

**BECAUSE  
OF THEM  
WE CAN**

**BOX**

**JUST FOR KIDS**

# BECAUSE OF ALTHEA GIBSON

AGES 9-12

BOTWC MINI POSING AS  
ALTHEA GIBSON



# ALTHEA GIBSON

Read the interview with Althea Gibson. In an interview you will see at least two speakers discussing a certain topic. Usually an interview is recorded to be listened to or to be watched, but you can also get what is called a transcript, which shows everything that was said. An interview is a firsthand account of events because the information is coming from someone who directly experienced the events. In contrast, secondhand information does not come directly from a person who experienced it but maybe someone else who learned about the events. You will read the transcript and compare the firsthand account (the interview) to the secondhand account (the article written about Althea Gibson). The interview was created by Miles Educational Film Productions, Inc. and can be found in the Washington University in St. Louis Library using this link: <https://bit.ly/2VtxPzR>.



## FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT:

**[Interviewer #1:]** You play world-class championship tennis. Would you describe your style of play and perhaps judge yourself, and the other players you competed against?

**[Althea Gibson:]** Well my style of play, I believe, was **aggressive, dynamic,** and mean. The players that I played against they were, they were the same actually, you know, because I came on the scene as is and I was new in those years. And, of course, in those years, I was struggling to become well known, as the first black player to compete against world-class champions such as Louise Brough, who I had the occasion to win, beat her at Forest Hills during the U.S. nationals. But they were all very tough players, particularly on the grass surface that they had in those years at Forest Hills.

**[Interviewer #1:]** What were the things that happened that first brought tennis into your life?

**[Althea Gibson:]** Well, it was paddle tennis that started it all. At that time, my parents was living at 143rd Street, between Lenox and 7th Avenue. And that was, happened to be, one of the play streets, and they had all types of games up and down the street: hoop basketball, marbles, loadies, and paddle tennis. And that paddle tennis court was right in front of my parents' stoop of that building. I think the address was 135 West 143rd Street. And, one summer morning, I came down and a friend of mine, we hung out together, we played together, we roamed the streets together, we saw two bats and a ball on the paddle tennis court. So I said to her, I said, What's that? She said, Well two bats and a ball. I said, Well let's pick it up, let's see what, so we started hitting back and forth. And, from that moment on, we were the block paddle tennis court occupiers. We would get up in the morning, as soon as they laid that court out, we were the first ones on, we stayed on, and we challenged anybody on the block to play us. Nobody would, so weirdly that's how I got started in tennis, through paddle tennis.

**[Interviewer #1:]** Now I've skipped a little bit. I just want to back up with you for a moment. After your paddle tennis experience on your block, obviously you learned to play the game of court tennis. Maybe you'd tell us a little bit about that, how that process developed. Who taught you—

**[Althea Gibson:]** Oh.

**[Interviewer #1:]** —Where did you go from your block to learn to play the game of tennis?

**[Althea Gibson:]** Well, after playing paddle tennis in the play streets, I think, I'm not, I'm not too sure on this, but that we have in those, in those years a tennis club called the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club. That was the black, I think



# GAME, SET AND MATCH

it was the black **elite** tennis club in those years. And I was introduced to that club by the play street director named Buddy Walker, who happens to be a band leader, and plays tenor sax. And he introduced me to the club. And, upon introducing me, the tennis pro there, Fred Johnson, who happened to be one-arm, he lost one arm in, during the war. And, he took me on to teach me how to play lawn tennis. And, he taught me the basics, the footwork, the service motion. And, from 1946 to 50—, no I'm sorry, up to '46 I won the ATA girls' singles championship at the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club through the tutelage of Fred Johnson, at the time. And, I went on from there.

**[Interviewer #1:]** Tennis has always been a game involving a lot of traveling. And you had grown up in Harlem, in a city, Manhattan, New York City. What did those other parts of America, those other parts of the world, look like to you when you started to travel on the tennis circuit?

