

It's Her Story: Billie Jean King - A Graphic Novel

EDUCATOR GUIDE



Billie Jean King is an iconic tennis champion and activist who changed the world of women's sports. She was named the world's top-ranked female tennis player six times and won thirty-nine Grand Slam titles. As powerful off the court as on it, Billie Jean helped pass historic laws against gender discrimination. She continues to fight for equality for women and the LGBTQ+ community to this day.

It's Her Story: Billie Jean King
Written by Donna Tapellini
Illustrated by Maria Lia Malandrino
\$10.99 US / \$14.99 CAN
ISBN: 9781503769854
Ages 7 to 10
48 pages
Hardcover, 6.2 x 8.6 inches

DISCUSSION

Ask these questions to the class as a whole or have students discuss in small groups.

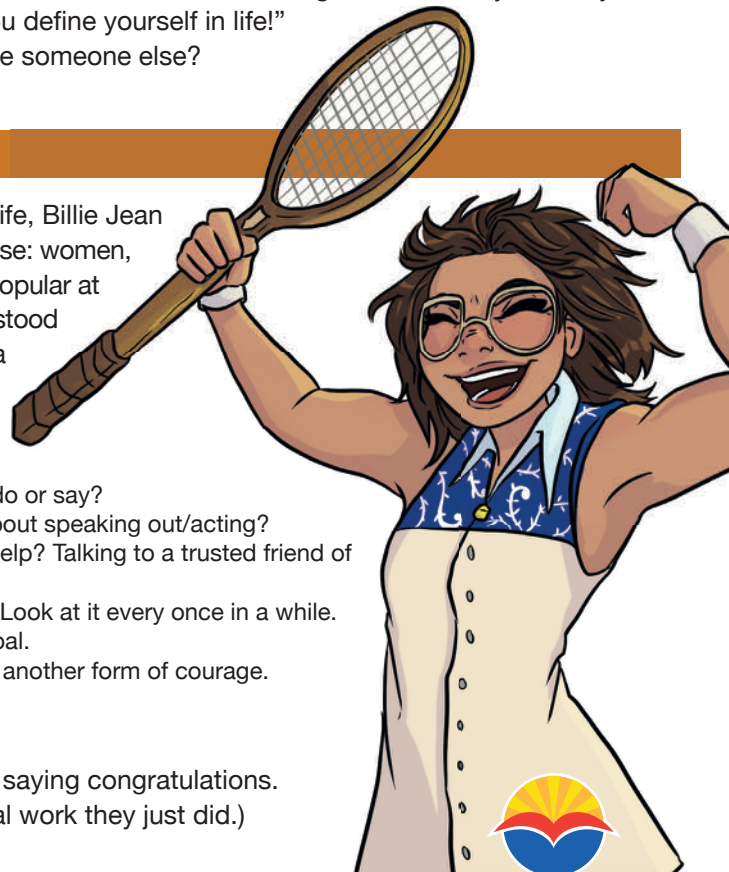
1. Billie Jean was hooked on tennis the very first time she played. What is an activity that you loved the moment you were introduced to it?
2. The book opens with tennis professional Billie Jean King about to play an important match, and then goes back to her childhood to tell her story from the beginning. By the time we get back to that match, on page 26, we know more about her. This storytelling technique is called a flashforward. What are some reasons an author might write a story this way?
3. On page 37, Billie Jean says "Don't let anyone else define you. You define yourself in life!" What does it mean to define yourself? What does it mean to define someone else? Why wouldn't you want someone else to define you?

CHARACTER CONNECTION

Write the prompts below on the board. Tell students: Throughout her life, Billie Jean King stood up for people who were treated unfairly, in sports and otherwise: women, girls, the LGBTQ+ community, and others. None of these stances were popular at the time she took them, yet her bravery lifted everyone—the people she stood up for and the rest of society, too. Respond to the following prompts on a piece of paper. You don't have to show anyone or turn this paper in. It is just for you.

- What is something you want to be brave about but aren't quite ready to do or say?
- What might be causing you to feel uncertain, fearful, or uncomfortable about speaking out/acting?
- What might help you find your courage? For example, would practicing help? Talking to a trusted friend or family member? Finding others who feel the same?
- When you get home, put this paper somewhere you can keep track of it. Look at it every once in a while. Some day you may feel brave enough to take some steps toward your goal.
- Remember that facing and reflecting on things you are not ready to do is another form of courage. Congratulations on your courage in doing this exercise!

Have students walk around the room giving each other high fives and saying congratulations. (The physical movement will help students process the socioemotional work they just did.)



ART CONNECTION

On the board, write the quote that is on the back of the book: Champions keep playing until they get it right. Point out to students that it does not say Champions keep playing until they win, and that gives us some room to think about what “getting it right” can mean, and what being a champion can mean.

Ask the class to suggest the different ways the quote applies to Billie Jean King’s life and accomplishments (winning in tennis, fighting for gender equity, helping pass legislation, etc.).

Have students work in groups to list some ways kids their age can “keep playing” until they “get it right.” Remind them this could be about athletics, but could also be about academics, hobbies, interests, or anything else.

Now, have students turn back to their books. As a class, work through how the illustrator shows Billie Jean King persisting across time in visually different and interesting ways on pages 16, 17, 18 (bottom frames), and 34.

Have students create an illustration, modeled after the ones discussed, that shows themselves persisting in something important to them across time, starting with the past and imagining success points into the future. This can be done in class or as homework. You can have students share their work as a gallery walk, ask a few volunteers share, or just have students keep their artwork for themselves, depending on your class’s comfort level.

