

1 Activate Prior Knowledge

Think about a person whose courage led to new opportunities for other people. Describe the person, and list his or her accomplishments.

2 Reading Skill

The **author's purpose** is his or her main reason for writing. According to what you read in the bracketed passage, what is the authors' purpose for writing this essay?

3 Stop to Reflect

Would you have accepted a place on the team if you had been Jackie Robinson? Explain.

4 Reading Check

What baseball team were Robinson and Rickey associated with? Underline the answer in the text.

Jackie Robinson: Justice at Last

Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns

It was 1945, and World War II had ended. Americans of all races had died for their country. Yet black men were still not allowed in the major leagues. The national pastime was loved by all America, but the major leagues were for white men only.

Branch Rickey of the Brooklyn Dodgers thought that was wrong. He was the only team owner who believed blacks and whites should play together. Baseball, he felt, would become even more thrilling, and fans of all colors would swarm to his ballpark.

Rickey decided his team would be the first to integrate. There were plenty of brilliant Negro league players, but he knew the first black major leaguer would need much more than athletic ability.

Many fans and players were prejudiced—they didn't want the races to play together. Rickey knew the first black player would be cursed and booed. Pitchers would throw at him; runners would spike him. Even his own teammates might try to pick a fight.

But somehow this man had to rise above that. No matter what happened, he must never lose his temper. No matter what was said to him, he must never answer back. If he had even one fight, people might say integration wouldn't work.

When Rickey met Jackie Robinson, he thought he'd found the right man. Robinson was 28 years old, and a superb athlete. In his first season in the Negro leagues, he hit .387. But just as importantly, he had great intelligence and sensitivity. Robinson was college-educated, and knew what joining the majors would mean for blacks. The grandson of a slave, he was proud of his race and wanted others to feel the same.

In the past, Robinson had always stood up for his rights. But now Rickey told him he would have to stop. The Dodgers needed "a man that will take abuse."

Vocabulary Development

integrate (IN tuh grayt) v. remove all barriers and allow access to all

At first Robinson thought Rickey wanted someone who was afraid to defend himself. But as they talked, he realized that in this case a truly brave man would have to avoid fighting. He thought for a while, then promised Rickey he would not fight back.

Robinson signed with the Dodgers and went to play in the minors in 1946. Rickey was right—fans insulted him, and so did players. But he performed brilliantly and avoided fights. Then, in 1947, he came to the majors.

Many Dodgers were angry. Some signed a petition demanding to be traded. But Robinson and Rickey were determined to make their experiment work.

On April 15—Opening Day—26,623 fans came out to Ebbets Field. More than half of them were black—Robinson was already their hero. Now he was making history just by being on the field.

The afternoon was cold and wet, but no one left the ballpark. The Dodgers beat the Boston Braves, 5–3. Robinson went hitless, but the hometown fans didn't seem to care—they cheered his every move.

Robinson's first season was difficult. Fans threatened to kill him; players tried to hurt him. The St. Louis Cardinals said they would strike if he took the field. And because of laws separating the races in certain states, he often couldn't eat or sleep in the same places as his teammates.

Yet through it all, he kept his promise to Rickey. No matter who insulted him, he never retaliated.

Robinson's dignity paid off. Thousands of fans jammed stadiums to see him play. The Dodgers set attendance records in a number of cities.

Slowly his teammates accepted him, realizing that he was the spark that made them a winning team. No one was more daring on the base paths or better with the glove. At the plate, he had great bat control—he could hit the ball anywhere. That season, he was named baseball's first Rookie of the Year.

Vocabulary Development

petition (puh TISH uhn) *n.* a document that people sign to express demands
retaliated (ri TAL ee ayt id) *v.* punished in return for an injury or a wrong done

TAKE NOTES

5 Literary Analysis

An **expository essay** is a short piece of nonfiction about a specific subject. What situation do the writers explain in the essay?

6 Reading Skill

Details can help you determine the **authors' purpose** for writing. Underline at least one important detail in the bracketed passage. Why do the authors present this detail?

7 Reading Check

What was the final score in Jackie Robinson's first game with the Dodgers? Circle the answer.

TAKE NOTES

8

Reading Skill

How does the final sentence help you understand the **authors' purpose** in writing this essay?

Jackie Robinson went on to a glorious career. But he did more than play the game well—his bravery taught Americans a lesson. Branch Rickey opened a door, and Jackie Robinson stepped through it, making sure it could never be closed again. Something wonderful happened to baseball—and America—the day Jackie Robinson joined the Dodgers.

9

Reader's Response: Do you think it was difficult for Jackie Robinson to hold his temper? Explain.



Writing About the Big Question

What is important to know? In "Jackie Robinson: Justice at Last," Jackie Robinson knew how to be strong and brave, even when people were cruel to him. Complete this sentence:

10 If people are unfair to you, it's important to limit your reactions, such as _____ because _____.

11 Note-taking Guide

Use the chart to recall the most important details of the story.

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|--|----------------------------------|
| Who was Branch Rickey? | He was the owner of the Dodgers. |
| Why does he want Jackie Robinson on his team? | |
| What problems did Robinson have during his first season? | |
| Why was it important that Robinson not fight back? | |