**[Althea Gibson:]** At first, strange, different, the people's mode of living was new and different to me. As a matter of fact, I considered it a great education to be able to travel around the world as I did, being the first black, female tennis **champion** of the world to have this **privilege**, and I enjoyed it tremendously. I learned a lot, I saw a lot, and I played a heck of a lot of tennis all over the world. I think it's always great for someone to be able to travel, especially representing their country in a sporting event, to travel to different **foreign** countries, to see how other people of the world live. I enjoyed it very much.



## SECONDHAND ACCOUNT:

Althea Gibson was a tennis player from South Carolina who was the first Black American to play at Wimbledon in 1951. She started off playing table tennis, where she was often the champion, and then was invited to play full court tennis by a musician named Buddy Walker. She was a part of the American Tennis Association and won 12 championship titles, which earned her a scholarship at Florida A&M. Being a star athlete gave Althea the chance to travel to many different places to play tennis- for example, France - where she played in the French Open. She made a name for herself as a great tennis player and got to have new experiences and meet all types of different people while doing it!



## GLOSSARY

**Transcript** - a written, printed, or typed copy of words that have been spoken

**Elite** - the people who have the most wealth and status in a society; the most successful or powerful group of people

**Aggressive** - ready and willing to fight, argue, etc.; feeling or showing aggression

**Dynamic** - having or showing a lot of energy

**Champion** - someone or something (such as a team or an animal) that has won a contest or competition, especially in sports

**Privilege** - a special opportunity to do something that makes you proud

**Foreign** - located outside a particular place or country, and especially outside your own country

# READ & RESPOND

Answer the following questions, based on what you read in the interview and article.

**1. What is one thing that is the same between the firsthand account and secondhand account?**

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**2. What is one thing that is different between the firsthand account and secondhand account?**

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**3. Do you think one account is better than the other one, or that one might work best in certain situations? Explain why or why not.**

