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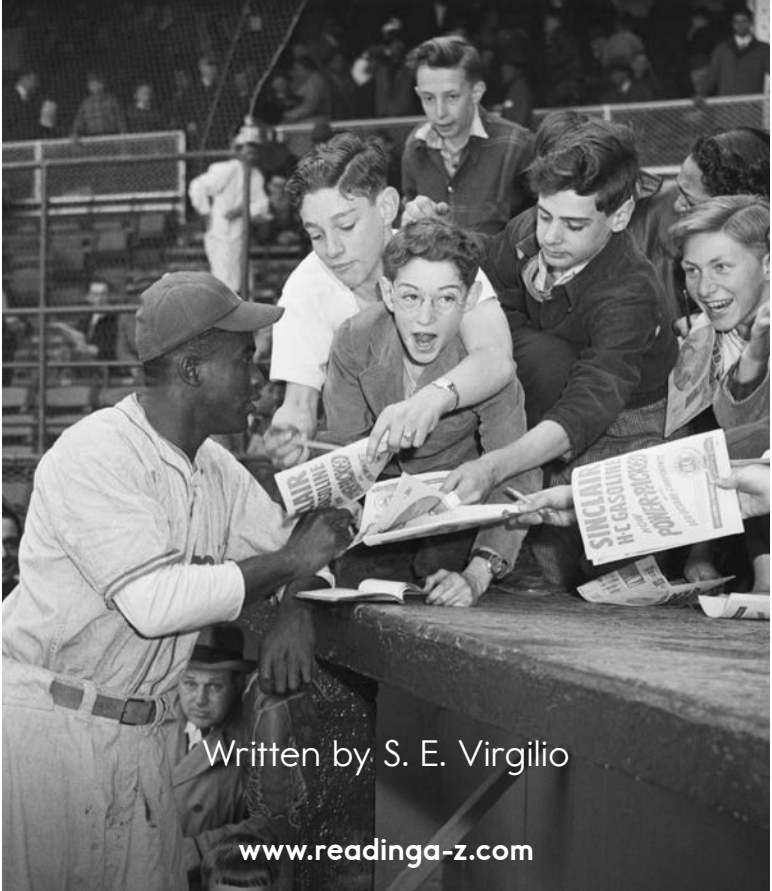
# Jackie Robinson

Written by  
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# Jackie Robinson



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## Focus Question

How did Jackie Robinson change history?



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## Introduction

The Ebbets Field stands were full on April 15, 1947. Brooklyn Dodger Jackie Robinson picked up his baseball bat. The crowd watched as the only African American in **Major League Baseball** (MLB) walked to the plate.



Robinson waits for the pitch during an exhibition game at Ebbets Field the day before his MLB debut.

Insults rang out from the other team's dugout. The Dodgers' general manager, Branch Rickey, had warned him this would happen. The words hurt, but Robinson had promised not to respond. He would play ball and let his bat do the talking.

Many people took note of the great courage Jackie Robinson showed that day. His courage would make him a baseball **legend** and a champion for equal rights.



## The Early Years

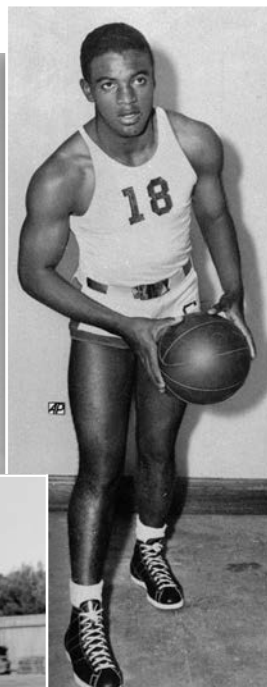
Jack Roosevelt Robinson was born on January 31, 1919, the youngest of five children in a poor Georgia family. The Robinson family moved to California when Jackie was a boy. There, he became known as a talented **athlete** in not one but several sports.



