

This I Believe Product 2

Tell students: Jackie Robinson inspired a number of singers and songwriters to compose songs in his honor in the years immediately following his major league debut in 1947. One of the best known songs is Buddy Johnson's 1949 classic, "Did You See Jackie Robinson Hit That Ball?" Show this YouTube video featuring historical footage of Jackie Robinson and Natalie Cole singing the song.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGQpQ-KXc_Q After, as a class, discuss how the song and the footage portrayed Robinson as well as baseball fans.

Now have students conduct some research about Jackie Robinson and the breaking of the color line in baseball. At the conclusion of their research, students will be asked to review and revise their original response imagining how Jackie Robinson would have responded to the following using evidence from the texts: The success of the individual and the community are interdependent: "E Pluribus Unum". (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7)

Background condensed and collated from information found in the Library of Congress timeline [Baseball, the Color Line, and Jackie Robinson 1940-1972](#).

By the 1940s, organized baseball had been racially segregated for many years. In addition to racial intolerance, economic and other complex factors contributed to segregation in baseball. For example, many owners of major league teams rented their stadiums to Negro League teams when their own teams were on the road. Team owners knew that if baseball were integrated, the Negro Leagues would probably not survive losing their best players to the majors, major league owners would lose significant rental revenue, and many Negro League players would lose their livelihoods. Some owners also thought that a white audience would be reluctant to attend games with black players. Others saw the addition of black players as a way to attract larger white as well as black audiences and sell more tickets.

The black press and some of their white colleagues had long campaigned for the integration of baseball. Although several people in major league baseball tried to end segregation in the sport, no one succeeded until Brooklyn Dodger's general manager Branch Rickey set his "great experiment" into motion.

Branch Rickey (1881-1965) was involved with baseball in a variety of capacities -- as a player, coach, manager, and owner -- for more than sixty years. In 1942, Rickey joined the Dodgers and quietly began plans to bring black players to the team. Rickey knew that the player would have to be more than a talented athlete to succeed. He would also have to be a strong person who could agree to avoid open confrontation when subjected to hostility and insults, at least for a few years.

Jack (John) Roosevelt Robinson, was born in Cairo, Georgia, on January 31, 1919. His mother moved the family to Pasadena, California, in 1920, and Robinson attended John Muir Technical High School and Pasadena Community College before transferring to the University of

California, Los Angeles. An outstanding athlete, he lettered in four sports at UCLA -- baseball, football, basketball, and track -- and excelled in others, such as swimming and tennis.

Robinson showed an early interest in civil rights in the Army. He was drafted in 1942 and served on bases in Kansas and Texas. With help from boxer Joe Louis, he succeeded in opening an Officer Candidate School to black soldiers. Soon after, Robinson became a second lieutenant. At Fort Hood, Texas, Robinson faced a court martial for refusing to obey an order to move to the back of a bus. The order was a violation of Army regulations and the issue was dropped.

Shortly after leaving the Army in 1944, Robinson joined the Kansas City Monarchs, a leading team in the Negro Leagues. In August, 1945, Jackie Robinson met with Branch Rickey at the Brooklyn Dodgers office and Rickey revealed that he wanted Robinson to play for the major league Dodgers. On October 23, 1945, Jackie Robinson officially signed the contract. After a successful season with the minor league Montreal Royals in 1946, Robinson officially broke the major league color line when he put on a Dodgers uniform, number 42, in April 1947.

When he began playing for the Dodgers in 1947, at age 28, Jackie Robinson was older than the typical rookie. Baseball fans and players reacted to Robinson with everything from unbridled enthusiasm evident in newspaper headlines, to wariness and open hostility expressed in beanball pitches and death threats. His athletic abilities prevailed despite the intense pressures caused by breaking the "color line." Robinson won respect and became a symbol of black opportunity. The Sporting News, which had opposed blacks in the major leagues, gave Robinson its first Rookie of the Year Award in 1947. The award was renamed in Robinson's honor in 1987.

After a few seasons of playing well while tolerating racial insults, Robinson stepped up his playing style and spoke out often. He stirred controversy by protesting -- umpires' calls, hotels that refused to let him stay with his teammates, and teams that refused to hire black players.

Robinson's outstanding 10-year career included compiling a .311 lifetime batting average, playing in six World Series, and stealing home 19 times. He also won the National League Most Valuable Player award in 1949, when he led the league with a .342 batting average and 37 stolen bases. His impressive running speed, powerful hitting, and strong fielding made Robinson a key player on a team with many stars.

