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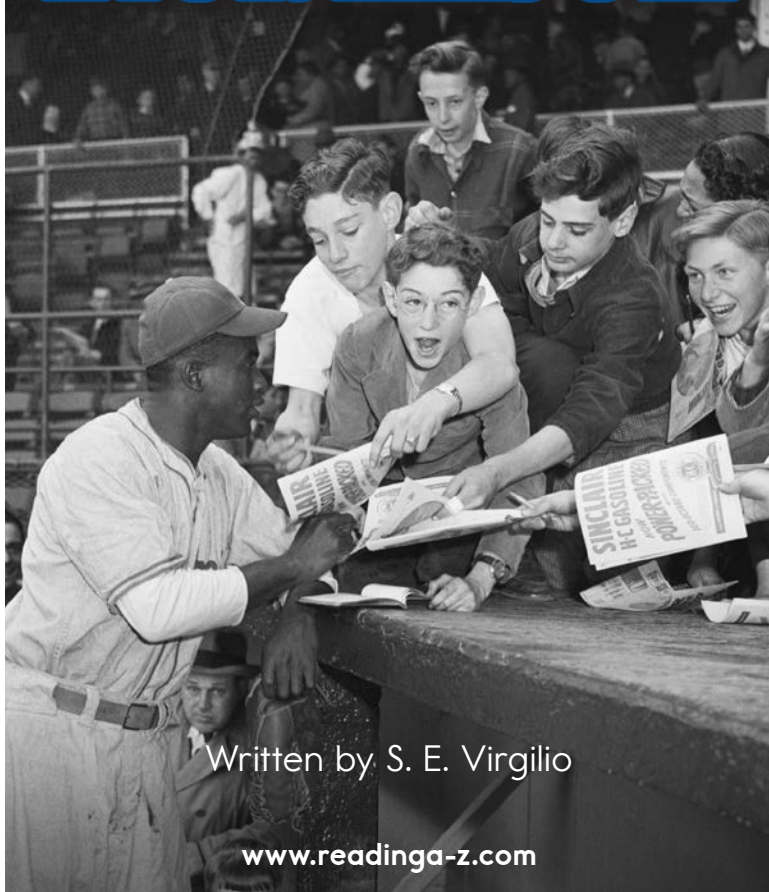
Jackie Robinson

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Focus Question

How did Jackie Robinson change history?

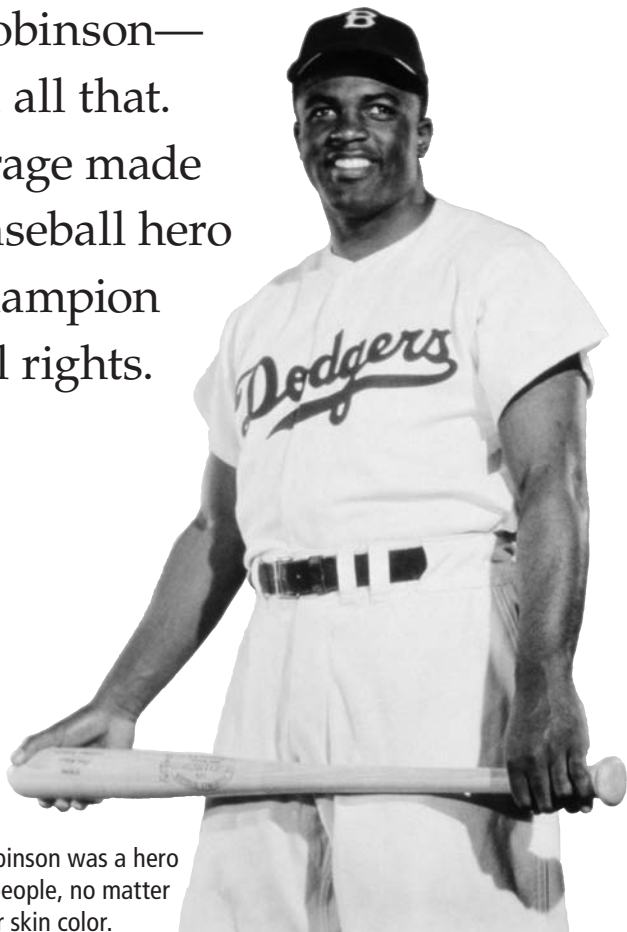


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Introduction

African Americans play a big part in **professional** sports today. For many years, however, black **athletes** weren't allowed to play with white athletes. One African American—Jackie Robinson—changed all that. His courage made him a baseball hero and a champion for equal rights.



