DEAR EDUCATOR

Welcome to the study guide for the screening of 42 that you and your students will be attending as part of BAM Education’s Civil Rights in Cinema series. This stirring film firmly situates the true story of baseball player Jackie Robinson in historical and social context. In 1947, Jim Crow ruled the South, and segregation was a social reality as far north as Brooklyn. This sensitive portrait of a political trailblazer recognizes Robinson’s brave actions as one of the earliest victories of the civil rights movement.

YOUR VISIT TO BAM

The BAM program includes this study guide, a pre-performance workshop in your classroom led by a BAM teaching artist, and the screening and discussion in the BAM Rose Cinemas.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to connect to the Common Core State Standards with relevant information and activities; to reinforce and encourage critical thinking and analytical skills; and to provide the tools and background information necessary for an engaging and inspiring experience at BAM. Please use these materials and enrichment activities to engage students before or after the show.
After having fought valiantly for their country during World War II, African-American soldiers returned to a country that had retained its rampant bigotry, prejudice, and segregation, horrors that had existed since the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of Jim Crow. Jobs were scarce for returning black veterans, and opportunities available to white soldiers coming back from the war were institutionally denied to African Americans.

Jackie Robinson was one of those black veterans; although he was never deployed overseas to fight, he received an honorable discharge in November 1944. After leaving the army, he faced the same bigotry and prejudice as the black soldiers returning from combat. And in spite of the fact that Robinson was an accomplished athlete, no one would hire him, even as a high school coach, because of the color of his skin. Desperate to support his mother and eventual wife, Rachel, he joined baseball’s Negro Leagues.

Baseball began in 1800s, and would eventually become the country’s national pastime. African Americans had their own teams, which eventually formed into the Negro Leagues. Initially, there were some African Americans in the white International League—that is until 1887 when the league established a gentlemen’s agreement to prohibit hiring African-American players, initiating an impenetrable color divide that lasted over 60 years. At the turn of the 20th century, some major league baseball owners and managers tried to pass off African Americans as Hispanic or Native American in order to hire them.

Jackie Robinson’s only option was to play in the Negro Leagues, and he joined the Kansas City Monarchs. It was a rough life, full of weary travel from one small town to another. The pay was low and irregular. Robinson describes it as a “miserable way to make a buck... Some of the crummy eating joints would not serve us at all. You could never sit down to a relaxed meal. You were lucky if they magnanimously permitted you to carry out some greasy hamburgers in a paper bag... You ate onboard the team bus or on the road.”

Explore the Negro Leagues Museum and design a webpage aimed at attracting teenagers to the site to discover the Negro Leagues’ significance in American baseball history.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5** Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
THE NOBLE EXPERIMENT

Branch Rickey, general manager, president, and part-owner of the Dodgers organization, was preparing for what would soon be dubbed the “Noble Experiment.” Rickey had always felt racism was wrong and, as a deeply religious man, he believed that all men were created equal. Decades earlier, as coach for the Ohio Wesleyan College team, a hotel manager refused to give an African-American team member a room. Rickey allowed the young athlete to room with him. He remembered the experience later:

“He sat on that cot and was silent for a long time. Then he began to cry, tears he couldn’t hold back. His whole body shook with emotion…He began tearing at one hand with the other—just as if he were trying to scratch the skin off his hands with his fingernails. I was alarmed and asked him what he was trying to do…”It’s my hands…They’re black. If only they were white, I’d be as good as anybody then, wouldn’t I Mr. Rickey?”

—Branch Rickey

When Rickey joined the Brooklyn Dodgers organization, he was determined to desegregate the major leagues. Responsible for keeping his team afloat, he was also hoping to increase revenue by bringing in a large new fan base of African Americans to major league games.

Rickey felt Jackie Robinson would attract large numbers of African-American baseball fans. Although a tad old at 26, Robinson unceasingly strove to be a superlative player, and was fiercely competitive. This started in his youth when Jackie felt he had to prove that he was as good as anyone in the white community. Robinson also had the advantage of already having played on integrated teams in college, where he’d been the first athlete in the school’s history to “letter” in four separate sports. Jackie was educated, spoke intelligently, did not drink liquor, and was planning to marry and begin a family.

The Proposal & Deal-Breaker

After laying out his proposal at their first meeting, Rickey had to make absolutely sure he had the right man. He knew that the only way they’d succeed was if Robinson would always “turn the other cheek”—to never react, respond, or strike back in any way.

