



Writer's Workshop

Every Picture Tells a Story

"Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball."

Historian Jacques Barzun

Baseball has a language all its own. One that has taken 100 years to create and generations to perfect.

Begin this workshop by reading the phrase and asking seniors to share the meaning of these sayings that now extend beyond the baseball diamond.

ballpark figure: a rough estimate

bat a thousand: a reference to a continuing series of successes

bush league: minor league team in baseball, usually referring to the rural locations of such teams, outside the field it means not of the highest quality or sophistication.

curve ball: something unexpected (from the unpredictable trajectory of that type of baseball pitch)

go to bat for: support (from the notion of a batter contributing to his team)

in the ballpark: close; said of an estimate

it's a whole new ball game: a reference to a changed situation

keep your eyes on the ball: maintain focus

off base: wrong, or on the wrong track

out in left field: said of a person with an unusual idea (from the idea of left field being a distant location)

out of your league: said of a person trying to succeed in an area in which he has little chance of success

play ball: cooperate

play hardball: act aggressively

rain check: a promise to make good on an offer; originated in baseball

step up to the plate: take responsibility (compared to a player taking his turn at bat)

strike out: to fail

swing for the fences: perform with great effort or intensity

throw a curve: surprise someone with something unexpected

touch base: contact (compared to a player landing a foot on a base)

From the phrases that have crept into the English language from the sport, like “whole new ballgame” and “drop the ball” to seldom heard outside of a baseball stadium.

Here are a few of these colorful phrases.

Bean Ball: When a pitcher hits a batter with the pitch.

Brushback: A pitcher throwing a ball inside to a hitter to keep him off the plate.

Can of Corn: An easy fly ball caught by a fielder.

Caught Looking: When a hitter is called out on strike 3 without swinging.

Chin Music: A pitch that brushes past a player's face.

Grand Slam: A bases loaded homerun.

Heater: A fastball.

Murderer's Row: A string of really good hitters in a batting order.

Mustard: “He had some mustard on it” refers to an especially hard throw.

“In a Pickle”: A runner caught between bases.

Plunked: Getting hit by a pitch.

Pow Wow: When the manager, catcher, pitcher and infielders have a “meeting at the mound”.

Room Service: When a ball is hit right to a fielder where he barely has to move to catch it.

Shelled: this refers to a pitcher who gave up a bunch of hits.

Shutout: A team being shutout means they didn't score ANY runs.

Skipper: A team's manager.

Stick: A bat.

The Hill: The pitcher's mound.

Turn Two: Double play.

Whiff: A swing and a miss.

Worm Burner: A throw that hits the ground before reaching it's target.

Yard: This can refer to a ballpark OR if a person says "he went yard" that means the player hit a homerun.

You're in the Hole: The batter due up after the hitter on deck.

Uncle Charlie: A curveball.

Baseball announcers have always helped to fill the space between pitches with personality, and few were better than Chicago Cubs announcer Harry Caray. Caray started as an announcer with the St. Louis Cardinals and finished as the voice of Cubs baseball in 1997, 52 years later. Caray's distinctive voice became the voice of Cubs baseball and is credited with popularizing the singing of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" during the seventh inning stretch.

Listen to this clip of Harry Caray calling plays and see what baseball lingo you can pick up.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnTNYZITspg>



Harry Caray