TO CHANGE THE GAME, YOU HAVE TO STEP UP TO THE PLATE
You know the name, and his game. But did you know that Jackie Robinson was a civil rights icon? Did you know that he stood up against racism and injustice of all kinds, that he worked to create social and economic opportunities for African Americans, and that he believed all citizens should actively participate in our American democracy?

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson broke through a major barrier in American society when he became the first African American to play for a major league baseball team, the Brooklyn Dodgers. Since baseball was one of the most popular forms of entertainment in 1947, all of society watched as Robinson’s heroism paved the way for other people of color to achieve new heights.

Throughout his life, even before his baseball career, Jackie Robinson stood up for social justice and fair treatment for all. He was married in 1946 and, though he and his beloved wife Rachel continued to face racism at every turn, his activism and the example they set led to positive change that still impacts and inspires us today.

How to Use This Guide

Jackie Robinson believed that “the right of every American to first-class citizenship is the most important issue of our time.” He lived his life—as an athlete, activist, patriot, entrepreneur, and family man—according to that firm belief. One hundred years after Robinson’s birth, social injustice and inequality remain urgent issues. Highlighting major events in his life and the values by which he lived, along with those of his wife, Rachel, who shared and continued his work after his death, this guide is meant to encourage open dialogue about historic and current events by using Robinson’s life and legacy as a starting point.

It is hoped that students, teachers, and parents will explore this guide together, and use the questions at the end to discuss what social justice, equal opportunity, and responsible citizenship mean, and should mean, to you.

We hope you will visit the Jackie Robinson Museum in New York City and online, where you can experience exhibits, artifacts and interactive activities. No matter your age, you will engage in a thrilling first-hand look into the life and lessons of Jackie Robinson, an American hero.
SPRING 1936
Star high school athlete
At John Muir Technical High School, Jackie Robinson earns a place on the annual Pomona Tournament All-Star baseball team; wins the Southland Class A long-jump title with a 23' 1" leap; and captures the junior boys' singles championship in the annual Pacific Coast Negro Tennis Tournament.

FEB 1, 1937
Pasadena Junior College
Jackie Robinson enrolls in Pasadena Junior College, where he continues to be a star athlete.

FEB 15, 1939
Enrolling at UCLA
While at UCLA, Jackie Robinson excels and letters in football, basketball, track, and baseball, still the only athlete in UCLA’s history to have lettered in four sports. He leaves school in his senior year to help his mother support the family and secures a job as Assistant Athletic Director at the National Youth Administration.

JAN 31, 1919
Jackie Robinson is born
Jack Roosevelt Robinson is born to Jerry and Mallie Robinson in Cairo, Georgia.

JUN 1, 1920
Move to Pasadena, California
After a journey that began on May 21, 1920, Mallie Robinson and her five children, including one-year-old Jackie, arrive in Pasadena.

JUL 19, 1922
Rachel Isum is born
Jackie’s future wife, Rachel, is born to Charles and Zelle Isum in Los Angeles, California.

FEB 1, 1938
Reverend Karl Downs
Reverend Downs, an activist preacher, moves to Pasadena where he meets Robinson and mentors him during adolescence, becoming a key figure in Robinson’s life.

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SEP 1, 1940
Jackie Robinson & Rachel Isum meet
The two are introduced by Ray Bartlett on the UCLA campus, when Jackie is a senior and Rachel is a freshman.

APR 3, 1942
Jackie is drafted into the Army
Drafted into the segregated United States Army, Jackie Robinson befriends prizefighter Joe Louis. At Fort Riley, they work together to challenge the Army to include African-American soldiers in Officer Candidate School (OCS), after which Robinson is accepted into OCS and commissioned a second lieutenant.

AUG 2, 1944
Jackie is arrested, and later acquitted
Arrested by military police at Fort Hood, Texas, for sitting in the front of an Army bus next to a fair-skinned black woman who was thought to be white, Jackie Robinson defended himself against the court martial and was found not guilty of all charges. He was honorably discharged in 1944 after an ankle injury.

SPRING 1945
Joining the Monarchs
Jackie Robinson joins the Kansas City Monarchs baseball team, a Negro Leagues team.

JUN 1, 1945
Rachel Isum graduates from UCLA
Rachel Isum graduates with honors from UCLA with a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing.

OCT 23, 1945
The Montreal Royals
Branch Rickey, the president and general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team, signs Jackie Robinson to play with the Royals, the Brooklyn Dodgers’ farm team. Rickey learned about Robinson’s ability from baseball scouts and Wendell Smith, an African-American sports reporter for the Pittsburgh Courier.