Jackie Robinson always fought injustice, so this was, of course, a difficult decision. Robinson explains, “Since back to the age of eight when a little neighbor girl called me a nigger, I had believed in payback, retaliation. The most luxurious possession, the richest treasure anybody has, is his personal dignity.”

Robinson had never tolerated injustice. As a kid in an all-white neighborhood, he threw rocks at neighbors who harassed him, and was jailed as a teen for a traffic disagreement with a white driver. When he was a second lieutenant, the Army court-martialed Robinson for stridently refusing a bus driver’s orders to move to the back of the bus, which Robinson knew violated army regulations. The Army eventually acquitted Jackie when the case started to draw too much outside attention.

Knowing Robinson’s innate temperament to fight discrimination head on, Rickey role-played, assaulting Robinson with every form of vicious insult imaginable to give him a taste of how bad it would be. Robinson recalls, he had asked, “Mr. Rickey, are you looking for a Negro who is afraid to fight back?” I never will forget the way he exploded. ‘Robinson, I’m looking for a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back.”

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

In-class discussion questions

Why Jackie Robinson? If you’d been Rickey, what kind of ball player would you have been looking for as a partner in this risky venture? Does the fact that he also had a financial motive detract from his decision to break the color line?

What do managers look for in hiring star players today? Is having a squeaky clean character always a prerequisite? Why do you think it should or shouldn't be? Should there be an agreed upon standard of behavior for players, on and off the field, and if so, what should it be?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
JACKIE ROBINSON MAKES HISTORY

ENRHICHMENT ACTIVITY

In-class discussion questions

What issues did Jackie have to consider before accepting an offer to join a team in the all-white Major Leagues? What if he didn't play well or fought with white players if they taunted him? Then again, he could make history; he would be the first African American in the 20th Century to play major league baseball. Robinson also needed a steady income, which would be far more than in the Negro League, to marry and support his family.

What would you have done in Jackie's situation? Would you have taken the same risk? What single factor would have swayed you one way or another?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.c Propose conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

Warm Up

Robinson joined Branch's Dodgers, becoming what Rachel Robinson called the "daring pair." Rickey started Robinson with the Dodgers' minor league team, the Montreal Royals in 1946, and he did superbly, helping the team win the Little World Series. Robinson finished the year as the International League batting champion, with Sporting News calling him the "Colored Comet." So far, so good.

The Big Debut

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson stepped out before a crowd of some 26,600 spectators as the first African American major league player in the 20th century. This single act shattered the six-decades old "gentlemen's agreement" to keep baseball strictly segregated, thus making history.

ENRHICHMENT ACTIVITY

Telling History with Images: Photojournalism

Use images to instantly relay the importance of Robinson's historic first major league game. Look at photographs in today's news media that inspire you. Now, roughly sketch out your "photos." Finally, look for archival photos of Robinson in 1947 to see if you can get any more ideas to further intensify your images.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

African American Support

"In a very real sense, black people helped make the experiment succeed...Suppressed and repressed for so many years, they needed a victorious black man as a symbol... (But) it was one thing for me out there on the playing field to be able to keep my cool... It was another for all those black people sitting in the stands to keep from overreacting when they sensed a racial slur or an unjust decision. They could have blown the whole bit to hell by acting belligerently and touching off a race riot. That would have been all the bigots needed to set back the cause of progress of black men in sports another hundred years."

—Jackie Robinson, I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson

ENRHICHMENT ACTIVITY

Wendell Smith: Standing Right By Jackie

Read about Wendell Smith, the remarkable African-American sports writer for the influential black paper The Pittsburgh Courier who covered Robinson extensively that first season. In fact, he'd been the one to recommend Robinson to Rickey. He traveled, ate, and lodged with Robinson, experiencing the same rabid prejudice right along with him. Why do so few people know about this unsung hero of Robinson's success and his contribution to the larger African-American struggle? Prepare a proposal for Brooklyn's City Council advocating for a statue honoring Robinson and Wendell's relationship, as was done for Robinson and Pee Wee Reese.

Hank Aaron's Story: Breaking Down Barriers

Read Hank Aaron's story about how as a kid seeing Robinson play turned his life around. Who are the well-known people of any minority today breaking into fields normally not open to their race or gender? Are they sharing their experience to inspire others like them? Are there any that excite you to think about broad horizons?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.c Propose conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
Robinson was hardly welcomed with open arms. He felt like a lonely outcast. Some of his teammates signed a petition that threatened to strike if Robinson joined. Rickey quashed the rebellion telling them they were welcome to quit if they didn’t like it. Hostile opposing coaches and players, spurred on by enraged spectators, shouted venomous racial remarks and threw trash at Robinson, trying to break his concentration.

