

Comprehension

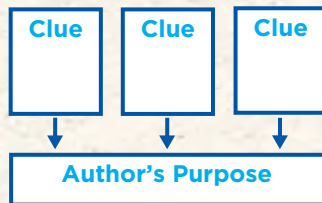
Genre

Historical Fiction is set in a real time and place in the past. It may include real people and events that actually happened, along with fictional characters and events.



Make Inferences and Analyze

Author's Purpose As you read, fill in your Author's Purpose Map.



Read to Find Out

What actually made Jackie so mighty?

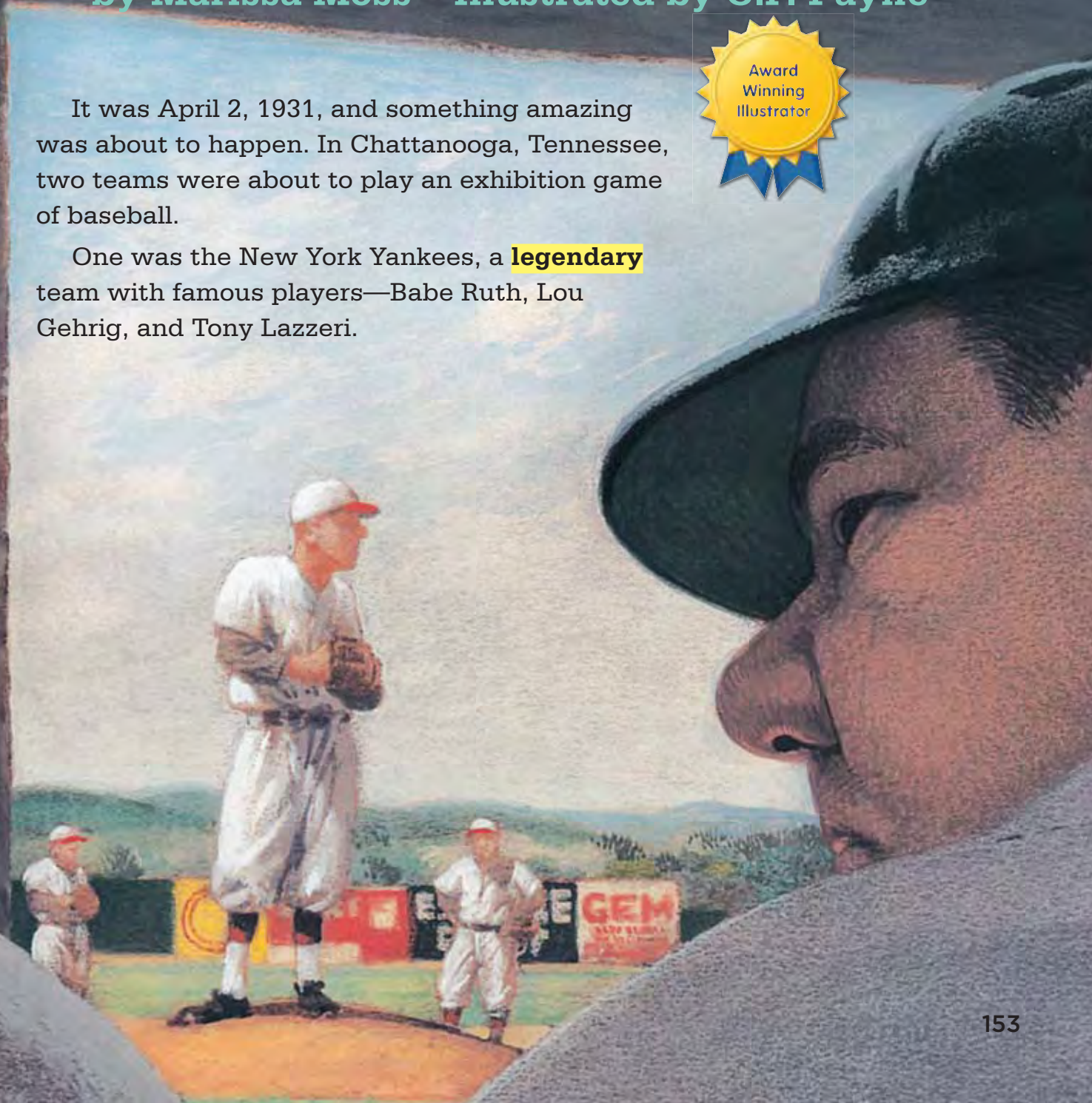
MIGHTY JACKIE

The Strike-out Queen

by Marissa Moss • Illustrated by C.F. Payne

It was April 2, 1931, and something amazing was about to happen. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, two teams were about to play an exhibition game of baseball.

