

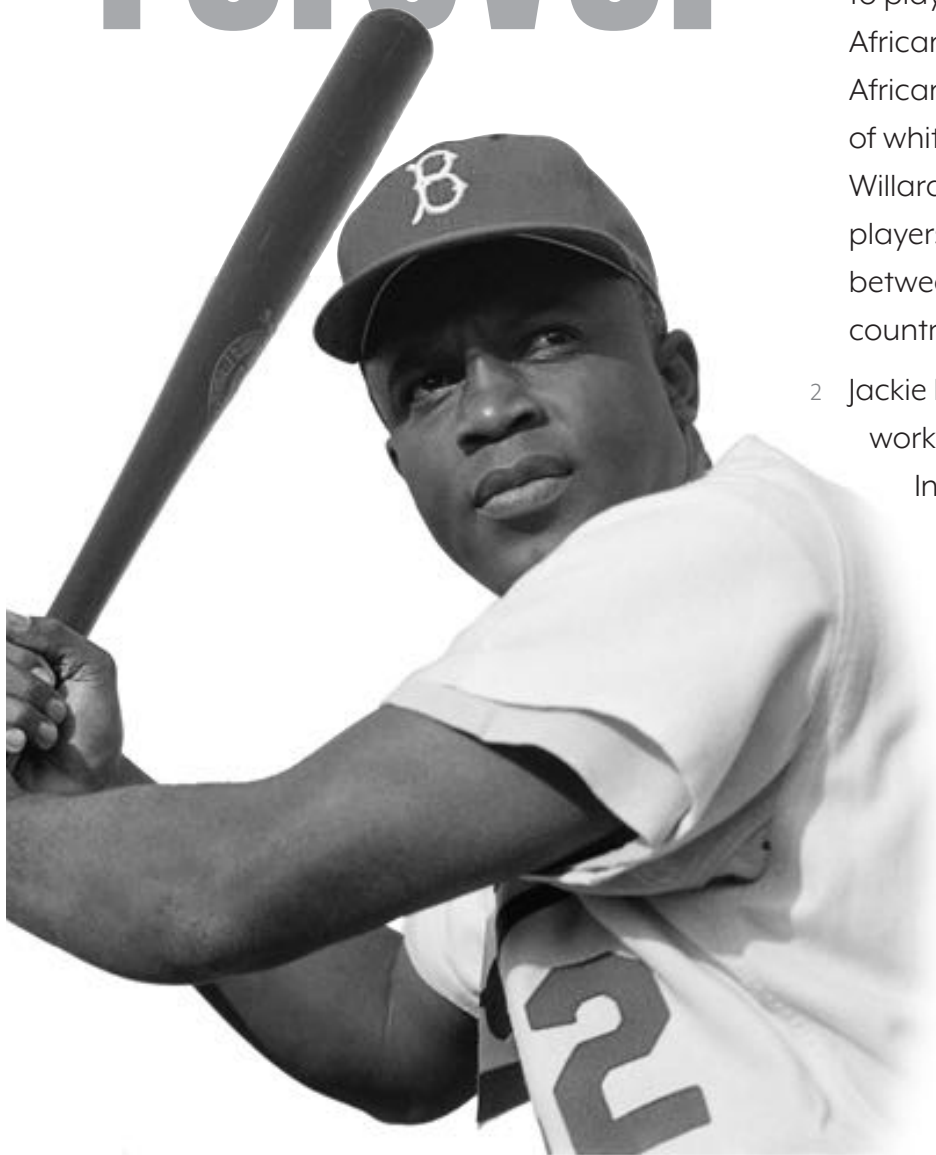
# Changing the Game Forever

By Michèle Dufresne

- 1 The game of baseball is an important part of American history. Many people do not know that the game of baseball played a key role in civil rights in America. For a long time, African Americans were not allowed to play professional baseball except in African American leagues. Then some African Americans became members of white teams. Jackie Robinson and Willard Brown are two of these baseball players. They helped break down walls between races, and they changed the country forever.

- 2 Jackie Robinson grew up poor, but he worked hard in school and at sports.