There was physical abuse too. Pitchers intentionally threw hard balls directly at Robinson’s head; base runners deliberately slid into him with the spikes on the sole of their shoes, gashing his ankle or thigh and knocking him down. Astonishingly, every single time you see Robinson grit his teeth and hold fast to his promise.

Off the field was no better; people “welcomed” Robinson to town with death threats in capitalized bold print.

“The hate mail piled up. There were threats against me and my family and even out-and-out attempts at physical harm to me.” — Jackie Robinson

A few Dodgers had refused to sign the petition against Robinson. Pee Wee Reese, a southerner, said, “It didn’t matter to me whether he was black or green... He had a right to be there, too.” A statue commemorates an oft-mentioned moment when Reese came out and stood by Robinson throwing an arm around him in front of the jeering crowd and opposing team members. The two became close friends to the end of their lives.

Robinson was pushed to the very edge when playing the Philadelphia Phillies:

“Hate poured out of their dugout: ‘Hey nigger, why don’t you go back to the cotton field where you belong? They’re waiting for you in the jungles, black boy! Hey, snowflake, which of those white boys’ wives are you dating tonight?’ I felt tortured and I tried just to play ball and ignore insults. But it was really getting to me. What did the Phillies want from me? What, indeed, did Mr. Rickey expect of me? I was, after all, a human being. What was I doing here turning the other cheek as though I weren’t a man.”

— Jackie Robinson, I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson

Where would you draw the line? If people endlessly bombarded you with malicious remarks could you always turn the other cheek? What’s tolerable for you and what’s just not? What do you think Robinson might say to you about your stance? Robinson admitted that sometimes after a particularly bad round of humiliations he’d become depressed and wondered if it was all worthwhile.

Jackie Robinson wasn’t the first baseball player to face racial hatred. Watch the short piece about Hank Greenberg, the first Jew to break into the major leagues in 1933, when anti-Semitism was rampant throughout the country. Hank’s final season overlapped with Robinson’s first.
THE NOBLE EXPERIMENT GAINS STEAM

ROBINSON WINS HIS TEAMMATES ONE BY ONE

Things had looked bleak in the beginning of the season. Robinson had told his teammates, “I’m not concerned with your liking or disliking me. All I ask is that you respect me as a human being.”

But as time went by, the tenor of the team changed. Robinson proved himself a magnificent ball player, excelling in the outfield, second base, batting, and as runner, sliding safely into a base after a hit or daringly stealing them. His teammates grew to respect Robinson’s unwavering restraint regardless of the endless tirades from the opposing team, spectators, and the restaurants and hotels that refused to serve him. Robinson points out the irony: “I think that the more people continued to ride me, it just brought us closer together.” The Dodgers became a mighty team that won the National League pennant and World Series in 1955.

“I started the season as a lonely man, often feeling like a black Don Quixote tilting at a lot of white windmills. I ended it feeling like a member of a solid team.”
—Jackie Robinson, I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson

Listen to Jackie Robinson on racial taunts and the changing of the tide with Pee Wee Reese, Robinson, and Rachel Robinson.

Robinson’s grand success opened the door for African-American players, and by 1952 150 of them were in the major or minor leagues. The Negro Leagues were eventually dismantled, as its best players and fans crossed over to the majors and minors. Effa Manley, the co-owner of the Negro League Eagles, established the precedent that the major leagues should compensate the Negro League teams when they lured away their players. Do you agree with her? How does this compare to what happens today when players are hired from a minor league team to the major league for a different team?

After two years of spectacular forbearance, Branch and Robinson agreed he no longer had to turn the other cheek. Robinson stood up often, protesting umpires’ calls, hotels that refused to let him stay with his teammates, and teams that refused to hire African-American players.

THE POWER OF THE BUCK

Robinson noted how important it was that their daring endeavor was a financial success as well. “Black people...came to sit in a hostile audience in unprecedented numbers to make the turnstiles hum... Money is America’s God, and business people can dig black power if it coincides with green power, so these fans were important to the success of Mr. Rickey’s ‘Noble Experiment.’”

Would the “Noble Experiment” have been successful if attendance hadn’t risen dramatically, thus not bringing in the big bucks Rickey was banking on?