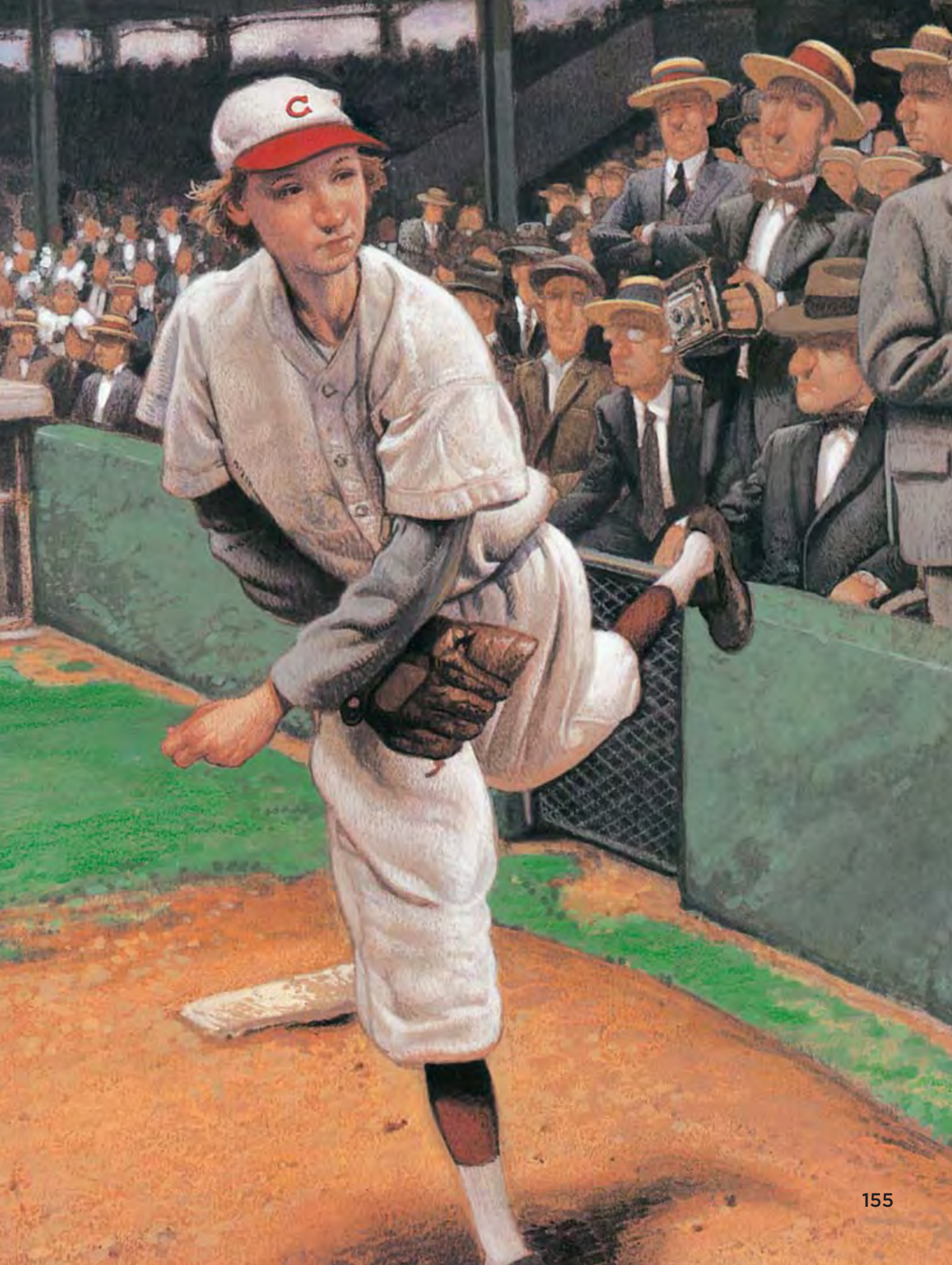
One was the New York Yankees, a **legendary** team with famous players—Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Tony Lazzeri.