Branch Rickey offered many, sometimes conflicting, reasons for his desire to integrate baseball. Initially, Rickey maintained that he hired Robinson because of his desire to put the best possible team on the field. Before multi-million dollar broadcasting contracts were typical, teams relied almost exclusively on ticket sales to pay team expenses--spring training, travel, player salaries, stadium upkeep--and make a profit. Attendance was always higher for winning teams, and Rickey was not alone in believing that African-American players could improve his team. The Dodgers succeeded well with such black stars as Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, and Don

Newcombe. Rickey later acknowledged that his belief in equal rights was also a strong motive in signing African Americans to the Dodgers.

After Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson opened the door for black players in organized baseball, a few others soon followed. In that first year, Dan Bankhead pitched for the Dodgers, Larry Doby played for the American League Cleveland Indians, and Henry Thompson and Willard Brown played briefly for the St. Louis Browns. Although some major league teams began to integrate right away, it was twelve years until the last major league team integrated in 1959.

Jackie Robinson decided to retire from baseball after the 1956 season. He accepted a job offer from the Chock Full O' Nuts restaurant chain in New York and contracted with Look magazine to write an article to break the news and explain his reason.

Robinson worked as vice president for personnel at Chock Full O' Nuts from 1957 to 1964. He was also active with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In December 1956, the NAACP had recognized Robinson with the Spingarn Medal, which it awards annually for the highest achievement by an African American. Robinson chaired the NAACP's million-dollar Freedom Fund Drive in 1957 and was a member of the board of directors until 1967.

Robinson used his national celebrity and commitment to equal rights to fuel many efforts to help African Americans achieve full citizenship through the "ballot and the buck."

1963: began annual "Afternoon of Jazz" concerts, with Rachel Robinson; first year's proceeds sent to SCLC to support civil rights work and voter registration drives in the South.

1964: helped found and served as board chairman for the Freedom National Bank, a minority-owned commercial bank based in Harlem, New York.

1964: became one of six national directors for Nelson Rockefeller's Republican presidential campaign, and later worked as special assistant for community affairs when Rockefeller was re-elected governor of New York in 1966.

1970: formed the Jackie Robinson Construction Company to build low and moderate income housing

Robinson was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962, his first year of eligibility. His forceful spirit inspired both his playing on the field and his civil rights work afterwards. As described in his 1972 autobiography, *I Never Had It Made*, Jackie Robinson became disillusioned with the continued lack of opportunity for blacks.

In the 1970s, Robinson's health began to deteriorate rapidly. (He had learned in 1957 that he had diabetes.)

On October 15, 1972, Robinson attended a World Series game that included a commemoration for the 25th Anniversary of breaking the color line. In his televised speech, Robinson again pushed baseball to employ blacks in more capacities. Nine days later, on October 24, 1972, Jackie Robinson died of a heart attack at his home in Stamford, Connecticut. The first black baseball manager, Frank Robinson, was hired in 1975 by the Cleveland Indians.

Excerpts from Speech by Branch Rickey for the "One Hundred Percent Wrong Club" banquet, Atlanta, Georgia, January 20, 1956

"Then I had to get the right man off the field. I couldn't come with a man to break down a tradition that had in it centered and concentrated all the prejudices of a great many people north and south unless he was good. He must justify himself upon the positive principle of merit. He must be a great player. I must not risk an excuse of trying to do something in the sociological field, or in the race field, just because of sort of a "holier than thou." I must be sure that the man was good on the field, but more dangerous to me, at that time, and even now, is the wrong man off the field. It didn't matter to me so much in choosing a man off the field that he was temperamental, -- righteously subject to resentments. I wanted a man of exceptional intelligence, a man who was able to grasp and control the responsibilities of himself to his race and could carry that load."

"Gentlemen, it is inconceivable to me that in view of domestic tranquility and home understanding that anywhere, anytime, anybody, can question the right of citizens of this country for equal economic opportunity under the law."

"I am completely color-blind. I know that America is, - it's been proven Jackie, - is more interested in the grace of a man's swing, in the dexterity of his cutting a base, and his speed afoot, in his scientific body control, in his excellence as a competitor on the field, - America, wide and broad, and in Atlanta, and in Georgia, will become instantly more interested in those marvelous, beautiful qualities than they are in the pigmentation of a man's skin, or indeed in the last syllable of his name. Men are coming to be regarded of value based upon their merits, and God hasten the day when Governors of our States will become sufficiently educated that they will respond to those views."

Excerpts from Jackie Robinson's autobiography

THE MAJOR LEAGUES: JACKIE ROBINSON PLAYS FOR THE DODGERS JUST ANOTHER GUY: TRULY BREAKING THE COLOR BARRIER

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/history/spotlight_august3.html

MY OWN MAN: ROBINSON TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/history/spotlight_august4.html