A SIGN OF SUCCESS: ROBINSON PERMEATES AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

Jackie, Jackie everywhere! Jackie Robinson captured the nation’s imagination and even ended up on the front of a Wheaties cereal box. He was heard on countless radio shows, and written about in innumerable magazine and newspaper articles covering his games. There was even a Jackie Robinson comic book.

He also inspired a number of songs, by far the most popular being, “Did You See Jackie Robinson Hit That Ball?, which skyrocketed to 13 on the music charts in 1949.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Celebrity Culture

How do you feel about today’s celebrities making immensely lucrative deals with companies that use their fame to sell their products or services? Compare the number of famous artists and athletes who endorse products versus those who use their renown to support a social cause. Do you think notable people should be morally obligated to use their prominence to do good for society?

MOVING ON

Jackie Robinson retired from the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1956. Branch Rickey, Robinson’s close comrade-in-arms, had left six years earlier, and Robinson had a rough relationship with the new management. He also knew they were trading him to the Giants, and resented being “move[d] around like a used car.” The Giants offered what at the time was an enormous salary of $60,000—but Robinson was resolute. He’d had enough. It was time to move on.
JACKIE ROBINSON, CHAMPION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE & CIVIL RIGHTS

“The right of every American to first-class citizenship is the most important issue of our time.” —Jackie Robinson

ON TO THE BROADER STAGE

Jackie and his wife Rachel knew that his on-field success had helped raise the growing consciousness of equal rights for African Americans. But Rachel says they wanted to do “something that was larger than the struggles in baseball and more intensely connected to the destiny of our race.”

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND CIVIL RIGHTS


Robinson joined the civil rights movement in full force, ceaselessly making a tangible difference for African-American justice and equality both near to home and on the broader national arena.

CHOCK FULL O’ NUTS VICE PRESIDENT—1957 TO 1964

Listen to Rachel discuss Jackie’s job at Chock Full O’ Nuts, the immensely popular restaurant chain and coffee brand, which had been courting Robinson even before he announced his retirement. Robinson became the first African-American vice president and was responsible for employees under management level, the vast majority of whom were African American. Robinson improved their wages and benefits, training, and made it easier to move up job levels. The Chock Full O’ Nuts founder and owner didn’t want Robinson as some mere celebrity figurehead, and gave him both the power and authority to make change. Praising Robinson’s work he said, “I’m proud, very proud to have you on my team.”

“Respect” Aretha Franklin: The Queen of Soul

Listen to the powerful rhythms and lyrics of Aretha Franklin’s 1967 hit song “Respect.” that led her to be called the Queen of Soul. Hear the African-American reporter describe the changing meaning of the song.

Now, identify a song that means a lot to you because of where you are in your life today and speculate how you might feel about it 15 years from now.

Political Activism

Hear Rachel talk about Jackie’s work with what is now the oldest and largest civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)—speaking out on issues, raising money, and serving on the executive board. Robinson worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other prominent civil rights leaders, and tirelessly with church and community groups. Rachel also speaks about how Jackie used his fame and social standing to unhesitatingly write letters, which never minced words, to Presidents and other national politicians to take action on civil rights issues.

Advocate on the Political Front

Read the pointed letters Robinson wrote to President Eisenhower in 1958, and then 14 years later to the Assistant to President Nixon, Roland Elliot in 1972. How does his tone change from the earlier correspondence to the one at the end of his life? What do they indicate about the changing temper of the civil rights movement and general attitude of African Americans in the country? What words and phrases does Robinson use to create the force and tone of each letter?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy RI.9-10.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy SL.9-10.3 Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

Post-Screening Classroom Discussion

“There I was the black grandson of a slave, the son of a black sharecropper, part of a historic occasion, a symbolic hero to my people…It should have been a glorious moment for me as the stirring words of the national anthem poured from the stand. As I write this twenty years later, I cannot stand and sing the anthem. I cannot salute the flag; I know that I am a black man in a white world. In 1972, in 1947, at my birth in 1919, I know I never had it made.”

—Jackie Robinson, I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson

Why would this man, who broke the color barrier against fantastic odds and went on to become a revered sports hero, feel so dejected?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy SL.9-10.1.c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
The Biopic Movie: 42

Why title the movie simply 42? Maybe it implies that everyone does, or should, immediately associate the number with Robinson’s uniform so there’s no reason to include his name. The film covers the daunting challenges Robinson faced in 1947 as the first African American in the 20th century to play in the major leagues. Living this journey with Robinson, both on and off the field, we get a visceral first-hand sense of the bitter intolerance African Americans faced throughout the country.