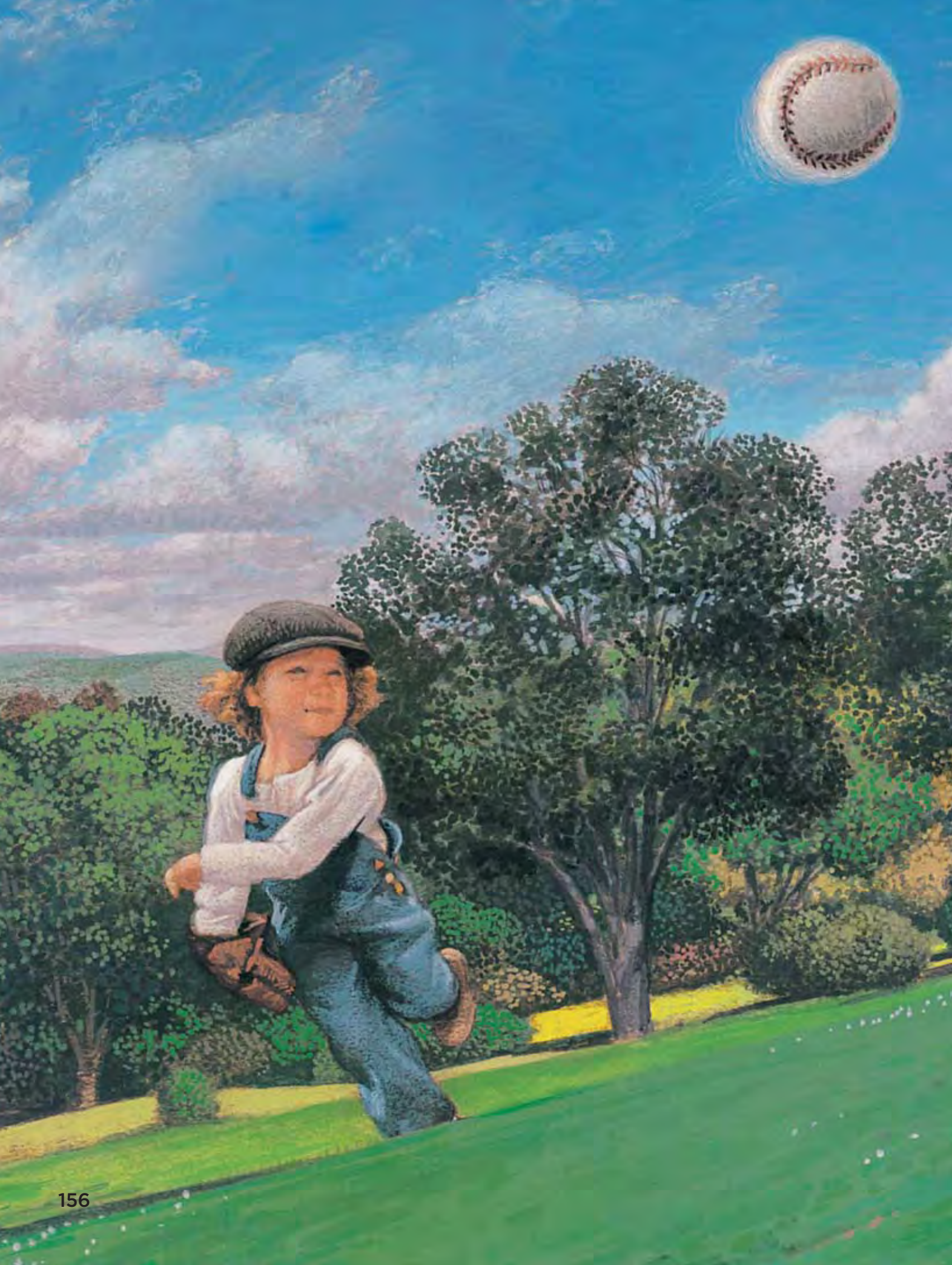


The other was the Chattanooga Lookouts, a small team, a nothing team, except for the pitcher, Jackie Mitchell.

