

EDUCATOR/DISCUSSION GUIDE

CALL ME ROBERTO! ROBERTO CLEMENTE GOES TO BAT FOR LATINOS

¡LLÁMENME ROBERTO! ROBERTO CLEMENTE ALZA LA VOZ POR LOS LATINOS

**Written by
Nathalie Alonso**

**Illustrated by
Rudy Gutierrez**

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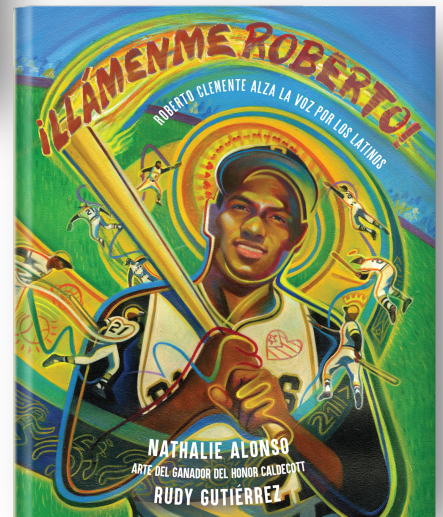
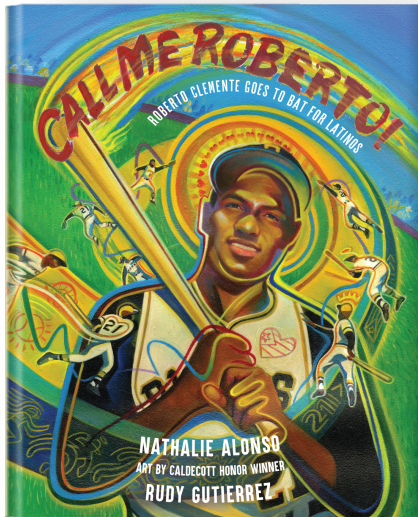
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ABOUT THE BOOK

Before Roberto Clemente was a World Series champion, he was a little boy growing up in Carolina, Puerto Rico, who loved to play béisbol. A Major League scout spotted his talent when Roberto was only nineteen, and before long Roberto was showcasing his remarkable hitting and defensive ability on a national stage. But while the fans back home in Puerto Rico cheered Roberto's successes, the reception from newspaper reporters and fans in the States was not so warm.

Roberto stayed strong in the face of jeering taunts and the reporters' barbs. He believed, "If I'm good enough to play here, I have to be good enough to be treated like the rest of the players." He spoke out against the segregation he experienced during spring training. He insisted that his name was "Roberto" and not "Bob." And he worked so hard and played so

ASTRA BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

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well that ultimately no one could deny his excellence. He was the first Spanish-speaking ballplayer to be named MVP of the World Series.

Author Nathalie Alonso highlights Roberto's incredible athletic achievements, and Rudy Gutierrez's fluid illustrations showcase how well Roberto could "swing and slide...catch, throw, and run."

PRAISE FOR *CALL ME ROBERTO!*

★ "The triumphant picture book biography skillfully weaves an underdog sports story with political context, prioritizing Roberto's love of the game while also exploring how white supremacy played into his professional and personal life. Gutierrez's celebratory art is a riot of movement and color, with fluid lines and painterly swoops zinging through the saturated pages; patterned but balanced backgrounds create a contained energy that matches Roberto's exuberant but disciplined approach to the game. His tragic death on one of his many humanitarian trips is detailed in the backmatter, but overall, Alonso, a career sports journalist, gives readers a joyful, affectionate portrayal of a sports hero told with the reverence of a true fan." —***The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, starred review***

★ "In this stirring biography of Puerto Rican baseball player Roberto Clemente (1934–1972), Alonso celebrates the athlete's contributions to baseball and human rights. The smartly paced narrative kicks off with Clemente's childhood in Puerto Rico...then follows his arc to the major league, joining the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1955...Acrylic, colored pencil, and crayon illustrations by Gutierrez impart vibrancy to lively art that emphasizes the figure's athletic ability and connection with the public." —***Publishers Weekly, starred review***

"Admiring biographies of the great baseball player and humanitarian for younger readers abound, but here sports journalist Alonso takes a different angle...Though she covers on-field highlights up to his three-thousandth hit, it's Clemente's insistent identity as a Latin American in the face of jeering references to his accent in the press and efforts to rename him "Bob"—not to mention poor treatment on the road due to Jim Crow laws—that to her (and many Latine ball players since) make him an inspirational figure. 'Bold style' is a good way to characterize Gutierrez's illustrations, too, as the sports star swats powerfully, runs bases, and makes catches in sinuous blurs of action or off-the-field poses within

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intricately interwoven frames and strong, swirling backdrops.” —**Booklist**

“Sports journalist Alonso weaves Spanish words into the story and ratchets up the narrative’s energy with play-by-play descriptions of Clemente’s athleticism. Caldecott honoree Gutierrez’s vibrant mixed-media illustrations evoke urban murals or Afro-Caribbean fabrics, pulsing with swirls, designs, and actions saturated in color and fueled by emotion... an inspirational, fast-paced biography of a man who broke barriers for athletes of color.” —**Kirkus Reviews**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

Roberto grew up playing a lot of béisbol. What did he use for a bat and ball? What was his early playing field like?

