addressing one of the following prompts:
  - In what ways did organized sports, specifically baseball, play a significant role in the integration and social dynamics at Eastern State Penitentiary during a time of racial segregation in the United States? Discuss how baseball helped bridge divides and reflect on how this story of integration within the prison mirrors broader themes of racial and social integration in American history.
  - Can sports be an effective tool for rehabilitation and social reform in modern prisons? Consider the example of baseball at Eastern State Penitentiary and the impact it had on prisoner behavior and relationships. Analyze the potential benefits and drawbacks of incorporating sports programs into today's correctional facilities, and explore how figures like Jack Blackburn, who participated in prison sports, might have been viewed differently because of their involvement in athletics.

## **Common Core Standards:**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3:** Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or whether the events were merely coincidental.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1:** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8:** Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

## QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Contact [education@easternstate.org](mailto:education@easternstate.org).

Learn more about the Center for Justice Education at Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, and about the Teacher Institute, at

**EASTERNSTATE.ORG**