



## JACKIE ROBINSON: BASEBALL LEGEND AND HERO

**Learning Objectives:** The students will...

1. Use research skills to locate information.
2. Recognize the courageous contribution to society made by Jackie Robinson.
3. Understand the need for equality.
4. Respond to information in a creative way.

**TEKS:** 3.9A, 3.11A

**Materials Needed:** Children's books about Jackie Robinson, research materials (internet access, books, magazines, display materials).

**Vocabulary:** hero, segregation, prejudice, discrimination

**Teaching Strategy:**

1. Introduce lesson by teaching the students the song, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame."
2. Ask for student responses to their experiences with baseball games, if any of them have ever been to a professional game, if they watch games on TV, etc.
3. Read the story of Jackie Robinson. Good sources available in local libraries include *The Children's Book of Heroes* by William Bennett (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. ISBN: 0684834456) or *A Picture Book of Jackie Robinson* by David Adler (Holiday House, 1997 ISBN: 0823413047)
4. Discuss the challenges Jackie Robinson faced and how he responded. Ask students to think about how baseball would be different today if it were not for Jackie Robinson.
5. Ask students to brainstorm attributes of a hero and list their responses on the board. Which of these characteristics did Jackie Robinson possess?
6. Pair students with a partner. Each pair of students will spend time gathering more information about Jackie Robinson, from various sources, including print media, internet sources, magazine archives, and/or the Baseball Hall of Fame.
7. Students will create a bulletin board collage of information about Jackie Robinson's life and contributions. These various products may take the form of paragraphs, essays, or pictures by the students, a crossword puzzle or word search about his life, pictures from the internet or magazines, statistics, poems, games, or others.
8. Each pair of students will contribute one or more items to the collage, at the teacher's discretion. Allow each pair of students to tell about what they are putting up and distribute copies of games or puzzles they have created. Assessment will depend on how much information is included.
9. Distribute and read Hank Aaron's article from *Time* magazine as a closing activity.

**Extension for Gifted/Talented:**

A group of students may create a PowerPoint presentation about Jackie Robinson's life and contribution to baseball.

## TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALLGAME

This song was written in 1908 by a man named Jack Norworth. One day when he was riding a New York City subway train, he spotted a sign that said "Ballgame Today at the Polo Grounds." Some baseball-related lyrics popped into his head, that were later set to some music by Albert Von Tilzer, to become the well known baseball song, "Take Me Out To The Ballgame." Despite the fact that neither Norworth nor Tilzer had ever been to a baseball game at the time the song was written, it is one of the most widely sung songs in America.

"Take me out to the ball game,  
Take me out with the crowd.  
Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack,  
I don't care if I never get back,  
Let me root, root, root for the home team,  
If they don't win it's a shame.  
For it's one, two, three strikes, you're out,  
At the old ball game."

## Jackie Robinson

He thrilled fans, shattered baseball's color barrier and changed the face of the nation

By HENRY AARON

*TIME* magazine—June 14, 1999

Monday, June 14, 1999

I was 14 years old when I first saw Jackie Robinson. It was the spring of 1948, the year after Jackie changed my life by breaking baseball's color line. His team, the Brooklyn Dodgers, made a stop in my hometown of Mobile, Ala., while barnstorming its way north to start the season, and while he was there, Jackie spoke to a big crowd of black folks over on Davis Avenue. I think he talked about segregation, but I didn't hear a word that came out of his mouth. Jackie Robinson was such a hero to me that I couldn't do anything but gawk at him.

They say certain people are bigger than life, but Jackie Robinson is the only man I've known who truly was. In 1947 life in America — at least my America, and Jackie's — was segregation. It was two worlds that were afraid of each other. There were separate schools for blacks and whites, separate restaurants, separate hotels, separate drinking fountains and separate baseball leagues. Life was unkind to black people who tried to bring those worlds together. It could be hateful. But Jackie Robinson, God bless him, was bigger than all of that.

Jackie Robinson had to be bigger than life. He had to be bigger than the Brooklyn teammates who got up a petition to keep him off the ball club, bigger than the pitchers who threw at him or the base runners who dug their spikes into his shin, bigger than the bench jockeys who hollered for him to carry their bags and shine their shoes, bigger than the so-called fans who mocked him with mops on their heads and wrote him death threats.

