

Name _____ Date _____

Jackie Robinson

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. Jack Roosevelt Robinson was born on January 31, 1919, in Cairo, Georgia. He was the youngest of five children raised by a single mother. Most of the United States was segregated at this time. African Americans could not go to the same schools, hospitals, libraries, restaurants or hotels as white people. They had to sit in their own section of the bus, movie theater and sports stadium. This type of “separate but equal” segregation was known as “Jim Crow.”

Notes

2. Young Jackie Robinson excelled at sports from an early age. He studied at Pasadena Junior College and UCLA, where he became the university’s first student to win varsity letters in four sports—football, baseball, basketball and track. Unfortunately, he had to leave college before graduation because his family could not afford it.

Notes

After leaving college, Robinson served in the US Army in World War II. During boot camp, he refused to give up his seat and move to the back of a segregated bus. He was arrested. However, he had an excellent reputation and won the support of his friends, various black newspapers and the NAACP. He was cleared of all charges and honorably discharged from the military. This peaceful resistance to segregation was an early example of Robinson’s upright character and devotion to civil rights.

3. American baseball became popular during the Civil War. In its early years, baseball was not segregated. Two black players, Bud Fowler and Moses Fleetwood Walker, played alongside white players in the late 1800s. After Walker retired in 1890, however, Major League Baseball adopted an unofficial segregation policy. White players were in the Major Leagues, while black players were relegated to the Negro Leagues. This segregation was known as the unofficial “color barrier.”

Notes

4. After being discharged from the army in 1944, Robinson began to play baseball professionally in the Negro Leagues. He was soon contacted by Branch Rickey, the manager of the all-white Brooklyn Dodgers. Rickey wanted to break the color barrier by signing a black player to his team. He knew that Robinson was a great player and could help the Dodgers win the pennant. He also knew that Robinson's upright character was important for challenging segregation in sports.

Notes

To prepare Robinson for the bigotry and harassment he was sure to face on the field, Rickey impersonated racist fans, ballplayers and umpires. He wanted to see how Robinson would react to the attacks. Finally, Robinson demanded, "Mr. Rickey, do you want a ballplayer who's afraid to fight back?" Rickey replied, "I want a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back." Robinson promised there would be no violent outbursts, and Rickey signed him.

5. Robinson stepped up to bat for the minor-league Montreal Royals on March 17, 1946. After a successful season, he was promoted to the major-league Brooklyn Dodgers. On April 15, 1947, he played his first game at Ebbets Field, becoming the first black athlete to play Major League Baseball in the 20th century.

Notes

From the beginning of his career, Robinson faced bigotry and harassment. Opposing players and people in the crowd yelled racial slurs at him. Even some of his own teammates objected to having a black player on the team. With support from his manager and friends, Robinson persevered and showed everyone what a great baseball player he was. In his first season, he was named Rookie of the Year and helped the Dodgers win the National League pennant. Finally, in 1955, he helped the team win the World Series. After that, even his former critics considered him a hero.

6. Jackie Robinson retired from baseball on January 5, 1957, but he didn't stop working for the greater good. He helped establish the African American-owned Freedom National Bank. He was a vocal champion of civil rights and served on the board of the NAACP until late in his life.

Notes

Robinson was the first African American to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962. In 1972, the Dodgers retired his uniform number of 42, ensuring no other player would ever wear that number. In 1997, the 50th anniversary of his first Major League game, all Major League teams retired his number. He is the first player ever to have earned that honor.