Jackie’s wife Rachel, an important activist in her own right, and their children worked for some 30 years to get the film 42 produced. Rachel made suggestions on how to improve the script, and to ensure that the film portrayed what life was like for African Americans at the time. And perhaps most importantly, the family wanted Jackie’s legacy to inspire young people to achieve, which Rachel does through the Jackie Robinson Foundation.

Who plays who in 42? Take a look at History vs. Hollywood to see which actors play the major roles in the Hollywood movie. Then scroll down to learn fascinating information about which events portrayed actually occurred, and which didn’t.

The film 42 is a biopic. What does “bio” mean? It’s an account of an actual person’s life. But unlike a documentary, which must adhere strictly to fact, it has the leeway to include fictionalized scenes, dialogue, and/or play around with sequences of events for artistic purposes (referred to as “artistic license”).

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

The Nuances of Film: Biopics vs. Documentaries

Biopics can use artistic license to present a person in a particular light. Yet, even though documentaries only use true facts, are they purely neutral? Doesn’t the information documentary filmmakers choose to include influence the way we perceive the person? Watch the earlier biopic The Jackie Robinson Story from 1950 starring Robinson himself, and then compare it to the documentary Jackie Robinson. What are the differences and how do they impact how you understand Robinson? Learn how to sketch a storyboard and, as the “director,” create one for an opening scene for a biopic or documentary about someone you admire.

Music for Civil Rights Efforts

Jackie and Rachel loved jazz, and as you can hear, had jazz fundraisers at their home for political causes. Find recordings of the pieces listed on the program at the bottom of the page at the First Jackie Robinson Jazz Concert in 1963, and select which works would have inspired you. Identify two songs you’d use today at a musical fundraiser for a social issue you care about.
**MEDIA**

*The Jackie Robinson Story*

1950 biographical film starring Robinson himself while he was still playing for the Dodgers.

Large Array of Videos with and about Jackie Robinson

Jackie Robinson Mini Biography

Short overview of Jackie Robinson’s life is from his first game that shattered the color barrier to winning the World Series in 1955. His post-baseball work as a civil rights activist is also mentioned.

Jackie Robinson Breaks Barriers

Jackie Robinson Documentary

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

*“Life With Jackie Robinson: American Icon”*

Excellent photographs that capture the dynamism of Jackie Robinsons on the field

Interviews With the Real Pee Wee Reese, Jackie and Rachel Robinson

Interviews with Robinson, his friend and fellow player Pee Wee Reese, his wife Rachel and former Dodger Eddie Stanky. They comment on the discrimination Robinson endured as the first black man to play Major League Baseball.

42 Featurette With the Real Rachel Robinson

This 42 featurette includes Rachel Robinson interview segments as well as comments from director Brian Helgeland and cast. Famed baseball player Hank Aaron also speaks.

**WEBSITES**

*An Educational Lifetime Tour: The Robinson Initiative Records at University of Massachusetts*

This quality collection includes administrative records, correspondence, photographs, videotapes, audio-tapes, and newspaper clippings.

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

*“Beyond the Playing Field: Jackie Robinson, Civil Rights Advocate”*

Primary source documents of Jackie Robinson’s letters to various presidents about Civil Rights issues.

**ARTICLES**

*“Why Jackie Robinson Still Matters”*

Article that addresses why decades after Jackie Robinson crossed the color line, his contributions to sports and to the US are undiminished.

*“After Jackie Robinson”*

A moving article about the impact of Jackie Robinson on an African-American child’s life and ability to dream of wider opportunities.

**MISCELLANEOUS**

*Timeline of Jackie Robinson*

Excellent photo-enhanced annotated timeline of Jackie Robinson’s entire life—before, during, and after baseball.


In this extensively illustrated biography about her husband, Rachel Robinson describes his baseball career and their civil rights work and family life.

**FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS**

*The Jackie Robinson Story, Student Resource Guide*
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About the Writer

Abby Remer is an education consultant who has worked with institutions including museums, libraries, botanical gardens and nature conservancies, historical societies, and community organizations, and the like for 30 plus years. She has also worked for over a decade in the youth development field, helping youth gain in-depth educational experiences that help support success in their lives. Remer provides a wide range of services including evaluation, program planning, curriculum writing, and professional development. She has worked with adults, families, teachers, students, and professionals in a wide variety of fields. Abby Remer is also a published author of three books about art and culture and has contributed to many textbooks and publications on a wide range of topics.