What happened when Roberto turned 19? How was his first stop in the Major Leagues different from his home?

Where did Roberto make his Major League debut? How did he do in his first at-bat?

“Roberto hears taunts from opposing players and people in the stands.” How does Roberto respond to the criticism?

What did the newspaper reporters call Roberto? When people called him “Bob,” what did Roberto say?

In 1960, Roberto was named an All-Star. How many home runs and RBIs did he have that season?

Roberto’s team, the Pittsburgh Pirates, made it to the World Series in 1960. How did Roberto play? What did he get at least one of in every game of the series?

When Roberto headed home after the World Series, how did his fans in Puerto Rico greet him? What are “pitos and tambores?”

Roberto was treated like a baseball hero in Puerto Rico, but in the most valuable player balloting, he only finished eighth. Why wouldn’t the newspaper reporters give him the credit he deserved?

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In 1966, “the newspapers can’t deny it: Roberto is the MVP. El más valioso.” What were Roberto’s stats that year?

In 1971, the Pirates returned to the World Series. How did Roberto play? At the end of the series, Roberto was the first Spanish-speaking player to receive what honor?

How many career hits did Roberto have? How many other Major League baseball players have that many career hits? How many seasons did Roberto play in the major leagues?

At the end of the book, the author describes Roberto’s incredible accomplishments in baseball. How many Gold Gloves did he win? How many All-Star Games did he appear in? How many batting titles did he win?

How does Major League Baseball honor Roberto Clemente every year?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

“Out in right field, Roberto is an acrobat.” What are some of the other descriptive words the author uses to describe Roberto’s athleticism?

“Many fans love Roberto’s bold style, but not everyone is quick to embrace a Black man from Puerto Rico who speaks español.” How did newspaper reporters treat Roberto? How did opposing fans treat Roberto? Roberto faced so many challenges, yet he continued to play so well for so many years. What are some words you would use to describe Roberto Clemente’s character and perseverance?

Every year, baseball teams travel to warmer climates for spring training. The Pirates had spring training in Florida, but Florida was segregated in 1960. What does the word “segregation” mean? How was Roberto’s spring training experience different from his White teammates? What did Roberto have to say about the poor treatment he received?

For the 1961 season, Roberto led the “league with a .351 batting average” and won “a Gold Glove for his spectacular catches and throws.” Over the course of his career, he batted .317 and won 12 Gold Gloves. He was a true triple threat, with exceptional hitting, base-running, and fielding skills. One sportswriter said this about his powerful throwing arm: “Clemente could field the ball in New York and throw out a guy in Pennsylvania.” In 1973,

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Roberto Clemente was the first Caribbean and the first Latin-American player to be elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame. To learn more about Roberto Clemente's remarkable career, visit: baseballhall.org/discover/inside-pitch/class-of-1973-brings-clemente-to-cooperstown.

Describe how the illustrator, Rudy Gutierrez, depicts Roberto's speed, power, and grace.

After Roberto is named MVP of the 1971 World Series, he asks his parents, "Doña Luisa and Don Melchor for their blessing on television en español." What do you think this moment meant to Roberto and his parents? What do you think hearing español spoken on television by a World Series champion meant to Hispanic Americans at that time? How is Roberto's message to his parents a reflection of how he feels about them and his home country? To see Roberto's message to his parents, watch pbs.org/video/chapter-1-roberto-clemente/.

EXTRA CREDIT

The author reports that Roberto Clemente was born "in the quiet sugar town of Carolina, Puerto Rico." When Roberto was a boy, sugar production in Puerto Rico was at its peak. What countries grow the most sugarcane today? Is sugarcane still grown in Puerto Rico?

Roberto is "orgullosa to be from Puerto Rico." Puerto Rico is a US territory. Where is Puerto Rico? How many US territories are there?

In the 1960 World Series, Roberto's team, the Pittsburgh Pirates, bested the New York Yankees in seven games. At that time, how many World Series had the Yankees won? How many had the Pirates won? The Pirates were the underdog of that Series. What does the word "underdog" mean?

Find out more about other athletes whose play on the field and courage off the field led to societal change. Jackie Robinson and Billie Jean King are just two examples.

In the author's note, Nathalie Alonso explains that while Roberto Clemente's humanitarian efforts are well known, she wanted to highlight "his battle to get the sport to accept and embrace players from Latin America." Roberto's pride in his heritage and his athletic prowess opened the door for future generations of ballplayers. Today, over 30 percent of Major League players are Hispanic/Latino. How did Roberto pave the way for peloteros

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from Latin America? See if you can learn more about Major League ballplayers from Puerto Rico who have followed in Roberto's footsteps.

Guide written by Jane Becker



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