

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “How was basketball invented?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hi, it's Doug! Do you know how to spell the word murraya? I sure didn't. I never even heard that word before. But teenager Zaila Avant-garde sure knows how to spell it.

- Murraya, M-U-R-R-A-Y-A.

- That is correct.

Murraya was the words Zaila spelled to win the 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee, making her one of the best spellers in the world. But get this, spelling isn't even the only thing that Zaila is amazing at. Check this out. Zaila holds three Guinness World Records in basketball, one for shooting, one for dribbling, and another for juggling. So cool! Someone named Neveah has a question about the sport of basketball. Let's give Neveah a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Doug!

- Hi, Neveah!

- I have a question for you. How was basketball invented?

- Ooh, that's an interesting question.

And you know what? I think Jay Flores should be the one to answer this. He's a huge basketball fan. Let's hear what Jay has to say.

- Hey, Doug. You're right, I love basketball, especially when I'm watching my hometown team, the Milwaukee Bucks. I just really like how simple the game is. There's a ball, there's a basket and you need to get the ball into that basket to score points. But if you've ever played this sport, you probably know that making a basket is not as easy as it looks.

- Oh, what a block from Wayne!

That's because the other team is gonna do whatever they can to try and stop you. Whoa! Plays like that make basketball so fun, and it's not just people in the United States who think that. Basketball is one of the most popular sports in the world. There are professional leagues in places like Madagascar, China, Spain, and Australia. But did you ever wonder how was basketball even invented? Did someone just accidentally toss a pumpkin into a trash can and say, "Hey, I just invented basketball." Before we go on. I'm curious. How do you think basketball was invented?

VIDEO 2

When answering this question, it helps to go back in time thousands of years back to Central America. Scientists who study the past by looking at ancient objects think that this was one of the courts for one of the oldest sports that was ever played in Central America. An ancient sport played by people like the ancient Aztecs, the ancient Mayans, and the ancient Olmec people. The sport was a lot like basketball. There were two teams and a rubber ball and one of the goals was to get the ball into a ring like this one. It almost looks like a sideways basketball hoop,

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doesn't it? Now, unlike basketball, where a team scores a lot of times, this sport was a lot harder. The ring was really high off the ground and the rules weren't always exactly the same but you couldn't just use your hands to throw the ball. You had to hit it with your hips, your arms or other parts of your body. So teams hardly ever made a basket. And the game was way rougher than basketball too. Some players would get bruised and even break bones. Ouch! The ancient people of Central America absolutely loved this sport. They would play for fun and watch athletes play it in large arenas. Some archeologists believe that they even played it to settle arguments instead of going to war. Okay, now the sport they played in Central America wasn't exactly like the basketball we play today but it was one of the first sports played on a court with a ball, and one of the first sports where you had to try to shoot a ball through a hoop, like a basketball to score points. Ancient sports, like this, inspire people to invent more ball sports—sports where you had to shoot the ball into a goal or a basket. Okay, but what about our basketball, the one we play today? Where did that come from? Believe it or not, the basketball we play today might have never been invented if it weren't for these. These are snowstorms called blizzards. If you've ever experienced a blizzard, you may know that you can't go outside and play in them. There's just way too much snow and blizzards were one of the main reasons basketball was invented. A class of college students in Springfield, Massachusetts had just experienced a blizzard, and they couldn't go outside for sports. But, luckily for them, their PE teacher had been working on an idea for a fun new game they could play indoors. He nailed two peach baskets on an indoor balcony, divided his class into two teams, and gave them one main rule. Try to get a ball into the other team's basket. He blew his whistle and the first-ever game of basketball began. But there were some pretty big problems. Can you think of what they were? Since there were only a few simple rules, a lot of students began to push and shove. And like the ancient sport played in Central America, some of them even got hurt. And that wasn't all.

The peach baskets didn't have holes at the bottom, so every time someone scored, they would have to climb up to the balcony and take the ball out.

- It sure slows things down having to climb up here every time.

So the teacher had to make some more rules like you had to bounce the ball in order to move it. And you definitely couldn't push. Oh, and he cut a hole at the bottom of each basket so the basketball would drop back down after each shot. That made things way easier. The students loved it. They even began playing it after the blizzard and pretty soon, other schools started playing it in other cities and states. Those students probably would have never dreamed that a game their PE teacher invented during a blizzard would become one of the most popular sports in the world. Now basketball is played everywhere from the NBA and WNBA to parks and playgrounds around the world. So in summary, the first basketball-like games were played thousands of years ago by the Aztecs, Mayans, and Olmec people of Central America. But the basketball we play today was invented by a teacher who was just trying to keep his class from getting bored during a blizzard. That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Navaya for asking it!