Jackie Robinson (second from left) poses with his family around 1925.

Jackie Robinson attended the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). He was a star on the school's football, track, basketball, and baseball teams. Robinson was the first student in the school's history to win special awards in four sports in a single year.

In spite of this success, Robinson did not graduate from UCLA. The Robinsons had little money. He left school in 1941 to help support his family.



In addition to baseball, Robinson ran track and played basketball and football at UCLA—and excelled at all of them.



## Taking a Stand

Robinson played semiprofessional football after college. Then, in December 1941, the United States entered World War II. Like many young men at the time, Robinson was called up to serve in the U.S. Army.

Robinson served at Fort Hood, Texas. One day in 1944, he and a group of soldiers got on an army bus. The bus was **segregated**—white soldiers sat in the front and black soldiers in the back. Yet Robinson knew he was no less a soldier than the white men. He refused an order to move to the back of the bus. For this, he was arrested.



Robinson poses in his U.S. Army uniform.

The army wanted to punish Robinson, but many people defended him. He was a good soldier who had only stood up for what was right. In the end, he was found not guilty.

## **You're Hired!**

After his time in the army, Robinson worked at a Texas college coaching basketball. In 1945, he received a letter from the Kansas City Monarchs, a professional baseball team. They offered Robinson a contract to play with them for four hundred dollars a month.

The Monarchs were part of the Negro Leagues. At that time, baseball was segregated. White and black athletes played in separate leagues. Robinson signed on to play for the Monarchs, thinking it might be a way to someday get into the all-white major leagues.



Robinson played shortstop for the Kansas City Monarchs in the mid-1940s.





Wesley Branch Rickey, pictured here around 1945, wanted to see baseball's "color barrier" (the rules keeping white and black athletes separate) broken.

Robinson showed everyone he was a skilled player. He caught the eye of Branch Rickey, general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Rickey felt that there should not be separate baseball leagues based on race. Instead, as he put it, professional baseball should be "color-blind." He wanted the Dodgers to sign a player from the Negro Leagues, a first attempt to **integrate** major league baseball. Rickey knew that this player would not only have to be a great athlete. He would also have to show strong **character** in the face of **abuse**.

In 1945, Rickey met with Robinson. Rickey offered to hire him on one condition: Robinson could not respond to any **prejudice** against him because of his race.

## A Team of Two

"Plenty of times I wanted to haul off when somebody insulted me for the color of my skin, but I had to hold to myself. I knew I was kind of an experiment. The whole thing was bigger than me."

—Jackie Robinson

"I cannot face my God much longer knowing that his black creatures are held separate and distinct from his white creatures in the game that has given me all that I can call my own."

—Branch Rickey



Robinson shakes Rickey's hand after signing his 1948 contract.

Robinson was at first very surprised. How could this man expect him to not fight back against prejudice? Rickey explained that the best way to fight back would be to play well. Robinson would show just how good he was.

## Number 42 Takes the Field

On October 23, 1945, Jackie Robinson signed on to play for the Dodgers' minor league team. Spring training for the team was held in Florida. There, Robinson had a taste of what he would face as MLB's first African American player. He could not stay in the same hotels as the rest of the team. Other minor league teams refused to play because of Robinson. Opposing pitchers threw the ball at him. Even some of his teammates didn't want to play with him.

### Punishing Pitches

In his career, Robinson was hit by 72 pitches, which ranks him as 225 in the top 1,000 major league players hit by pitches. How many of those hits were intentional is anybody's guess.



The umpire motions Robinson to first base after Robinson is hit in the arm by a pitch during his 1947 season in the major leagues.

None of this abuse stopped Robinson. He played well enough to move up to the Dodgers the next year. Wearing number 42, Jackie Robinson took the field on April 15, 1947, before a crowd of more than twenty-six thousand spectators. The Dodgers earned a victory that day, not only over the Boston Braves but also over prejudice against African Americans.