FEB 10, 1946
Jackie Robinson and Rachel Isum marry
The two are married by Reverend Downs in Los Angeles.
NOV 18, 1946
Jackie Jr. is born
Jack Roosevelt Robinson, Jr., the first child of Rachel and Jackie Robinson, is born.

OCT 4, 1946
Little World Series
The Montreal Royals win the Little World Series at the end of Jackie Robinson’s debut year in professional baseball.

APR 15, 1947
Breaking the color barrier
After signing a contract five days earlier, Jackie Robinson takes first base on Ebbets Field to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers, becoming the first African American in modern baseball history to play for a major league baseball team.

SEP 26, 1947
Rookie of the Year
Sporting News awards Jackie Robinson the first-ever “Rookie of the Year Award,” which is renamed the “Jackie Robinson Rookie of the Year Award” in 1987.

JUL 12, 1949
All-Star Game
Jackie Robinson is the National League’s starting second baseman in the MLB All-Star game, the first to feature African-American players. Other African Americans who played that year were his Dodgers teammates, catcher Roy Campanella and pitcher Don Newcombe, and the American League’s first African-American player, Larry Doby, who played for the Cleveland Indians.

OCT 16, 1948
YMCA in Harlem
After concluding their barnstorming tour, Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella report for duty as coaches and counselors in the Boy’s Work Department of the Harlem YMCA in New York City.

By the end of his rookie year as a Brooklyn Dodger, Jackie Robinson had 12 home runs, a .297 batting average, and led the league in steals, with 29. He distinguished himself throughout his decade-long career, with an impressive .311 career batting average.

At this time, many professional American athletes worked during baseball’s off-season to support their families. Some players earned money during “barnstorming” tours of half-seasons traveling across the U.S. and sometimes Central America, playing exhibition games.

The Little World Series was the championship game played between the two best minor league baseball teams.
MAY 21, 1951
Death threat
Arriving at a hotel in Cincinnati, Jackie Robinson finds two FBI agents waiting for him because of a letter containing a death threat against him—just one of a vast number of racist actions he faced on a daily basis. With the support of his teammates, Robinson decides to play that day anyway.

FEB 4, 1952
Broadcast career
WNBC and WNBT announce that they have signed Jackie Robinson as Director of Community Activities, to deliver commentary on air and to supervise the development of youth programs in collaboration with the Police Athletic League (PAL), the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), the Boy Scouts, the YMCA, and the YMHA.

MAY 14, 1952
David Robinson is born
David, the youngest child of Rachel and Jackie Robinson, is born.

FALL 1949
Named National League MVP
Jackie Robinson is named the NL’s Most Valuable Player.

JUL 18, 1949
House Un-American Activities Committee testimony
Jackie Robinson testifies before the U.S. House of Representatives’ Un-American Activities Committee on whether African-American soldiers should fight in the military against communist countries. Robinson publicly disagrees with Paul Robeson, the renowned African-American concert artist, actor and star athlete, who is against fighting the communists to defend the United States government and its policies, which discriminate against people of color.

JAN 13, 1950
Sharon Robinson is born
Sharon Annetta Robinson, the second child and only daughter of Rachel and Jackie Robinson, is born.

JAN 13, 1950
“Don’t let him fool you. What he came up against, and what we all came up against, was very, very rough.”
— RACHEL ROBINSON

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“Jack and I finally felt connected to something larger than [our] struggles in baseball, [and were] more intensely connected to the destiny of our race.”

– RACHEL ROBINSON, ON THE LANDMARK 1954 BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION SUPREME COURT DECISION

The 1954 landmark Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education continues to positively impact all of society. The justices ruled unanimously that “racial segregation of children in public schools is unconstitutional.” The Brown decision was a pivotal moment in the Civil Rights Movement.

OCT 1956

Brooklyn Dodgers Goodwill Tour

Jackie and Rachel Robinson visit Japan with the Brooklyn Dodgers for a twenty-game tour to support United States diplomatic and cultural relations after World War II.

SEP 28, 1955

“He’s safe!”

Jackie Robinson steals home plate in game one of the 1955 World Series, creating great team momentum. The Brooklyn Dodgers win the series in seven games, earning the Dodgers their first World Championship.

JAN 14, 1957

Career change

The Brooklyn Dodgers trade Jackie Robinson to the New York Giants, but Robinson had already decided to retire from baseball and publicly announces that he will become Vice President of Personnel Relations for the Chuck Feeney’s fortune. While there, Robinson chairs the NAACP’s Fight for Freedom Fund, which raises money to fight for equal rights for people of color, and he convinces the company to support those efforts.

