



Teaching Guide

SEGMENT 3, WEBISODE 13

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



Segment Overview

Brooklyn Dodger fans who saw Jackie Robinson take the field in 1947 witnessed more than just an exceptional ballplayer. They experienced history in the making when the first African American played major league baseball in the twentieth century and broke the color line of professional baseball. Robinson was the perfect man to do so, for in addition to being a multi-talented athlete in a variety of sports, his true distinction was as a man of great courage, self-control, fierce determination, and social action.

When Robinson retired from baseball, he built on his experience as a trailblazer on the ball field to become an advocate for change in the larger political world. Until his premature death in 1972, Robinson never stopped crusading on behalf of full civil rights for all people. He believed that the United States was too good a nation to shirk the goals for fair and equal treatment. Robinson's social activism and civic consciousness was born from a belief that since democracy is not static, one must fight constantly to preserve it.

Teacher Directions

1. Students, in small teams, discuss the following questions.
 - What did Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson do that was controversial?
 - What were the heroic qualities of Branch Rickey?
 - What were the heroic qualities of Jackie Robinson?
2. Make sure students understand the following points in discussing the questions.

Branch Rickey first integrated major league baseball when he hired African American Jackie Robinson. Rickey was heroic because at that time, it was unpopular, even dangerous, for a white to advocate for equality and integration for blacks. Many Americans wanted to keep the races segregated in all aspects of American life. Hate and fear fed racism and kept the nation from providing equality and justice to all people.

Jackie Robinson was the perfect man to integrate major league baseball he was an exceptional multi-talented athlete in a variety of sports and a man of great courage, self-control, fierce determination, and social action.



Let's Discuss



Teacher Directions

1. Share with the students the following background information concerning Jackie Robinson's letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Today, what most people know or remember about Jackie Robinson is that he was a superb baseball player and the first African American to play major league baseball. But behind his feats on the field, Jack Roosevelt Robinson was a public-spirited citizen who used his gifts and fame to help his country combat racial intolerance and bigotry in everyday life.

Robinson wrote to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in September 1957 in the midst of a simmering crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas. Central High School, a public school of more than two thousand white students, was to open its doors for the first time to nine black students. Arkansas' governor Orval Faubus announced on television that since he could not ensure the safety of the nine students, he planned to call out the National Guard to turn them away, thus violating the federal court order to integrate.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower never intended to push integration, but now he faced a challenge to the federal government's authority and his power as president to enforce the law as interpreted by the Supreme Court. Reluctant to take such an extreme measure, Eisenhower had to order federal troops to defend the rights of black citizens.

Jackie Robinson's letter of September 13 reflected his concern that the president never publicly denounced violence against integration. He also chafed at suggestions that civil rights advocates were extreme in wanting the Supreme Courts decrees upheld. Robinson believed that efforts to resist integration were unpatriotic because they were unlawful and undemocratic.

2. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Robinson's Letter to President Eisenhower*.
3. Working in small teams, students read Robinson's letter and discuss the following questions.
 - Who wrote the letter and when? What was the purpose of the letter? Why is the letter written on Chock Full o' Nuts stationary? (At the time Robinson was a highly visible corporate executive with the company)
 - Who is the "we" to whom Robinson refers? According to Robinson, what constitutional rights are being violated?
 - What circumstances caused Robinson to write the letter? Why is the president's statement about violence not enough for Robinson? What does Robinson want the president to do?
 - Did Robinson write the letter as a "Negro", a "Negro American", or just an American? Explain your opinion.
 - Do you consider Robinson's criticism fair? Is his tone pleading or demanding? Explain.
4. Explore the effects of letter writing as a political activity with the students.



What do you
Think?

5. Students draft responses from the president to Robinson. Students share their letters with each other.

Teacher Directions

1. In their small teams, students Think-Team-Share.
 - What did Jackie Robinson gain by exercising self-control?
 - If I had been in Jackie Robinson's place, how would I have responded to the scorn and abuse?
2. Students briefly share their responses.

Teacher Directions

1. Make available information from websites such as By Popular Demand: Jackie Robinson and Other Baseball Highlights, 1860s-1960s @ <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/jrhml/jrhome.html>; Baseball, the Color Line, and Jackie Robinson @ <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/jrml/jrabout.html>; Shadowball: Remembering the Negro Leagues @ <http://www.iwaynet-harlansw/negro-league>: and Negro Leagues Baseball Online Archives @ <http://www.nc5infi.net/-moxie/nib/nlb.html>
2. Break each team into two partnerships, one partnership identifies Jackie Robinson's special traits and how he moved the nation toward freedom. The other partnership identifies Branch Rickey's special traits and how he moved the nation toward freedom. Students support each trait with evidence from Robinson's or Rickey's life.

For example, Robinson had self-control as evidenced by his agreement not to fight back when he broke the color line in the major leagues. Robinson's other traits included courage, commitment to social action, fierce determination, and athletic ability.
3. Each partnership agrees on how Rickey or Robinson moved the nation toward freedom and writes that information with supporting evidence on a giant baseball made from chart paper.
4. Each partnership shares its baseball evidence with the class and discusses Jackie Robinson's and Branch Rickey's courage in integrating major league baseball.
5. Discuss the experiences of Robinson as a leader in integrating American society and why Robinson and Rickey are heroes.



Moving Toward
Freedom



Connections

Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

Research/Library — Students research the Negro Baseball Leagues and its stars such as Cool Papa Bell and Satchel Paige. Students use books (for example, *Black Diamond* by Patricia C. and Frederick McKissack) and web sites.

Science/Library — Students investigate the physics of baseball. What scientific principles does the baseball player use to throw a fast ball or create a spin on the baseball? How do health and physical development impact performance?

Math/Library — Students work with the facts and figures of baseball. How is the batting average calculated? Students compare Jackie Robinson's baseball statistics with those of more recent players.

Art — Students design a commemorative stamp featuring Jackie Robinson.

Research/Library/Technology — Students compare pay, travel, and other conditions in the Negro League with the all-white leagues.

Visual Arts/Library — Students view excerpts from the Ken Burns video series: *Baseball*. Students discuss the footage or analyze Burn's innovative style of creating documentaries.

Local History — Students investigate baseball players or teams that came from their local area.

Robinson's Letter to President Eisenhower

Telephone
WOLley 4-1111

Goek, Full o' Nuts

425 LEXINGTON AVENUE
New York 17, N. Y.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
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September 13, 1957

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. President:

A few days ago I read your statement in the papers advising patience. We are wondering to whom you are referring to when you say we must be patient. It is easy for those who haven't felt the evils of a prejudiced society to urge it, but for us who as Americans have patiently waited all these years for the rights supposedly guaranteed us under our Constitution, it is not an easy task. Nevertheless, we have done it.

It appears to me now, Mr. President, that under the circumstances the prestige of your office must be exerted. A mere statement that you don't like violence is not enough. In my opinion, people the world over would hail you if you made a statement that would clearly put your office behind the efforts for civil rights. As it is now, you see what the Communist nations are doing with the material we have given them.

I am aware, Mr. President, this letter expresses a mood of frustration. It is a mood generally found among Negro Americans today and should be a matter of concern to you as it is to us.

Very respectfully yours,

Jackie Robinson
Jackie Robinson

JR:cc

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