Robinson and Dodgers team captain Pee Wee Reese smile after both hit home runs to help win Game 1 of the 1952 World Series. As teammates they became close friends, and they remained so for the rest of their lives.



Robinson and Reese were both stars in 1952.

## Another Great Steal

Jackie Robinson stole 197 bases in his MLB career. That's a lot! In 1955, Robinson made one of the greatest steals in baseball history. Leo Lennox was there:

"My father and I went to Game 1 of the 1955 World Series against the New York Yankees. In the eighth inning, Robinson was on third base. We saw him take a big lead and then head for home. The catcher was waiting for the ball as Robinson approached.

The crowd was roaring. Robinson went into his slide and the catcher reached for the tag. 'Safe!' called the umpire. Robinson did it! He stole home!"



Yankees catcher Yogi Berra attempts to tag Robinson during the 1955 World Series.

Robinson also went on to have a great career. He was chosen Rookie of the Year in 1947. In 1949, he was voted Most Valuable Player in the league. Robinson was a fast runner who led the league in stolen bases. He helped the Dodgers win six league championships and a World Series victory. In 1962, he became the first African American to enter the Baseball Hall of Fame.



## His Number, His Day

In 1972, the Dodgers retired his uniform number, 42, to honor Jackie Robinson. No other Dodger could use that number. In 1997, the number 42 was permanently retired from all Major League Baseball teams.

The only time the number 42 is worn is on April 15, the day of Robinson's first game in the major leagues. On that day, every player's uniform bears the number 42 in memory of the legendary Jackie Robinson.



The Los Angeles Angels and the Oakland Athletics both wear number 42 jerseys during an 11-inning game on April 15, 2014 (top). President Barack Obama views Robinson's jersey during a tour of the Baseball Hall of Fame (right).

## Beyond Baseball

After retiring from baseball in 1957, Robinson joined the coffee maker and fast-food chain Chock Full o' Nuts. In doing so, he became the first black vice president of a U.S. national company. In 1964, he cofounded the Freedom National Bank, which grew to become one of the largest black-owned banks in the United States. Six years later, he launched a construction company.

Robinson also became a **civil rights** leader who continued to work for equality for all people. He died in 1972 from heart problems and diabetes complications.

In the world of sports, people of color have more opportunities today than ever before. We all have Number 42 to thank for that.



Robinson works at his desk in January 1962. He knew that the power of money could bring about positive social change. In his autobiography, he wrote, "Green power . . . could . . . reinforce black power."

## Glossary

<b>abuse</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	harmful treatment of a living thing (p. 9)
<b>athlete</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person trained in sports, games, or other activities that require strength, speed, and skill (p. 5)
<b>character</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the moral strength of a person (p. 9)
<b>civil rights</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	rights that promise freedom and equality for all citizens (p. 15)
<b>integrate</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to bring different ideas or groups of people together (p. 9)
<b>legend</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a famous person who is known for a special talent or action (p. 4)
<b>Major League Baseball</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a group of thirty professional baseball teams from the United States and Canada (p. 4)
<b>prejudice</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a bad opinion of something without an understanding of a certain person, group, or subject (p. 9)
<b>segregated</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	kept apart based on group differences, such as race (p. 7)

## Words to Know

abuse

athlete

character

civil rights

integrate

legend

Major League

Baseball

prejudice

segregated

Title page: Robinson signs autographs for excited young Dodgers fans in 1947.

Page 3: Robinson's family pitches in to help him blow out a candle on his thirty-fifth birthday in 1954.

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### Correlation

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Reading Recovery	30
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# Jackie Robinson

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## Connections

### Writing

Pretend you are Jackie Robinson on April 15, 1947. Write a journal entry describing your experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the day. Use information from the book as support.

### Social Studies

Make a timeline of Jackie Robinson's life, including at least five events. Share your timeline with a partner.



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