DEC 8, 1956

Spingarn Medal

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) announces that Jackie Robinson will receive its highest honor, the Spingarn Medal, given annually to an African American whose achievements brought credit to the race.

The NAACP is a civil rights organization founded in 1909 to advance equal rights and justice for African Americans. It remains an active and important organization.

JAN 14, 1957

Fundraising for Dr. King

In addition to raising funds for the NAACP, Jackie Robinson travels extensively in 1957 to raise funds for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) organization, which defends equal rights for people of color.

Formation in 1957 after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, SCLC’s mission was to end all forms of oppression. Today, the organization remains focused on economic justice and civil rights for people of color.

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JAN 23, 1962

Robinson becomes the first African American inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

JAN 1, 1962

Jackie as a visionary

In New York’s African-American weekly publication, Amsterdam News, Robinson starts a column called “Home Plate,” which focuses on politics and civil rights. In 1962, he is also elected to the NAACP’s Board of Directors.

1962

Voter registration

In Decatur, Georgia, and Harlem (New York City), Jackie Robinson serves as a central figure in voter registration rallies and efforts.

JUN 30, 1963

Jazz for a Cause

Jackie and Rachel Robinson host a jazz concert at their home in Stamford, Connecticut, to raise bail money to help civil rights activists who are jailed in the South. The event continues and supports important causes annually until 2001.

OCT 17, 1957

Little Rock 9

With the situation in Little Rock far from resolved, Jackie Robinson joins members of the NAACP in New York for a telephone conversation with Daisy Bates and seven of the nine children who had integrated Central High, to provide encouragement for their efforts.

FALL 1960

President Nixon and Dr. King

To campaign for Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon, Jackie Robinson takes a leave of absence from Chock Full o’Nuts until the presidential election in November. When a hostile judge in DeKalb County, Georgia sentences Dr. King to four months in jail, Robinson appeals to the Nixon campaign for a direct show of support for the civil rights leader. Nixon refuses. Robinson responds, saying, “Nixon doesn’t deserve to win.”

MAY 1961

Rachel Robinson earns a master’s degree

Graduating from New York University (NYU) with a master’s degree in psychiatric nursing, Rachel Robinson later becomes Head of Psychiatric Nursing at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

“HE WAS A FREEDOM RIDER BEFORE THERE WERE FREEDOM RIDES.”

– THE REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The Freedom Rides in the United States occurred between May 4 and December 10, 1961. African-American and white civil rights activists took bus trips together through southern states such as Alabama and South Carolina to protest segregated bus terminals.

JAN 25, 1962

Hall of Fame induction

Robinson becomes the first African American inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

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AUG 28, 1963
1963 March on Washington

The Robinson family attends the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” at which Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gives his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Jackie Robinson and Dr. King are friends, despite disagreeing over some issues, such as the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War.

One of many marches that Jackie and his family joined, the 1963 March on Washington, D.C. saw 250,000 people gather in front of the Lincoln Memorial to shed light on limited job opportunities and other social inequities faced by African Americans. Conceived of by civil rights activists A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, and organized with the great support of African-American men and women across the country, it was where Dr. King shared his “I Have a Dream” speech.

FEB 28, 1964
Nelson Rockefeller

Jackie Robinson resigns from Chock full o’ Nuts to join Nelson Rockefeller’s presidential campaign as one of six deputy national directors.

1965
Malcolm X

Jackie Robinson and Malcolm X publicly denounce each other’s tactics on gaining equality for African Americans. Robinson believed in integration, while Malcolm X was more of a segregationist at the time. Nonetheless, the men maintain great respect for each other.

FEB 20, 1965
Freedom National Bank

Co-founded by Jackie Robinson, the Freedom National Bank opens; it would become the largest black-owned and operated bank in New York State.

1965
Rachel Robinson

as Director of Nursing

Rachel Robinson becomes Director of Nursing for the state mental health center in New Haven, Connecticut, and an Assistant Professor at the Yale University School of Nursing.

1965
National Conference of Christians and Jews

Jackie serves as National Chairman of the National Conference of Christians and Jews’ Brotherhood Week.

The National Conference of Christians and Jews was founded in 1927 to promote harmony between groups separated by race and religion.

FEB 1, 1968
Special Assistant to Governor Rockefeller

Jackie Robinson is appointed by New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller to the position of Special Assistant for Community Affairs.

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MAY 1973
Jackie Robinson Foundation (JRF)
Rachel Robinson, along with founding board members Martin Edelman, Charles Williams and Franklin Williams, honors her husband’s memory by establishing the Jackie Robinson Foundation to provide four-year scholarships, hands-on mentoring, and leadership development opportunities to talented college students with limited financial resources. Having disbursed over $85 million in scholarships and direct program services which include job placement, study abroad opportunities and graduate school fellowships, JRF continues to address the achievement gap in higher education through its celebrated scholarship program.