Jackie was young, only seventeen years old, but that's not what made people sit up and take notice. Jackie was a girl, and everyone knew that girls didn't play major-league baseball.

The *New York Daily News* sneered that she would swing "a mean lipstick" instead of a bat. A reporter wrote that you might as well have "a trained seal behind the plate" as have a woman standing there. But Jackie was no trained seal. She was a pitcher, a mighty good one. The question was, was she good enough to play against the New York Yankees?







As long as she could remember, Jackie had played ball with her father. She knew girls weren't supposed to. All the kids at school, all the boys in her neighborhood told her that. When one boy yelled at another one, "You throw like a girl!" it was an **insult**—everyone knew girls couldn't throw. Or that's what they thought.

Day after day, in the neighborhood sandlot, Jackie's father told her differently. He said she could throw balls, and she did. She ran bases, she swung the bat. By the time she was eight years old, Dazzy Vance, the star pitcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers, had taught her how to pitch. A real pitcher talking to a little girl was all Jackie needed to start dreaming of playing in the World Series. Her father saw her talent and so did Dazzy. He told her she could be good at whatever she wanted, as long as she worked at it. And Jackie worked at baseball. She worked hard.

She practiced pitching till it was too cold and dark to stay outside. She threw balls until her shoulder ached and her fingers were callused. She pitched until her eyes blurred over and she couldn't see where she was throwing. But it didn't matter, her arm knew.



Author's Purpose

Why do you think the author is providing so much information about Jackie's childhood?

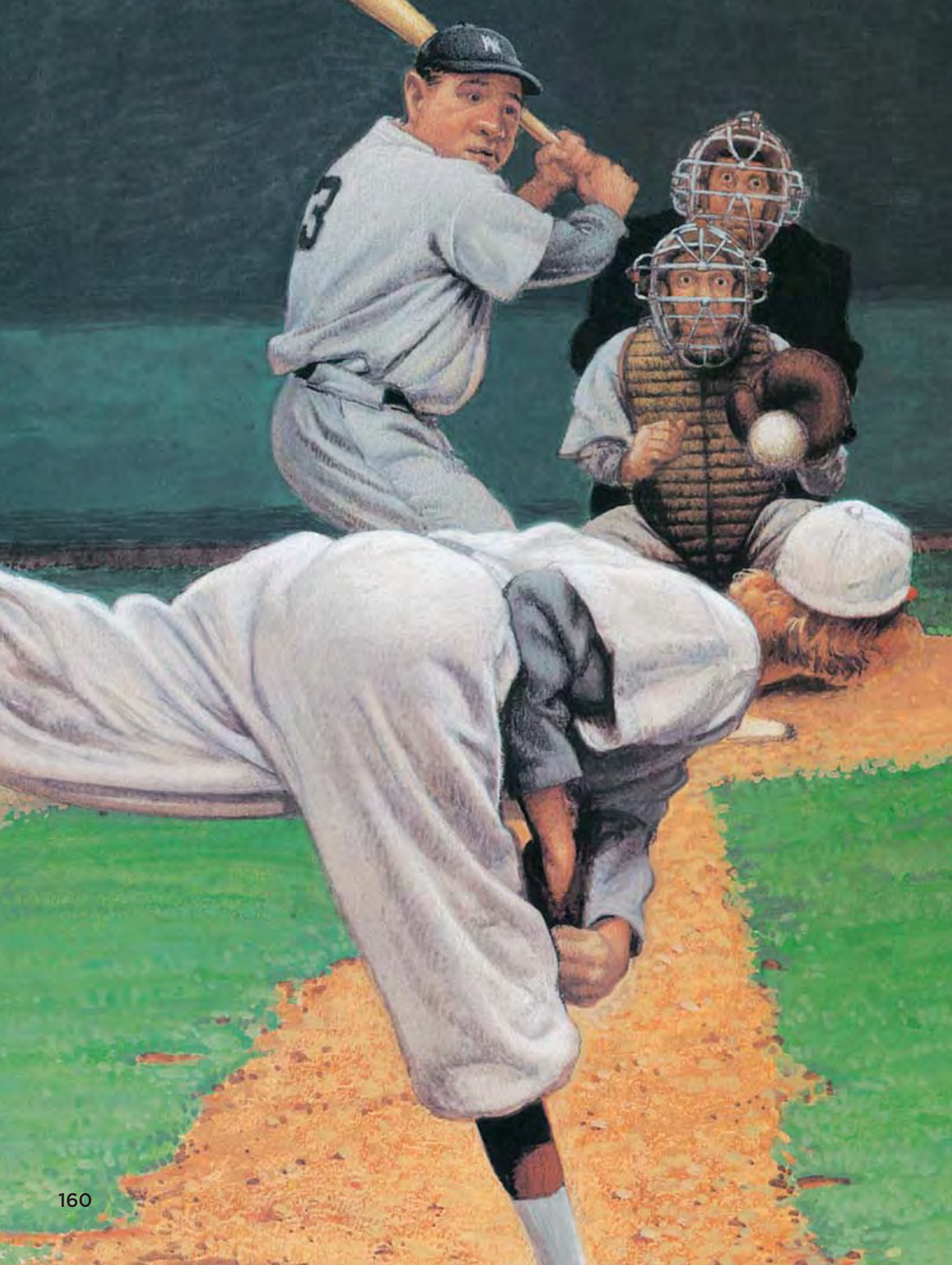
And now she was finally going to have her chance to play on a *real* baseball team, to pitch to *real* players. The stands were packed. A crowd of four thousand had come to see the strange sight of a woman on the pitcher's mound.

