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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



Wilborn Hampton, a former editor at *The New York Times*, is also the award-winning author of several books for young readers, including *Up Close: Elvis Presley* (A New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age); *September 11, 2001: Attack on New York City* (An ALA Best Book for Young Adults); and *Kennedy Assassinated! The World Mourns: A Reporter's Story* (A New York Times Book Review Notable Book). He lives with his wife in New York.



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**DISCUSSION GUIDE**



**UPclose: BABE RUTH**  
*M.V.P.*

a twentieth-century life by **WILBORN HAMPTON**

While reading **Up Close: Babe Ruth**, ask your students to think about the following questions. Answers can either be written individually or discussed in groups to make for an interesting and thought-provoking classroom conversation.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- In the foreword, author Wilborn Hampton says that few know the “man behind the legend.” What do you know about Babe Ruth? Where did you find this information? After reading Up Close: *Babe Ruth*, think about all of the new information you’ve learned about Ruth. What did you find the most interesting or surprising?
- Discuss Ruth’s family. What was his childhood like growing up in Baltimore? How did he come to St. Mary’s Industrial School for Boys?
- Who was Brother Matthias? What were his primary responsibilities at St. Mary’s? In what ways was he a mentor to Ruth?
- Which position did Ruth play on the St. Mary’s baseball team? Why did he switch to pitching?
- How did Ruth demonstrate his excitement during the beginning of spring training? Which behaviors struck his teammates as curious or amusing?
- Explain the significance of the nickname “Babe.” Why do you think it stuck with Ruth throughout his career?
- What was the Federal League? How did it contract players? Why was this a problem in Baltimore’s baseball business?
- Why did Dunn sell Ruth to the Boston Red Sox? How did he wind up playing for the Providence Grays instead? What do you think of his year as a “rookie”? How do you think he felt about his first year in baseball?
- Describe how Ruth was different when he returned to spring training for his second year with the Red Sox. Who was Helen Woodford? What positions was Ruth playing? How was the Sox’s season?
- Name the factors that contributed to Ruth’s erratic behavior during the 1917 and 1918 seasons. Why was 1917 the start of a particularly volatile time in baseball?
- What types of demands was Ruth making at the beginning of the 1919 season? Who was Henry Frazee? How did he respond to these demands? Why? How did Ruth and Frazee ultimately resolve their conflict?
- Why is Babe Ruth the “home-run king”? Which records did he beat? What happened as a result of all the attention?
- What was the Chicago Black Sox scandal? What consequences did it have that would significantly impact Ruth and many other baseball players in the early 1920s? How did Ruth react to the changed policies?
- Discuss the changes that Ruth made before the 1923 season. Why did he do this? What other factors contributed to the Yankees winning the World Series that year?

- How did Ruth’s personal life impact his playing? Despite the warnings he was given, why do you think he continued to break rules and ignore his health?
- In chapter eight, Miller Huggins tells Babe that he admires a man “who can win over himself.” What does he mean by this? Do you agree that Babe triumphed over himself? List examples from the text to illustrate your point.
- Who was Lou Gehrig? How were he and Ruth similar and how were they different? Think about how their legacies differ. Which one do you consider to be the bigger hero and why?
- Explain Ruth’s quest to become the Yankee manager. How did Ruppert reply to his request? In what ways did the Yankee regime change under Joe McCarthy?
- What is the mystery of the “called-shot”? Why was Ruth so coy about the truth?
- How did Ruth’s baseball-playing career end? Was that the end of his career with the sport?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

- Baseball is often referred to as “America’s pastime.” What do you think this means? Now that you’ve learned about the history of baseball in Up Close: *Babe Ruth*, do you agree with this label? What is so “American” about baseball? Was playing baseball the fulfillment of Babe Ruth’s “American dream”? For a fun baseball-themed activity, draw a large picture of a baseball diamond with Babe Ruth’s name written on the pitcher’s mound. Next, where home plate, first, second, and third bases are, insert the names of important people in Ruth’s life. Draw a line from each person to the pitcher’s mound, writing next to the line the ways in which that person either affected Babe or was affected by his pursuit of a dream. What does this reveal about dreams? Who do you think had the most impact on Babe’s baseball career? Who was the most impacted by his rise to stardom?
- In chapter seven, Hampton mentions the curse of the Bambino. Research more about the curse. What does it entail? How has the curse stayed news-worthy into present day? Find three newspaper articles where people are quoted talking about the curse, preferably from different decades. Do these people believe in the curse of the Bambino? Why is it relevant in the articles? Looking at the three together, what can you deduce about the curse’s significance to Red Sox fans? To Yankee fans? To professional baseball players in general? Share your findings with the rest of your class.
- Imagine you are the manager of a major league baseball team this season and that Babe Ruth is still alive. Write a letter asking him to participate in an all-star game you are coordinating. What would you say to convince Ruth, now an elderly man, to play? What makes your game and your team the best opportunity for Ruth to return in uniform? How has baseball changed since he last played? Explain the information he needs to know, such as your team’s name, stadium location, the rules for the game, any additional stars who will be playing, etc. Be as creative as you can—you’re in charge!