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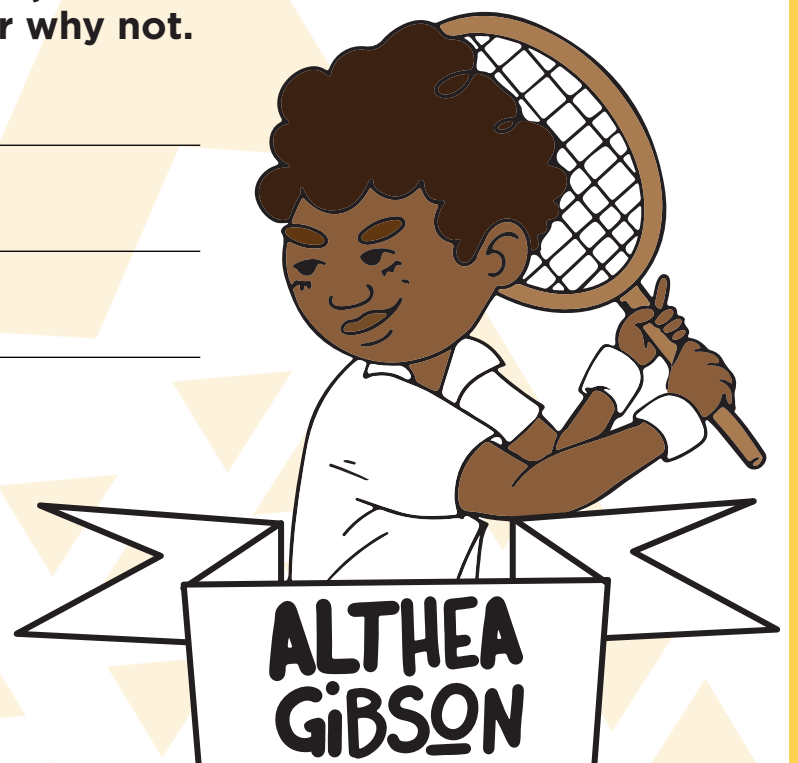
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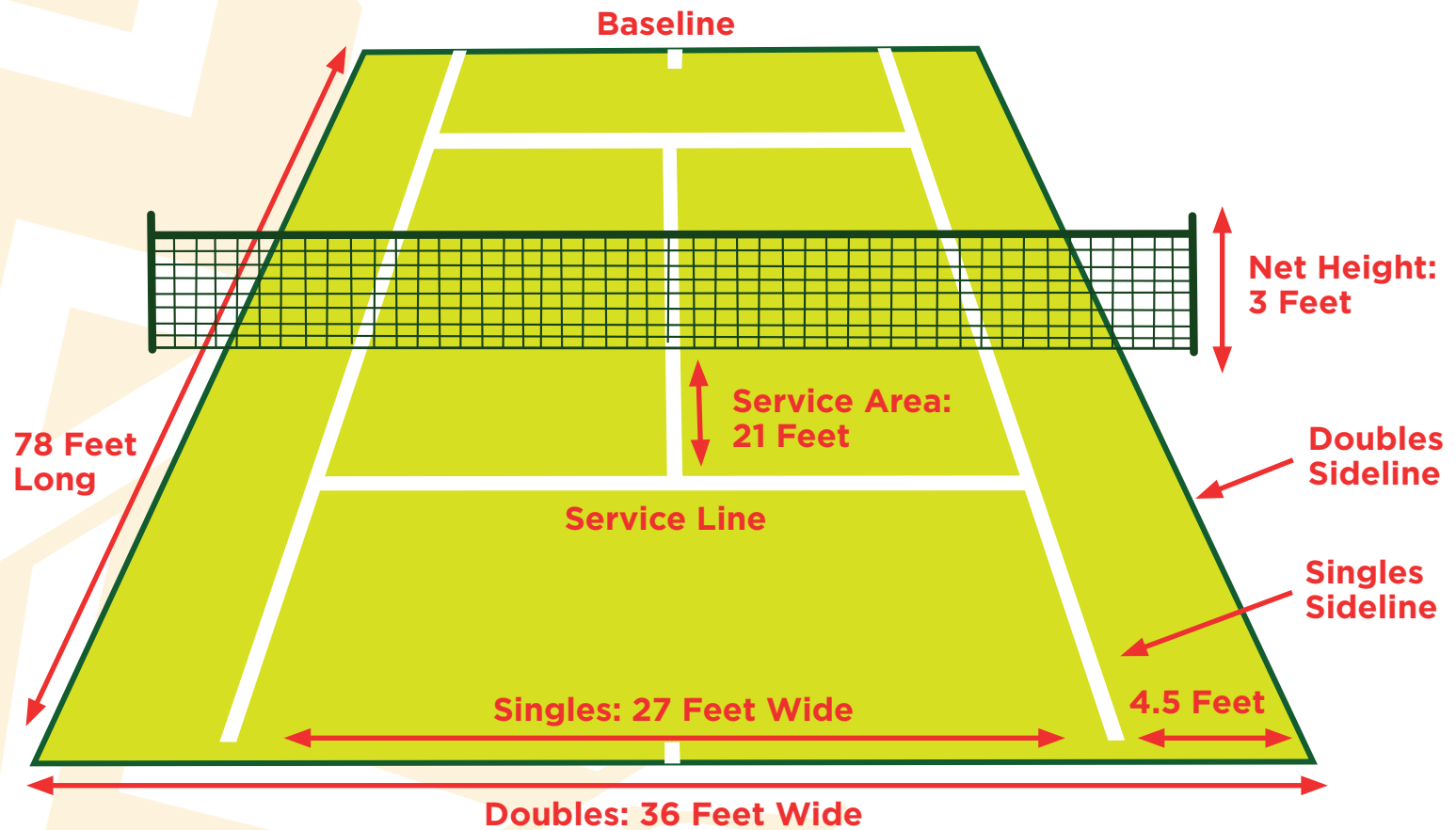
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# MATH, ANYONE?

Use the picture of the tennis court to answer the following questions.



