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Learn through sports

PRINTABLE · GRADES 3-5 · AGES 8–11

# The Secret Huddle

Football players huddle before almost every play. But who started it, and why? Read the true story, then answer. Look back at the passage as much as you need.

Name _____

Date _____

## HUDDLE TOOLKIT

**1894** — the year of the first huddle

**ASL** — American Sign Language

**11** — players per team on a football field

**Context clue** — nearby words that explain a new word

**Main idea** — what the whole text is mostly about




QB + 10 TEAMMATES

## READ THE TRUE STORY

### The Circle That Kept a Secret

1 In the fall of 1894, Paul Hubbard was the **quarterback** for the football team at Gallaudet, a college for deaf students in Washington, D.C. Today it is called Gallaudet University. Hubbard and his teammates talked in American Sign Language, or ASL. Before each play, he signed the plan to his team right out in the open.

2 That worked against most teams. But that season, Gallaudet played two schools for the deaf, and those players knew ASL too. They could read Hubbard's hands from across the field! Hubbard worried that the other teams were stealing his plays.

3 So he came up with a **clever** fix. Before each play, his teammates stood shoulder to shoulder in a tight circle around him. Inside the circle he could sign the play, and the other team could see only backs. This was the **huddle**, and many people believe it was the first one in football. Gallaudet won both of those games, 24–0 and 20–6.

4 Later, Hubbard moved to Kansas to teach at a school for the deaf. In 1899, as the school's football coach, he used the huddle again. College teams nearby noticed and **copied** the idea. It **spread** across the country, and by the 1920s most football teams huddled before their plays.

5 Today you can see huddles in basketball, soccer, baseball and many other sports. Gallaudet calls itself the "Home of the Huddle." A circle that began as a way to keep a secret is now one of the best-known shapes in sports.

ROOKIE

**1** Where was Gallaudet, and who went to school there? Use paragraph 1.

_____

_____

ROOKIE

**2** Why did Hubbard worry that the other teams were stealing his plays?

a) They could hear him shout the plays.
b) They knew ASL and could read his hands.
c) They peeked at his playbook.

letter _____

STARTER

**3** In paragraph 4, the word **copied** means:

a) made fun of
b) did the same thing as someone else
c) forgot about

letter _____

STARTER

**4** Gallaudet won two games against deaf schools: **24–0** and **20–6**. How many points did Gallaudet score in those two games?

WORK SPACE

_____ points

PRO

**5** It is **2026** now. How many years ago did Hubbard's team form the first huddle in **1894**?

WORK SPACE

_____ years

PRO

**6** Which sentence tells the **main idea** of the whole passage?

a) A deaf quarterback's clever fix became part of sports everywhere.
b) Gallaudet won two games in 1894.
c) Basketball players huddle too.

letter _____

## A Build the Football Timeline

Put the five real events in order from oldest to newest. Write the year and the letter in each box. Then answer the questions.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | The first college football game is played: Rutgers vs. Princeton. | 1869 |
| B | Paul Hubbard's Gallaudet team forms the first huddle. | 1894 |
| C | Gallaudet's college is founded in Washington, D.C. | 1864 |
| D | The forward pass becomes legal in college football. | 1906 |
| E | The first Super Bowl is played. | 1967 |

| OLDEST | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH | NEWEST |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| YEAR | YEAR | YEAR | YEAR | YEAR |
| LETTER | LETTER | LETTER | LETTER | LETTER |

1. How many years after the first college football game did Gallaudet form the first huddle?

   _____ **years**

2. How many years passed between the first huddle and the first Super Bowl?

   _____ **years**

3. Hubbard used the huddle in Kansas in **1899**. How many years **before** the forward pass became legal was that?

   _____ **years**

## B Huddle Counter

In the made-up Maple Ridge Flag League, teams play 7 on 7 and huddle before every play. Here is how many times each team huddled in each quarter. Add to find each total.

| TEAM | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ridge Rockets** | 9 | 11 | 8 | 12 | |
| **Harbor Hawks** | 10 | 7 | 12 | 9 | |

1. Which team huddled **more** times? How many more?

   _____ **by** _____

2. How many huddles did **both teams** make in the whole game?

   _____ **huddles**

## C Fact or Opinion?

A **fact** can be proven true. An **opinion** tells what someone thinks or feels. Write **F** for fact or **O** for opinion.

1. Paul Hubbard played quarterback for Gallaudet. ☐
2. The huddle is the best idea in sports history. ☐
3. Gallaudet beat one school 24–0 in 1894. ☐
4. Every team should huddle before every play. ☐
5. Huddles are used in soccer and basketball today. ☐
6. Watching a huddle is boring. ☐

## D Word Work

Match each bold word from the passage to its meaning. Write the letter on the line.

1. **quarterback** _____
2. **clever** _____
3. **huddle** _____
4. **spread** _____

**a)** smart and quick at thinking of good ideas

**b)** a tight circle of players planning the next play

**c)** moved out to reach many places

**d)** the player who starts most plays and often throws the ball

YOUR TURN · BONUS, NOT SCORED

Hubbard needed a way to share a play without the other team seeing it. Invent your own secret way for a team to share a plan. How does it work, and why can't the other team figure it out?

# Answer Key (for teachers & parents)

Answers for **The Secret Huddle**. Print pages 1 and 2 for students and keep this page for checking. The history is real (sources: Gallaudet University and Smithsonian Magazine). The flag league teams in Part B are made up. Accept written answers that use details from the passage, even if the wording is different.

## Page 1 · The Circle That Kept a Secret

1. Answer: **In Washington, D.C.; it was a college for deaf students**
   Paragraph 1. Accept answers with both details
2. Answer: **b) They knew ASL and could read his hands**
   Paragraph 2: "those players knew ASL too"
3. Answer: **b) did the same thing as someone else**
   Clue: teams "noticed" the idea first
4. Answer: **44 points**
   24 + 20 = 44
5. Answer: **132 years**
   2026 − 1894 = 132
6. Answer: **a) A deaf quarterback's clever fix became part of sports everywhere**
   The whole passage builds to this idea

## A · Football Timeline

**Boxes:** Answer: **C 1864, A 1869, B 1894, D 1906, E 1967**

1. Answer: **25 years**
   1894 − 1869 = 25
2. Answer: **73 years**
   1967 − 1894 = 73
3. Answer: **7 years**
   1906 − 1899 = 7

## Quick score

| | |
|---|---|
| Page 1 | _____ / 6 |
| A · Timeline (5 boxes + 3) | _____ / 8 |
| B · Counter (2 totals + 2) | _____ / 4 |
| C · Fact or Opinion | _____ / 6 |
| D · Word Work | _____ / 4 |
| **Total** | _____ **/ 28** |

## Skills practiced

Reading for details · Context clues · Main idea · Fact vs. opinion · Timelines · Subtracting years · Adding in a table · Sports history

**Teaching tip:** Before reading, have four kids try to whisper a secret play while classmates watch. Then form a circle and try again. Ask: why did the circle work? Paul Hubbard's team had the same problem with sign language.

## B · Huddle Counter

**Totals:** Answer: **Rockets 40, Hawks 38**
9 + 11 + 8 + 12 = 40; 10 + 7 + 12 + 9 = 38

1. Answer: **Rockets, by 2**
   40 − 38 = 2
2. Answer: **78 huddles**
   40 + 38 = 78

## C · Fact or Opinion · D · Word Work

**C:** Answer: **1 F, 2 O, 3 F, 4 O, 5 F, 6 O**
Opinions use words like best, should and boring

**D:** Answer: **1 d, 2 a, 3 b, 4 c**



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