She stood tall on the field and looked back at the crowd in the bleachers. They were waiting for her to make a mistake, and she knew it. They were waiting for her to prove that baseball was a man's game, not *her* game.

"It is my game," she **muttered** to herself and bit her lip. The Yankees were up, top of the first, and the batter was walking up to the plate. Jackie was ready for him, the ball tight in her left hand.







Except the batter was Babe Ruth—Babe Ruth, the “Home Run King,” a big mountain of a man—and Babe didn’t like the idea of a woman pitcher at all. He thought women were “too delicate” for baseball. “They’ll never make good,” he said. “It would kill them to play ball every day.” He walked to the plate and tipped his cap at Jackie. But if she thought he was going to go easy on her, she could forget it! He gripped the bat and got ready to slam the ball out of the ballpark.

Jackie held that ball like it was part of her arm, and when she threw it, she knew exactly where it would go. Right over the plate, right where the Babe wasn’t expecting it, right where he watched it speed by and *thwunk* into the catcher’s mitt.

“STRRRRIKE ONE!”

Babe Ruth **gaped**—he couldn’t believe it! The crowd roared. Jackie tried to block them out, to see only the ball, to feel only the ball. But Babe Ruth was facing her down now, determined not to let a girl make a fool out of him. She **flinched** right before the next pitch, and the umpire called a ball.

“Hmmmph,” the Babe snorted.

“You can do it!” Jackie told herself. “Girls can throw—show them!”

But the next pitch was another ball.

Now the crowd was hooting and jeering. The Babe was **snickering** with them.

Jackie closed her eyes. She felt her fingers tingling around the ball, she felt its heft in her palm, she felt the force of her shoulder muscles as she wound up for the pitch. She remembered what her father had told her: "Go out there and pitch just like you pitch to anybody else."

"STRRRRIKE TWO!"

Now the Babe was mad.

