GRADE 11
SBA REVIEW

JACKIE ROBINSON

CHARACTERIZATION*
FACT/OPINION
ANALYZE CONTEXT CLUES*
Introduction:

In 1947, Jackie Robinson took a bold, fearless step into the major leagues, paving the way for African Americans who dreamed of playing our nation’s highest caliber of baseball.

1. When a truly outstanding baseball player decides his career is over, one way his team honors him is to retire his uniform number. Some day, for example, the Baltimore Orioles will put away Cal Ripkin Jr.’s No. 8 and the St. Louis Cardinals will retire Mark McGwire’s No. 25.

2. Jackie Robinson may have received the ultimate honor, however, when all of baseball retired his number in 1998. That means no major-league baseball player will ever again sport No. 42 on his uniform.

3. So why did baseball honor Jackie Robinson with such a special tribute? Certainly, his accomplishments on the field were impressive. During his 10-year career (1947–56), he hit .311, with 137 home runs and 197 stolen bases. Still, other players before and after Robinson’s era far exceeded his numbers. Baseball retired Robinson’s No. 42 both for his skill and because of the courage he demonstrated in breaking baseball’s color line.

Time to Address Racism in Baseball

4. Such key baseball figures as Kenesaw Mountain Landis, who was the commissioner from 1919 to 1944, did all they could to keep African Americans from playing in the majors. Then came Branch Rickey. In the 1940s, Rickey had a plan to help African Americans get a shot at playing in the big leagues, and he aimed to make it happen.
Rickey believed Jackie Robinson, who at the time was a star shortstop in the Negro Leagues, could compete with the best in the major leagues. But Rickey wanted to make sure Robinson had the composure to withstand the racial taunts of fans and opposing players.

Robinson asked Rickey whether he wanted a player who would fight back when provoked. Rickey answered, “No, Jackie, I want a player with guts not to fight back. You will symbolize a crucial cause. One incident, just one incident, can set it back 20 years.”

Rickey also said, “I’ve been looking for a great black ball player, but I need more than a great player, I need a man who will carry the flag for his race.” After the meeting, Rickey knew that he had his man.

Jackie Robinson and His Career

Jackie Robinson was born on January 31, 1919, in Cairo, Georgia. His grandfather was a slave, and his father was a sharecropper who left the family when Jackie was young. Robinson, his mother, and his siblings relocated to Pasadena, California, where Jackie went on to attend the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). He starred in four sports at the university—track, basketball, football, and baseball. He later joined the U.S. Army and served as an officer in World War II.

In 1944, Robinson signed with the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro Leagues. He received $400 a month. It was during this period that he caught Branch Rickey’s attention and earned a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

For seasoning, Rickey sent Robinson to the Dodgers’ Montreal farm team in 1946. That year, he led the team to the Little World Series. The following season, Robinson made the step up to the major leagues. He won a job as the Dodgers’ starting first baseman and had a spectacular year, leading the National League in stolen bases (29) while hitting .297, with 12 home runs, 125 runs, and 48 runs batted in.

For Robinson, playing baseball was the easy part. The hard part was staying calm when racist players called him names, spiked him, or tried to pick fights.
Even some of his teammates resented him. Fred “Dixie” Walker, who was raised in the South, asked to be traded.

True to his word to Branch Rickey, Robinson let his bat and glove do his talking. During his career, he became known as an excellent hitter and daring base runner who made things happen. He was a six-time All-Star.

An American Legend

Then, at age 37, he hung up his spikes. Six years later, in 1962, he was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Sadly, Robinson died in 1972 at the age of 53, having suffered from high blood pressure, heart trouble, diabetes, and blindness in one eye.

When Major League Baseball retired Robinson’s number, it was attempting to recognize his permanent contributions to baseball. Without Robinson’s resolve and inner strength, many more years might have passed before African Americans took that first courageous step at gaining equality in major-league baseball.

### Batting Average

A player’s batting average is determined by dividing the total number of base hits by the number of official times at bat. For example, a batting average of .250 means that a player gets a hit once in every four times at bat. The best major league players have batting averages of .300 or higher. Ty Cobb’s lifetime batting average of .366 is the highest in major league baseball history.
1. Which sentence from the selection is an opinion?

A. “For Robinson, playing baseball was the easy part.”
B. “That year, he led the team to the Little World Series.”
C. “Fred ‘Dixie’ Walker, who was raised in the South, asked to be traded.”
D. “Still, other players before and after Robinson’s era far exceeded his numbers.”

2. How did Jackie Robinson’s character influence the sport of baseball? Include four details from the selection in your answer.

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3. What is the meaning of the word *composure* in paragraph 5?
   A. Creativity
   B. Strength
   C. Talent
   D. Agility

4. What is the main idea of the situation?
   A. A baseball player should work hard.
   B. A baseball player can make a difference.
   C. A baseball player has a shorter life span.
   D. A baseball player can receive many honors.

5. Write a summary of the section entitled “Jackie Robinson and His Career.” Include three main ideas from the section in your summary.
6. **According to the selection. How were Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson similar?**

A. Both wanted to use the bat and glove to speak louder than words.
B. Both wanted to become the greatest player in baseball.
C. Both wanted to fight back when taunted by players.
D. Both wanted to play baseball in the major leagues.
1. D
2. Answers will vary
3. B
4. B
5. Answers will vary
6. A