In college he was a star football and basketball player and a champion long jumper. He only began to play professional baseball later in life, but it was clear right away that he was very good. In 1947 Jackie was asked to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers. The Dodgers were an all-white team in an all-white league. Even though he knew it would be difficult, he decided to join the team.





- 3 During his first two years on the Dodgers, Jackie endured many insults, hate mail, and even death threats because of the color of his skin. It was hard for him to ignore this treatment, but he made a point to never fight back. Soon people admired him for how he behaved both on and off the baseball field. Jackie played baseball for ten years.
- 4 Jackie helped his team win six World Series. His success with the Dodgers encouraged other sports teams to include black players. As he became more popular, he began to speak out against segregation—the laws in parts of the country that treated black people differently from white people. Besides sports teams, there were buses, hotels, and even water fountains reserved for white people only. Jackie asked other baseball teams to work together to help put an end to these rules. His work opened the door for many black athletes around the country to play professional sports.
- 5 Willard Brown made history when he became the first African American player in the American League to hit a home run. Willard played for ten years in an all-black league, where he quickly became well known for his powerful hitting. He was even given the nickname “Home Run” Brown.
- 6 Some people called Willard a “Sunday player,” meaning someone who played his best only on Sundays, when the stands were full of fans. But a number of all-white teams noticed his hitting ability, and in 1947 the St. Louis Browns offered him a spot as an outfielder. This was just a few months after Jackie Robinson joined the Dodgers. Willard and another black player, Hank Thompson, became the second and third black players to join the American League.
- 7 Willard did not have an easy time on his new team. Fans called him nasty names and threw things at him on the field. He was called names by players from other teams and even some of his own teammates. When he hit his famous home run, a teammate smashed the bat out of anger.
- 8 This treatment upset Willard. He didn’t play as well as he could have. After playing only 21 major-league games, he left the team and returned to play with his all-black team.
- 9 Jackie Robinson and Willard Brown paved the way for more African American baseball players to join the professional baseball leagues. They changed the game forever but, more importantly, they changed how people felt about black and white people playing together. Both of these outstanding players are now in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

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## Test Questions

*Circle the correct answer.*

**1) This question has two parts. First answer Part A, then answer Part B.**

**Part A: Which character trait best describes Jackie Robinson?**

- a) cowardly
- b) courageous
- c) honest
- d) disadvantaged

**Part B: Which of the following statements provides the evidence for your answer choice in Part A?**

- a) Jackie Robinson was an incredible athlete who helped his team win six World Series.
- b) Jackie Robinson was a good student who grew up poor.
- c) Jackie Robinson joined an all-white team and eventually spoke out against segregation.
- d) Jackie Robinson was afraid to play baseball because he played only football and basketball.

**2) Why did Jackie Robinson feel joining the professional baseball team might be difficult?**

- a) He didn't play baseball in college and felt he wasn't good enough.
- b) He grew up poor and didn't have money to play baseball.
- c) He was known as a national long jumper.
- d) He would be a pioneer in an all-white baseball league.

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## Test Questions (continued)

3) What does the author mean by the word *endured* as it is used below?

During his first two years on the Dodgers, Jackie **endured** many insults, hate mail, and even death threats because of the color of his skin. It was hard for him to ignore this treatment, but he made a point to never fight back. Soon people admired him for how he behaved both on and off the baseball field. Jackie played baseball for ten years.

- a) delivered
- b) enjoyed
- c) withstood
- d) encouraged

4) How were the experiences of Jackie Robinson and Willard Brown different?

- a) Jackie Robinson was treated unfairly by the fans, and Willard Brown was not.
- b) Jackie Robinson was named into the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and Willard Brown was not.
- c) Jackie Robinson paved the way for African American baseball players, and Willard Brown did not.
- d) Jackie Robinson remained in an all-white league, and Willard Brown did not.

5) What was the most important effect of Robinson's and Brown's success as baseball players?

- a) The rules of segregation were changed.
- b) The rules of the game of baseball remained the same.
- c) The rules of the game of baseball were changed.
- d) The rules of segregation remained the same.