MAR 26, 1984
Jackie Robinson post stamp
The U.S. Postal Service first commemorates Jackie Robinson with a stamp in 1982, then issues additional stamps honoring his life in 1999, 2000, and 2013.

APR 15, 1987
Number 42 is retired throughout baseball
The nation, led by President Bill Clinton, celebrates the 50th anniversary of Jackie Robinson’s historic entry into baseball in an on-field ceremony with Rachel Robinson, President Clinton and MLB Commissioner Allan “Bud” Selig. MLB also honors Robinson by retiring his number, 42, throughout Major League Baseball, the only number in baseball history to have been retired across the league. The number 42 is displayed on the stadium wall of every major league ball park in the United States.

1982

WAR ON DRUGS
Jackie Robinson and Jackie, Jr. appear together on a program about drug abuse sponsored by the New York State Narcotics Addiction Control Commission for the Scotia-Glenville school district. Jackie, Jr. had become addicted to drugs as a soldier during the Vietnam War.

DEC 1, 1972
Jackie Robinson Construction Corporation
Rachel Robinson becomes president of the Jackie Robinson Construction Corporation that she and her husband founded and renames it the Jackie Robinson Development Corporation. The company builds 1,600 low-to-moderate income housing units.

MAR 1, 1971
War on drugs
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MAR 1, 1971
Jackie Robinson, Jr. dies
At 24 years old, Jackie, Jr. dies in a car accident while driving home from his job as Assistant Regional Director of Daytop, Inc, a drug rehabilitation center in Seymour, Connecticut.

OCT 24, 1972
Jackie Robinson passes away
With his wife Rachel present, Jack Roosevelt Robinson dies of a heart attack at his home in Stamford, Connecticut. He is 53 years old.

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The Jackie Robinson Museum opening

The Jackie Robinson Museum commemorates the life and legacy of this American hero by exploring his pioneering baseball career, his commitment to service, and his work on behalf of “first-class citizenship” for all Americans.

The Congressional Gold Medal honor

The Congressional Gold Medal, the nation’s highest civilian award bestowed by Congress, is awarded posthumously to Jackie Robinson, President George W. Bush and Congress present the Congressional Gold Medal (made of solid, 18 karat gold) to Rachel during a ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda on March 2, 2005.

“42” movie premieres

Legendary Pictures and Warner Bros. premiere the motion picture “42” in Los Angeles, California. The film stars Chadwick Boseman (known also for portraying James Brown, Thurgood Marshall, and Marvel Studios’ Black Panther on screen) and acclaimed veteran actor Harrison Ford (Star Wars, Indiana Jones, etc.), and depicts Robinson’s time in the minor leagues and first year with the Brooklyn Dodgers. “42” is a box office success, particularly in the United States and Japan.

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The U.S. Mint commemorates Jackie Robinson’s life by issuing silver $1 and gold $5 coins bearing his image. He is the first African American featured on a U.S. gold coin.

JOIN US AND BE INSPIRED.

Visit us at jackierobinsonmuseum.org throughout the year for hours, directions, and more information.

MAY 13, 1997

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2019

JRF today

The Jackie Robinson Foundation continues to honor the memory of its namesake through its celebrated college and graduate school scholarship programs, and with the building of the Jackie Robinson Museum in New York City. JRF Founder Rachel Robinson, at 97 years old, remains an active member of the board of directors.

2020

The Jackie Robinson Museum opening

The Jackie Robinson Museum commemorates the life and legacy of this American hero by exploring his pioneering baseball career, his commitment to service, and his work on behalf of “first-class citizenship” for all Americans.
Jackie Robinson. “The right of every American to first-class citizenship is the most important issue of our time.” What time was he referring to? What did he mean by “first-class citizenship?” What does “first-class citizenship” mean to him and all Americans share this right equally?

Jackie Robinson’s mother taught him the value of perseverance and using one’s resources and talents to have a positive impact on others. What major events of his life demonstrate that he took his mother’s advice seriously? What leadership skills do you have that you think he meant? Identify milestones and other events in his life that support his belief in the use of non-violent tactics and his allies and opponents in these views?

In what areas of our society did Jackie Robinson have a positive impact that we benefit from today?

Questions for Discussion

What values did Jackie Robinson embrace and live by that made him the leader he was? What leadership skills do you think he used by Jackie and Rachel Robinson and their children during the days leading up to and after the Civil Rights Movement? Which tactics do you believe were most effective and why?

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