

JACKIE ROBINSON

The Loneliest Season



The meeting lasted three hours.

TBranch Rickey, general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, didn't want to take any chances. He wanted to make sure he had the right man for the job. The right man had to be willing to endure great public abuse. He had to be willing to "turn the other cheek." It was no task for a coward or a hothead. Rickey was looking for a black man to break into the whites-only world of major league baseball.

² At that meeting on August 28, 1945, the baseball player being interviewed was Jackie Robinson. Jackie listened as Rickey explained why he wanted a black man on his team. Rickey was tired of seeing black talent go to waste. He knew that a man with Jackie's athletic ability could help the Dodgers. Jackie's superb talents might even lead the Dodgers to a pennant.

³ But being the first black man in the major leagues would not be easy. Rickey warned Jackie that there would be trouble. He gave Jackie a taste of the kind of name-calling that he would have to face. If Jackie couldn't take such insults from one man, what chance would he have against a crowd of 40,000 hostile baseball fans?

Jackie Robinson and Brooklyn Dodgers president Branch Rickey look over Robinson's 1950 contract. The contract was for a sum between \$30,000 and \$35,000.

And it wouldn't be just the fans who would be hostile. Rickey pointed out that many of the white players would resent having a black man in the league.

⁴ It would be a dangerous situation. Jackie's presence could result in all kinds of violence. It could even lead to riots. Rickey knew that there was only one way it could work. If Jackie took the job, he would have to promise to avoid doing anything that would aggravate the already tense situation. He would have to remain silent in the face of vicious racial slurs and threats of violence. After telling Jackie all those things, Rickey paused and asked, "Well? Do you still want to go through with it?" Without hesitation, Jackie answered, "Yes. I am not afraid to try."

⁵ Who was this courageous man named Jackie Robinson? He was a man with great physical power, speed, and coordination. He was also a man of great moral character. The youngest of five children, Jackie was born in Cairo, Georgia, in 1919. Shortly after Jackie's birth, his father deserted the family. Jackie's mother moved her family to California in the hope that there would be more job opportunities there. She found work as a maid and fought hard to keep her family together. She did all she could to give her children a sense of self-worth and pride.

⁶ Despite his mother's support, life was not easy for Jackie. For a young black boy in the 1930s, California was not much better than rural Georgia. White children often called him "nigger." Many restaurants, playgrounds, and movie theaters were closed to him. Even the Pasadena municipal swimming pool was "for whites only."

⁷ Somehow Jackie survived the discrimination of those years without losing his dreams. He hoped to go to college and to become a baseball player. Jackie did manage to get into a junior college, and from there he made it to the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). At UCLA he ran track and joined the basketball and football teams. But baseball remained his real love.

⁸ When World War II broke out, Jackie joined the army and became a second lieutenant. Racial hatred followed him into the service. One day a bus driver ordered Jackie to move to the back of an army bus. The front, he said, was reserved for whites. Jackie became angry and refused to move. His refusal led to his arrest and trial in a military court.

Although he was found innocent, he never forgot the insult. He told himself that he never wanted to be insulted like that again.

⁹ Then in August of 1945, he found himself sitting in Branch Rickey's office promising to endure even worse insults in silence. Jackie knew it would be difficult for him to control his temper. But like Rickey, Jackie knew that it was the only



Jackie Robinson is caught off first base in a game between the Boston Braves and the Brooklyn Dodgers, September 7, 1948.

way he could ever play major-league ball. So he decided to try.

¹⁰ After one highly successful year on the Dodgers' Triple-A farm team, Jackie was ready for the big time. So in the spring of 1947, Jackie Robinson put on a Dodger uniform for the first time. He was finally in the big leagues—big league baseball and big league racism. When the other members of the team heard of Jackie's arrival, several of them threatened to quit. Rickey talked to them, however, and got them to agree to try one season with Jackie in their midst. But they warned that if at the end of that time they were still unhappy they would either quit or would ask to be traded to another team.

¹¹ When the official season opened in April, Jackie was a starting player for the Dodgers. But he had to play a position he had never played before. Jackie was an experienced second baseman.

Unfortunately, the Dodgers already had a good man in that position. So Jackie was forced to play first base. When he took to the field on opening day, his mind was on how he would handle his new assignment. But his thoughts were soon interrupted by the booing and hissing of the crowd. He heard the fans jeering at him and calling him names. But just as he had promised Rickey, he did not react. He ignored the fans completely.

¹² Gradually Jackie got used to the rude gestures and angry cries of the white fans. At every game, he had to put up with abuse from the stands. On top of that, he usually had to endure the hatred of the opposing team. When Jackie stepped up to bat, many pitchers threw the baseball directly at his head. When he was in the field, runners would try to step on his shoe, jabbing their spikes into his foot. Even Jackie's own teammates offered him little support.

¹³ As the season wore on, Jackie grew discouraged. It seemed he was making no progress. The fans continued to taunt him without mercy, and the players still did not accept him. Jackie began to wonder if it was worth all the pain and humiliation he was suffering. But something inside him would not let him give up. He continued to play and to endure. One sportswriter writing during that long summer of 1947 referred to Jackie as "the loneliest man I have ever seen in sports."¹⁴ But lonely or not, Jackie Robinson's patience and persistence finally paid off. By the end of the season, he was triumphant. He batted .297, led the league in stolen bases, and was named Rookie of the Year. His daring baserunning and strong hitting also helped the Dodgers win their first pennant in six years. Jackie's superior athletic skill earned him

the respect of his teammates and fellow athletes. By September, only one Dodger still wanted to be traded to another team, and most of the sports fans in America were on Jackie's side.