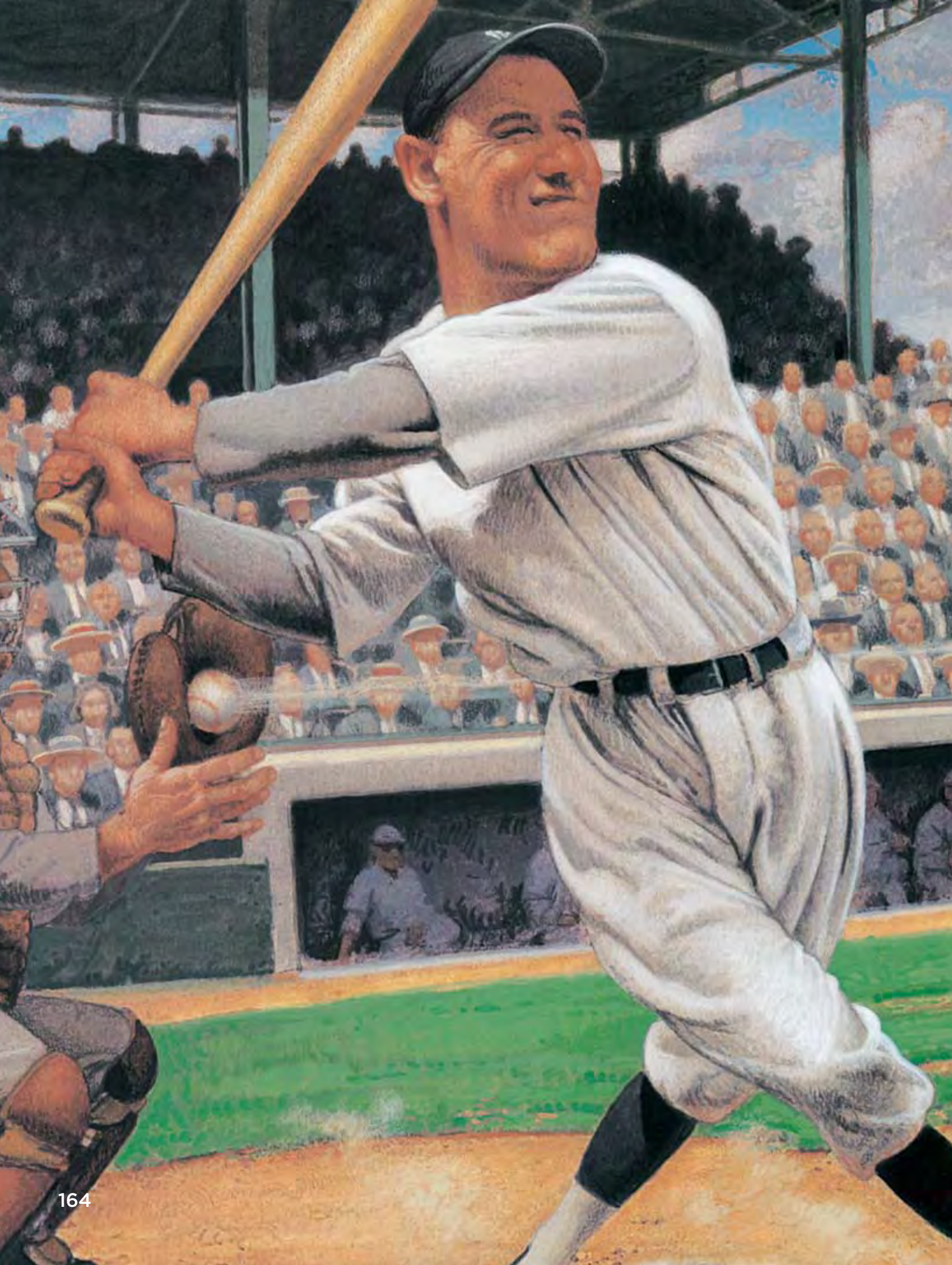
This was serious. The Babe was striking out, and the pitcher was a girl!

Jackie wasn't mad, but she wasn't scared either. She was pitching, really pitching, and it felt like something was happening the way it had always been meant to. She knew the batter would expect the same pitch, close and high, even if the batter was Babe Ruth. So this time she threw the ball straight down the middle with all the speed she could put on it.

"STRRRRIKE THREE!"

Babe Ruth glared at the umpire and threw the bat down in disgust. He told reporters that that would be the last time he'd bat against a woman! The crowd was stunned. A girl had struck out the "Sultan of Swat"! It couldn't be! It was a mistake, a **fluke**! What would the papers say tomorrow? But wait, here came Lou Gehrig, the "Iron Horse," up to the plate. He'd show her. She couldn't strike him out too.





Lou Gehrig swung with a mighty grunt, but his bat hit nothing but air.

“STRRRRIKE ONE!”