Jackie Robinson was a hero to many people, no matter what their skin color.

The Early Years

Jack Roosevelt Robinson was born into a poor Georgia family in 1919. In college, he was a star on his school's football, track, basketball, and baseball teams. His family had little money, however. He left college in 1941 to help support his family and did not finish school.



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



In addition to baseball, Robinson ran track and played football and basketball in college. He was great at all of them.



Taking a Stand

In December 1941, the United States entered a war. Like many young men at the time, Robinson was called up to serve in the U.S. Army. One day, 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 as good a soldier as the white men. He would not move to the back.

Robinson was arrested, 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**.



Robinson poses in his U.S. Army uniform.

You're Hired!

After his time in the army, Robinson played baseball. In 1945, however, baseball was segregated, too.

White and black athletes played in separate leagues.

Robinson felt that baseball leagues should not be separate based on race. So did Branch Rickey, the man who ran the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Rickey wanted the Dodgers to be the first white team to include a black player.

Rickey knew that this player would not only have to be a great athlete. He would also have to face **abuse** because of his race.



Wesley Branch Rickey wanted to end segregated baseball.

Rickey hired Robinson. He had one **condition**, though. Robinson could not respond to any of the abuse. Instead, Robinson would fight **prejudice** by playing great baseball.

A Team of Two

Rickey and Robinson teamed up to end segregated baseball. But being the first isn't always easy.

"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



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



The umpire motions Robinson to first base after he is hit by a pitch in 1947.

Number 42 Takes the Field

Jackie Robinson began by playing for the Dodgers' **minor** league team. On the road, he could not stay in the same hotels as the rest of the team. Other minor league teams would not play because of Robinson. Pitchers on other teams threw the ball at him. Even some of the men on his own team didn't want to play with him.



Robinson waits for
the pitch in April 1947.

None of this abuse stopped Robinson. He played well enough to move up to the Dodgers the next year. Wearing number 42, he took the field on April 15, 1947, before a crowd of twenty-six thousand people.

The stands were full when Robinson picked up his baseball bat. The crowd watched as he walked to the plate. Insults rang out from the other team's dugout. The words hurt, but Robinson did not respond. He let his bat do the talking.



Robinson and Dodgers team captain Pee Wee Reese smile after both hit home runs in 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.

The Dodgers earned a victory that day, not only over Boston but also over prejudice. Robinson forced many people who thought less of African Americans to think again.

Another Great Steal

In 1955, Robinson made one of the greatest steals in baseball history. Leo Lennox was there:

"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!"



The Yankees catcher attempts to tag Robinson as he steals home base during the 1955 World Series.

Robinson went on to have a great career. In 1949, he was voted Most Valuable Player in the league. He was a fast runner who led the league

in stolen bases.

In 1962, Robinson became the first African American to get into the Baseball Hall of Fame.



Robinson holds his Hall of Fame plaque (top). Robinson receives the Most Valuable Player award (right).



His Number, His Day

In 1997, the number 42 was retired from professional baseball. No other player could wear that number.

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



The Angels and the 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 Robinson stopped playing baseball in 1957, he went into business. He became the first black vice president of a U.S. national company.

He also became a **civil rights** leader. He continued to work for equal rights for all people until his death in 1972.

Today, more people of color play in the world of sports than ever before. We all have Number 42 to thank for that.



Robinson helped run the coffee maker Chock Full o' Nuts. Here, he works at his desk in January 1962.

Glossary

abuse (<i>n.</i>)	a harmful way of treating a living thing (p. 7)
athletes (<i>n.</i>)	people trained in sports, games, or other activities that require strength, speed, and skill (p. 4)
civil rights (<i>n.</i>)	rights that promise freedom and equality for all citizens (p. 15)
condition (<i>n.</i>)	something that must happen or be accepted before an agreement can move forward (p. 8)
guilty (<i>adj.</i>)	having done something wrong (p. 6)
minor (<i>adj.</i>)	secondary (p. 9)
prejudice (<i>n.</i>)	bad opinion of something without an understanding of a certain person, group, or subject (p. 8)
professional (<i>adj.</i>)	earning money for taking part in an activity rather than doing it purely for pleasure (p. 4)
segregated (<i>adj.</i>)	kept apart based on group differences (p. 6)

Words to Know

abuse

athletes

civil rights

condition

guilty

minor

prejudice

professional

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	20
DRA	28

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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