¹⁵ Jackie Robinson played 10 years in the major leagues and was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame after his retirement. Most importantly, he opened the door for other great black athletes. Baseball was eventually blessed by such legends as Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, and Reggie Jackson. While the talents of those men were tremendous, it was Jackie Robinson's willingness to suffer hatred and humiliation that made their careers possible. 🍀

If you have been tired, with reading this article, enter your reading time below. Then turn to the Words-per-Minute Table on page 74 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 79.

Reading Time Lesson 3

Minutes Seconds

A Finding the Main Idea

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea B—Too Broad N—Too Narrow

- _____ 1. Jackie Robinson, a gifted black athlete, led the Brooklyn Dodgers to the pennant in 1947.
- _____ 2. Jackie Robinson was a great baseball player who was discriminated against because he was black.
- _____ 3. Jackie Robinson endured great personal abuse to become the first black baseball player in the major leagues.

_____ Score 15 points for a correct M answer.
 _____ Score 5 points for each correct B or N answer.
 _____ Total Score: Finding the Main Idea

B Recalling Facts

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

- 1. One of the reasons Branch Rickey asked Jackie Robinson to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers was that he
 - a. wanted to win the pennant.
 - b. thought Jackie would attract big crowds.
 - c. could pay Jackie less than the others.
- 2. Shortly after Jackie was born, his father
 - a. moved to California.
 - b. deserted the family.
 - c. died suddenly.
- 3. When Jackie Robinson joined the Dodgers in 1947,
 - a. some players threatened to quit.
 - b. Branch Rickey was fired.
 - c. he had just gotten out of the army.
- 4. During his first year with the Dodgers, Jackie Robinson played
 - a. first base.
 - b. second base.
 - c. third base.
- 5. Jackie Robinson played in the major leagues for
 - a. one year.
 - b. 10 years.
 - c. five years.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

_____ Total Score: Recalling Facts

C Making Inferences

When you combine your own experience and information from a text to draw a conclusion that is not directly stated in that text, you are making an inference. Below are five statements that may or may not be inferences based on information in the article. Label the statements using the following key:

C—Correct Inference F—Faulty Inference

1. Branch Rickey thought that black athletes were much better than white athletes.
2. If Jackie Robinson had not been a top quality player on a top team, he would probably not have been accepted in the end.
3. During the 1930s and 1940s, discrimination against black Americans existed only in the southern United States.
4. Jackie Robinson had no hope that racial discrimination in the United States would someday disappear.
5. The black baseball players who followed Robinson into the majors did not have as difficult a time as he did.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

Total Score: Making Inferences

D Using Words Precisely

Each numbered sentence below contains an underlined word or phrase from the article. Following the sentence are three definitions. One definition is closest to the meaning of the underlined word. One definition is opposite or nearly opposite. Label those two definitions using the following key. Do not label the remaining definition.

C—Closest O—Opposite or Nearly Opposite

1. The right man had to be willing to endure great public abuse.
 - a. mistreatment ✓
 - b. kindness ✓
 - c. complaints ✓
2. Rickey pointed out that many of the white players would resent having a black man in the league.
 - a. dislike ✓
 - b. be fearful of ✓
 - c. welcome ✓
3. If Jackie took the job, he would have to promise to avoid doing anything that would aggravate the already tense situation.
 - a. make worse ✓
 - b. interfere with ✓
 - c. improve ✓

4. He would have to remain silent in the face of vicious racial slurs and threats of violence.

- a. insults ✓
- b. stuttering ✓
- c. polite remarks ✓

5. The fans continued to taunt him without mercy, and the players still did not accept him.

- a. compliment ✓
- b. challenge ✓
- c. jeer at ✓

Score 3 points for each correct C answer:
 Score 2 points for each correct O answer:
 Total Score: Using Words Precisely

Enter the four total scores in the spaces below, and add them together to find your Reading Comprehension Score. Then record your score on the graph on page 73.

Score	Question Type	Lesson 3
_____	Finding the Main Idea	_____
_____	Recalling Facts	_____
_____	Making Inferences	_____
_____	Using Words Precisely	_____
Reading Comprehension Score		

Author's Approach

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

1. What does the author mean by the statement "He had to be willing to 'turn the other cheek'"?

- a. Jackie Robinson could not look at the people who abused him.
- b. Jackie Robinson would be frequently hit in the face.
- c. Jackie Robinson could not react when people insulted him.

2. What is the author's purpose in writing "Jackie Robinson: The Lonellest Season"?

- a. To express an opinion about racism in the 1940s
- b. To inform the reader about Jackie's role in breaking baseball's color barrier
- c. To emphasize the similarities between black and white baseball players

3. What does the author imply by saying, "He told himself that he never wanted to be insulted like that again"?

- a. Jackie was a hothead.
- b. Jackie was proud.
- c. Jackie hated white people.

4. The author tells this story mainly by

- a. retelling Jackie's personal experiences as a baseball player.
- b. comparing the experiences of different athletes.
- c. telling different stories about breaking racial barriers.

_____ Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 74.