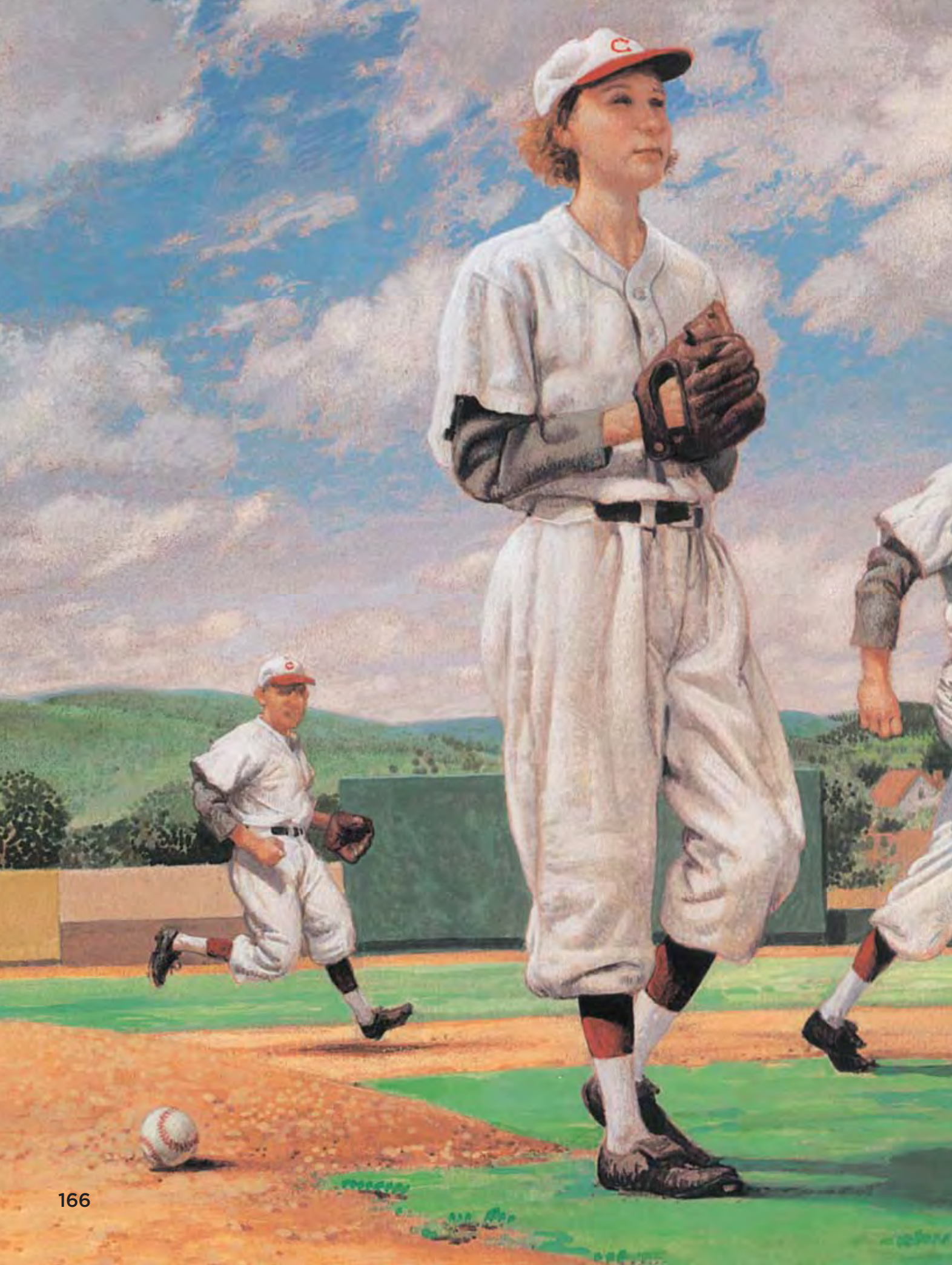
He looked stunned, then dug in his heels and glared at Jackie.

“STRRRRIKE TWO!”

Jackie grinned. She was doing what she'd worked so hard and long to do, and nothing could stop her.

She pitched the ball the way she knew best, a lefty pitch with a low dip in it. No one could touch a ball like that when it was thrown right.

“STRRRRIKE THREE!”



The crowd, so ready to boo her before, rose with a roar, clapping and cheering like crazy. Back to back, Jackie had struck out two of baseball's best batters, Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. She'd proven herself and now the fans loved her for it.

But Jackie didn't hear them. She was too proud and too happy. She'd done what she'd always known she could do. She'd shown the world how a girl could throw—as hard and as fast and as far as she wanted.