When Branch Rickey first met with Jackie about joining the Dodgers, he told him that for three years he would have to turn the other cheek and silently suffer all the vile things that would come his way. Believe me, it wasn't Jackie's nature to do that. He was a fighter, the proudest and most competitive person I've ever seen. This was a man who, as a lieutenant in the Army, risked a court-martial by refusing to sit in the back of a military bus. But when Rickey read to him from *The Life of Christ*, Jackie understood the wisdom and the necessity of forbearance.

To this day, I don't know how he withstood the things he did without lashing back. I've been through a lot in my time, and I consider myself to be a patient man, but I know I couldn't have done what Jackie did. I don't think anybody else could have done it. Somehow, though, Jackie had the strength to suppress his instincts, to sacrifice his pride for his people's. It was an incredible act of selflessness that brought the races closer together than ever before and shaped the dreams of an entire generation.

Before Jackie Robinson broke the color line, I wasn't permitted even to think about being a professional baseball player. I once mentioned something to my father about it, and he said, "Ain't no colored ballplayers." There were the Negro Leagues, of course, where the Dodgers discovered Jackie, but my mother, like most, would rather her son be a schoolteacher than a Negro Leaguer. All that changed when Jackie put on No. 42 and started stealing bases in a Brooklyn uniform.

Jackie's character was much more important than his batting average, but it certainly helped that he was a great ballplayer, a .311 career hitter whose trademark was rattling pitchers and fielders with his daring base running. He wasn't the best Negro League talent at the time he was chosen, and

baseball wasn't really his best sport — he had been a football and track star at UCLA — but he played the game with a ferocious creativity that gave the country a good idea of what it had been missing all those years. With Jackie in the infield, the Dodgers won six National League pennants. I believe every black person in America had a piece of those pennants. There's never been another ballplayer who touched people as Jackie did. The only comparable athlete, in my experience, was Joe Louis. The difference was that Louis competed against white men; Jackie competed with them as well. He was taking us over segregation's threshold into a new land whose scenery made every black person stop and stare in reverence. We were all with Jackie. We slid into every base that he swiped, ducked at every fastball that hurtled toward his head. The circulation of the Pittsburgh Courier, the leading black newspaper, increased by 100,000 when it began reporting on him regularly. All over the country, black preachers would call together their congregations just to pray for Jackie and urge them to demonstrate the same forbearance that he did.

Later in his career, when the "Great Experiment" had proved to be successful and other black players had joined him, Jackie allowed his instincts to take over in issues of race. He began striking back and speaking out. And when Jackie Robinson spoke, every black player got the message. He made it clear to us that we weren't playing just for ourselves or for our teams; we were playing for our people. I don't think it's a coincidence that the black players of the late '50s and '60s — me, Roy Campanella, Monte Irvin, Willie Mays, Ernie Banks, Frank Robinson, Bob Gibson and others — dominated the National League. If we played as if we were on a mission, it was because Jackie Robinson had sent us out on one.

Even after he retired in 1956 and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1962, Jackie continued to chop along the path that was still a long way from being cleared. He campaigned for baseball to hire a black third-base coach, then a black manager. In 1969 he refused an invitation to play in an old-timers' game at Yankee Stadium to protest the lack of progress along those lines.

One of the great players from my generation, Frank Robinson (who was related to Jackie only in spirit), finally became the first black manager, in 1975. Jackie was gone by then. His last public appearance was at the 1972 World Series, where he showed up with white hair, carrying a cane and going blind from diabetes. He died nine days later.

Most of the black players from Jackie's day were at the funeral, but I was appalled by how few of the younger players showed up to pay him tribute. At the time, I was 41 home runs short of Babe Ruth's career record, and when Jackie died, I really felt that it was up to me to keep his dream alive. I was inspired to dedicate my home-run record to the same great cause to which Jackie dedicated his life. I'm still inspired by Jackie Robinson. Hardly a day goes by that I don't think of him.

*Henry ("Hank") Aaron holds the major league career home-run record (755) and works for the Atlanta Braves organization*

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,991262,00.html>