

Going to Bat—in Jackie's Footsteps

Mo Vaughn wore number 42 when he played for the New York Mets between 2002 and 2003. He wore it for a special reason.

A baseball player named Jackie Robinson wore number 42. He was an African American. He entered the major leagues in 1947. Until then, no African American had ever played in the majors. Robinson broke baseball's "color barrier." He opened the door for black athletes to play in pro sports.

Vaughn wore number 42 as a tribute to Robinson. He also worked with Robinson's daughter Sharon. She keeps her father's spirit alive by helping young people break through barriers of their own.

Baseball Legend

Before 1947, some team owners didn't think that black athletes were good enough to play in the majors. Some fans didn't want to see black and white athletes play together. Black players belonged to all-black teams in all-black leagues. A man named Branch Rickey wanted to change that. He ran the Brooklyn (New York) Dodgers. (Years later, the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles, California. They play there today.) In 1945, Rickey formed a plan to hire the game's first black player.

Rickey chose Robinson. Rickey told Robinson that many people wouldn't like his playing in the big leagues. They would call him names. Other players would try to hurt him. But Robinson couldn't fight back, Rickey said. If he did, black athletes would never be allowed in major-league baseball.

Robinson joined the Dodgers in 1947. He was the target of abuse from fans and other players. But he didn't fight. Instead, he played brilliantly. He won over his critics. He proved that black athletes belonged on the field.

Talking to Young People

Robinson died in 1972. Today, his daughter Sharon runs a program called Breaking Barriers: In Sports, In Life.

In the program, she works with major-league stars, which in the past has included Vaughn. She and the ballplayers visit schools all over the country. They talk to students about the kinds of barriers they face in life.

In one class, a boy talked about his mother's death. A girl talked about her parents' divorce. In other classes, students discussed problems with learning at school.

Students also learn that big-league ballplayers face problems in life. When Vaughn was still playing in the major league, he missed a whole season because of an injury. But he used that time to train and get stronger.

Sharon Robinson talks about what students need to overcome their problems. They need courage, she said. They need to use teamwork. And they must never quit.

Saluting a Hero

Sharon Robinson said her program reminds people of the barriers her father broke. Vaughn agreed. He told students why he wore Jackie Robinson's number.

"This number isn't mine," he once said. "I just put it on and try to keep his memory alive as long as possible."

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Why did Mo Vaughn wear number 42?

- A because he worked with Sharon Robinson on her youth program
- B because 42 is his favorite number
- C because he wanted to keep Jackie Robinson's memory alive
- D because he likes even numbers

2. What are the two main topics described by the author in this text?

- A how Branch Rickey wanted to change major league baseball and how big-league ballplayers today handle their problems
- B how Jackie Robinson entered major league baseball and how Sharon Robinson helps young people with her youth program
- C why Mo Vaughn wore number 42 as a Mets player and how Mo Vaughn worked with Sharon Robinson on her youth program
- D why Sharon Robinson decided to start a youth program and how her youth program helps people remember her father

3. Why did the author use the following phrase in the passage? "Robinson broke baseball's 'color barrier.'" By using this phrase the author intends to communicate

- A that Mo Vaughn wore number 42 as a tribute to Robinson
- B that Jackie Robinson helped other black players enter and play pro sports
- C that African American players like Jackie Robinson were better than white players
- D that African American players were not allowed to play baseball

4. Read the following sentence and answer the question below: "Sharon Robinson talks about what students need to overcome their problems."

In this sentence, what does the word **overcome** most nearly mean?

- A to defeat
- B to understand
- C to work with
- D to be sad about

5. What would be another good title for this passage?

- A The Life and Times of Jackie Robinson
- B Jackie Robinson: An Inspiration
- C Jackie Robinson's Daughter Sharon
- D Jackie Robinson: Number 42

6. How did Branch Rickey change the situation of blacks and whites being separated in baseball?

7. Jackie Robinson broke many barriers during his time playing professional baseball. How does his daughter Sharon continue her father's work?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Branch Rickey wanted a black player on his major league baseball team,
_____ he asked Jackie Robinson to join.

- A since
- B after
- C if
- D so

9. Answer the questions based on the sentence below.

Jackie Robinson made a difference in 1947 by being the first African American to join a major league baseball team.

Who? Jackie Robinson

(did) What? _____

When? _____

10. Read the vocabulary word and definition below and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: barrier (barr · i · er): something that gets in the way.

10a. Read the five sentences below and underline the word **barrier** in each sentence.

1. Many people experience barriers to success, but if they keep trying, they will eventually achieve their goals.
2. One barrier to understanding what you read is a word that is too hard.
3. There is a rule stating that we cannot chew gum in school, so this policy serves as a barrier that makes it difficult to chew my favorite bubble gum.
4. If two people don't speak the same language, we say they have a language barrier because they are unable to communicate with one another.
5. When someone puts up a fence around his or her pool, he or she creates a barrier.

10b. Which image shows a barrier?



11. If you wanted to block the entrance to your house, would you need some kind of barrier? Why or why not?

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 610

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines, or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: In the first part of the reading, the author discusses how Jackie Robinson ended segregation in professional sports. In the second part, the author describes how Jackie's daughter Sharon is continuing his legacy with a program to help young people succeed.

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6. How did Branch Rickey change the situation of blacks and whites being separated in baseball?

Suggested answer: Branch Rickey made a plan to hire the first black player to play for his team, the Brooklyn Dodgers. He chose Jackie Robinson and helped Jackie be successful as a player for the team.

Jackie's success proved that black and white athletes could play together and that black athletes are as good as white athletes. [paragraphs 3, 4, 5]

7. Jackie Robinson broke many barriers during his time playing professional baseball. How does his daughter Sharon continue her father's work?

Suggested answer: Sharon runs a youth program to help young people overcome their problems. Her program is called Breaking Barriers: In Sports, In Life, and it was inspired by her father's sports career and how he broke the "color barrier." [paragraphs 2, 3, 7, 8]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

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- B after
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9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Jackie Robinson made a difference in 1947 by being the first African American to join a major league baseball team.

Who? Jackie Robinson

(did) What? **made a difference**

When? **in 1947**

How? **by being the first African American to join a major league baseball team**

10. ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

Vocabulary word: barrier

Step 1: Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (bar · ri · er)
- b. Teacher says: "This word is barrier. What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "barrier."]

Step 2: Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: "A barrier is something that gets in the way."
- b. Teacher says: "That something that gets in the way can be a wall, a fence, a law, or a policy. In the text, the author refers to the "color barrier." This was the unspoken rule that only white players could play major league baseball. There was a barrier, or a rule in the way, for African American players. When Jackie Robinson joined the Dodgers, he broke through that barrier, and he made it possible for black athletes to be part of professional sports."

- c. Teacher says: "What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "barrier."]

Step 3: Practice the word

Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the first sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.

- 10a.**
1. Many people experience barriers to success, but if they keep trying, they will eventually achieve their goals.
 2. One barrier to understanding what you read is a word that is too hard.
 3. There is a rule stating that we cannot chew gum in school, so this policy serves as a barrier that makes it difficult to chew my favorite bubble gum.
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 5. When someone puts up a fence around his or her pool, he or she creates a barrier.

Step 4: Check for understanding

This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

- 10b.** Which image shows a barrier?



- 11.** If you wanted to block the entrance to your house, would you need some kind of barrier? Why or why not?

Suggested answer: You would probably need some sort of physical structure to block other people from getting access to the entrance.

Suggested Additional Vocabulary: abuse, courage, overcome, salute