

## ***The William Hoy Story: How a Deaf Baseball Player Changed the Game*** by Nancy Churnin

### **Overview and Rationale**

William Hoy, a deaf baseball player, forever changed the sport in the 1880s. All he wanted to do was play baseball. In addition to the prejudice Hoy faced, he could not hear the umpires' calls. One day he asked the umpire to use hand signals: strike, ball, out. The results were the hand signals still used in baseball today.

This biography tells his story, with inspiring messages of perseverance and a "can do" attitude.

Lexile Framework: 620

Grade-Level Equivalent: 3

William scooped dust to dry the sweat off his slick rubber ball. He stared at the small X he'd chalked on the barn wall. He closed his eyes. He opened them and threw. Bam! He hit the mark. He stepped back so he could try again.

His mother waved her arms. She was applauding him.

She touched her fingers to her mouth to signal eating. He read her lips as she said, "Dinner."

William pulled out his pad and pencil. He scribbled: "Just a few more? I want to be perfect for tryouts."

His mother nodded.

His family was passing the mashed potatoes around the table when William pushed open the door. He read his father's lips telling him to wash up for dinner. He also read what his father's lips mouthed to his mother.

"Baseball," his father said. "It will never last."

Still, William couldn't wait to try out at his school, the Ohio State School for the Deaf. At tryouts, he threw the ball. He caught it. He batted. He waited.

"Too small," the team captain said.

William never got much taller than five-foot-five. He couldn't do anything about that.

But maybe they'd give him another chance if he aimed better and ran faster.

So every day, after homework and chores, he practiced.

One day William was standing outside the cobbler shop where he fixed shoes, wistfully watching men play baseball in a far-off field. A foul ball crashed by his feet. With his strong, sure arm, he threw the ball straight into an amazed player's waiting hand.

"Hey, kid," the player called. "Want to join us?"

But William couldn't read the player's lips from where he was. So he turned back to work.

The man ran to William and tapped his back to get his attention. William whirled around, and this time, when the man repeated the question, he understood. He scrambled happily to the outfield.

William threw the ball smack into his teammates' hands. When he was up at bat, he sent it soaring where no one would catch it.

"What's your name?" asked one of the players.

*William Hoy*, William wrote.

The man looked at the piece of paper a long time. He seemed to be thinking. "Do you want to try out for our team?" he asked William at last.

William grinned. He sure did!

William soon learned life in the hearing world wasn't easy. Unlike his parents, few people used sign language in the 1880s, and certainly not in baseball. He won a spot on the first team he tried out for, but the manager smirked when he offered William less money than he paid the others.

"I quit," William told him with his notebook. He quickly found another team.

But even on his new team, some players talked behind his back so he wouldn't know what they were saying. Others hid their mouths so he couldn't read their lips.

One day a pitcher played the meanest trick of all. William let three pitches go by because he thought they were balls. He was too far to read the umpire's lips and didn't know they were actually strikes.

He stood, gripping his bat, waiting for the next pitch. But the next pitch never came. William was confused.

Suddenly the pitcher burst out laughing. He pointed to the fans in the stands laughing too.

William's face grew hot. He walked off quickly. He wasn't going to cry. Not about baseball, he told himself.

He jammed his hands in his pockets. Paper crunched against his fist. He pulled out a letter from his mother. He read again how much she missed him.

William missed his family too. He remembered how his mom would raise her arms to applaud him.

That's it! William pulled out his pad and drew pictures. He scribbled words next to the pictures. He wrote. He wrote. He WROTE! He ran to find the umpire.

The umpire read William's notes.

"Yes, that could work," he said.

The next time William was at bat, the umpire raised his right hand for a strike and his left for a ball.

He used American Sign Language symbols for safe and out. This time William got on base. He stole bases. He scored! . . .

With his strong, sure arm, he became the first player to throw three base runners out at the plate in one game—from the outfield!

William taught his teammates signs so they could discuss plays. . . .

The fans enjoyed learning signs too. In those days, before speakers and giant screens, hearing the umpire's calls from the back of the bleachers was hard to do!

Now, even the farthest member of the crowd could see the signals.

Carefully watching the signals, he led the American League in walks in 1901. He was called the king of center field because for ten years he was ranked among the top five outfielders to get hitters out by catching hard-to-reach fly balls. . . .

Then, one day, when he ran out onto the field, fans waved their arms from the stands just as his mother did when he was a boy. They waved hats too.

William said he'd never cry about baseball. But he did cry at the sight of deaf applause.

All he'd wanted to do since he was a boy was find a way to play his favorite game. He never dreamed he'd change how the game was played. But he did, and we still cheer him today.