Author's Purpose

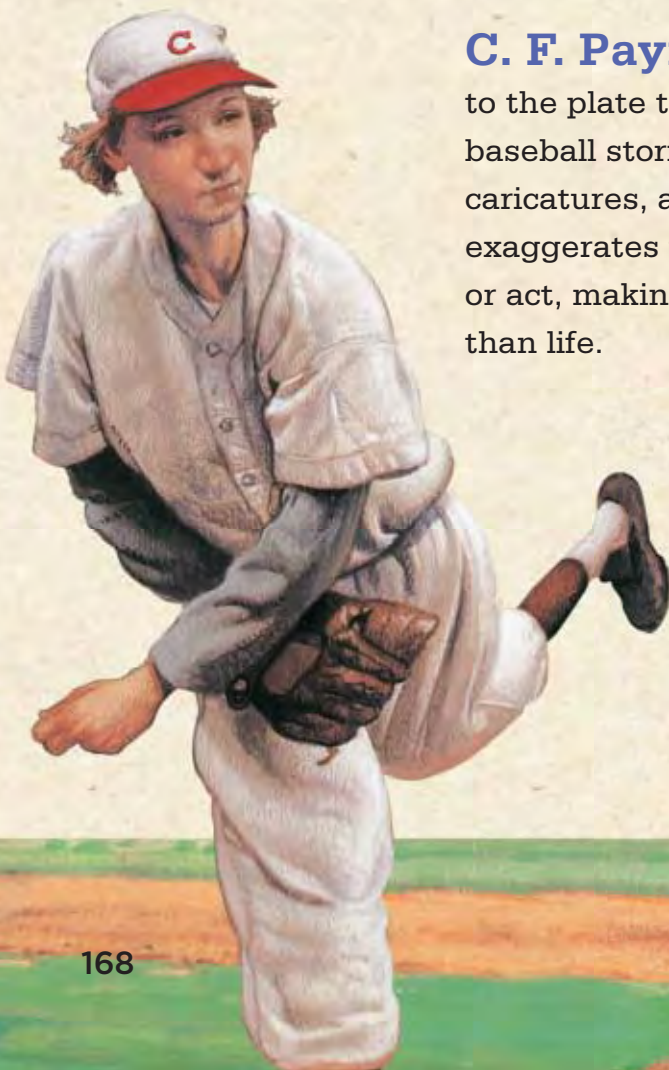
What was Marissa Moss's purpose in writing this story?

The Winning Team: Marissa and C. F.



Marissa Moss likes to write about real women like Jackie who have done unusual things. She has also written about a female train engineer and the first woman to fly across the English Channel. Marissa hopes that when kids read her books they will discover things about the past that remind them of their own lives.

Other books by Marissa Moss and C. F. Payne



C. F. Payne has stepped up to the plate to illustrate other baseball stories. C. F. often does caricatures, a kind of art that exaggerates the way people look or act, making them seem larger than life.



Find out more about
Marissa Moss and C. F. Payne at
www.macmillanmh.com

Author's Purpose

Marissa Moss based this story on the life of Jackie Mitchell. Does the fact that the main character was a real woman have an effect on the author's purpose? How do you know?



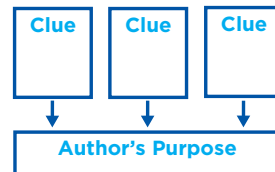


Comprehension Check



Summarize

Summarize *Mighty Jackie: The Strike-Out Queen*. Be sure to describe the main events, when and where the story is set, and the main character. Use information from your Author's Purpose Map to help you summarize.



Think and Compare



1. The author stresses the fact that Ruth and Gehrig were **legendary** baseball players. What is the author's purpose in doing that? **Make Inferences and Analyze: Author's Purpose**
2. Read the third paragraph on page 154. What were people's attitudes toward female athletes? Include details. **Analyze**
3. Have you ever reached a goal that you or other people may have thought was impossible to achieve? Explain. **Apply**
4. Why was proving her pitching talent so important to Jackie? Explain your opinion. **Analyze**
5. Read "Women Pick Up the Ball" on pages 150-151. How did women's role in professional baseball change from the 1930s to the 1940s? What caused this change? Use details from both selections in your answer. **Reading/Writing Across Texts**