1. What is the perimeter of the tennis court?
2. What is the area of the tennis court?
3. What is the perimeter of the court just on one side of the net?
4. What is the area of the court just on one side of the net?

# A TENNIS TIMELINE

There are many Black people that made tennis history just like Althea Gibson! She was the first Black person to play at Wimbledon (the oldest tennis tournament in the world). Match the text to the year in the correct place on the timeline.

1. 1916

A. Althea Gibson becomes the first Black player to participate in the US Nationals. This happens a long time after the ATA is created and before Arthur Ashe wins the US Open.



2. 1917

B. Althea Gibson becomes the first Black player to win a major U.S. tennis championship and is the first to win the US open. This is after she is the first African woman to participate in the US Nationals.

3. 1950

C. This is the first event on the timeline. The ATA (American Tennis Association) was founded in Washington D.C.

4. 1957

D. Arthur Ashe becomes the first (and is still the only) Black man to win the U.S open. This is after both of Althea's records.

5. 1968

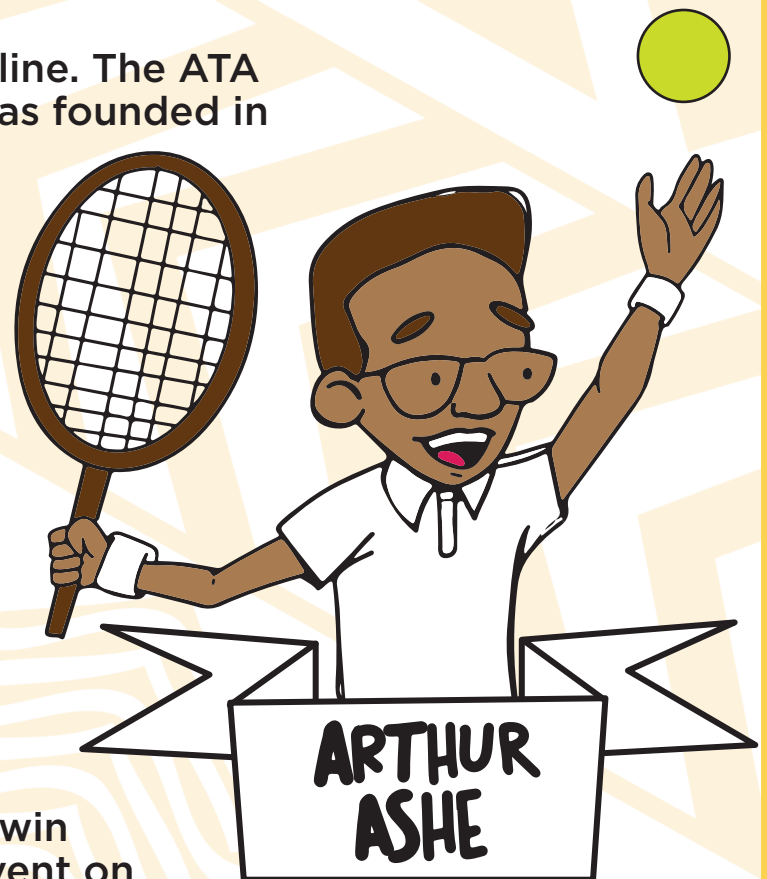
E. Just one year after the ATA was founded, Lucy Diggs Slowe wins the women's singles tournament and becomes the first Black woman national champion in any sport.

6. 1983

F. Venus and Serena Williams both win championships. This is the last event on the timeline.

7. 1998

G. Yannick Noah is the first Black man to win a French Open. This is after Arthur Ashe wins the US Open.



ANSWERS: (1) C (2) E (3) A (4) B (5) D (6) G (7) F

## TAKE THE PLEDGE

**I WILL HONOR**  
THE SACRIFICES OF  
MY ANCESTORS.

**I WILL BELIEVE**  
IN ME.

**I WILL PURSUE**  
MY DREAMS.

**I WILL HELP**  
OTHERS ALONG  
THE WAY.