

Lesson Plan

WNBA Pay Debate

Book: *Breanna Stewart*

Series: WNBA Superstars

Level: Navigator

Objective

To help students practice forming and supporting an opinion based on a group discussion, and to articulate that opinion in writing.

Supplies

- *Breanna Stewart* book
- Excerpt from the *Diana Taurasi* book (attached)
- Paper and pencils

Before the Activity

Read the *Breanna Stewart* book out loud, or assign it to students to read on their own.

Activity

Chapter 4 (“Overcoming Obstacles”) of *Breanna Stewart* describes several challenges that Stewart faced during her career as a pro basketball player. Invite a volunteer to read the first page of this chapter (page 23) out loud:

- “Like many of her teammates, Breanna Stewart played overseas during the WNBA’s off-season. WNBA players make much less money than men in the NBA. Also, they often make less than women in international leagues. Playing all year round helps them earn better pay. But it can be hard on their bodies.”

While playing overseas, Stewart tore a tendon and couldn’t play in the WNBA’s 2019 season. She’s not the only player to miss WNBA games because of injuries from playing overseas. For another example, read the excerpt from the *Diana Taurasi* book out loud. Then discuss the following questions as a class:

- What challenges can the pay gap create for players? (Sample Answers: Players may feel pressured to play year-round to earn enough money. Playing year-round makes them more likely to get injured. Injuries can cause players to miss games or even end their careers.)
- How can the pay gap be harmful for the WNBA? (Sample Answers: The WNBA might lose players who get injured while playing in other leagues. The WNBA might lose its top players to leagues that can offer higher pay.)

As a class, brainstorm some possible solutions to this problem. Examples include everything from raising the salaries of WNBA players to banning WNBA players from joining overseas teams. Discuss possible pros and cons to each solution. Then, have students take out a pencil and paper and write a short paragraph about which solution they think is best and why.

Paragraphs should include the following information:

- a topic sentence that states which solution the student thinks is best
- a sentence describing how or why this solution will solve the problem
- at least one fact, reason, or example that provides support for how or why the solution will work

Evaluation

Collect the paragraphs at the end of class. Use the following system to give each student up to 4 points:

- 1 point for a topic sentence that clearly states the student's opinion
- 1 point for describing how or why that solution will solve the problem
- 1 point for supporting that claim with reasons and/or evidence
- 1 point for spelling and grammar that is relatively free from errors

Standards

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards' reading standards for informational text, grade 4 (RI 4.1), speaking and listening standards, grade 4 (SL 4.1), and writing standards, grade 4 (W 4.1).

Diana Taurasi was one of the WNBA's best. She was also winning Olympic gold medals with Team USA. And Taurasi was playing overseas for teams in Russia and Turkey. However, playing year-round is hard. Taurasi's body started to wear down in response. For example, she injured her hip in 2012. As a result, she played in only eight games during the WNBA season.

Taurasi bounced back in 2014. She led the Mercury to their third WNBA title. But in 2015, Taurasi decided not to play in the WNBA that season. Instead, she played for a Russian team. That's because the Russian team offered her nearly 15 times her WNBA salary. This pay gap was common in the WNBA. Low pay was why many WNBA stars also played overseas.

However, Taurasi broke her left hand playing in Russia. So, she missed much of that season. She came back to the Mercury in 2016 and was healthy. She returned to being an All-Star and kept setting new records. In 2017, she became the first WNBA player with 7,000 points, 1,500 rebounds, and 1,500 assists.

Excerpt from *Diana Taurasi* by Joanne C. Gerstner, pp. 23–25.