

MIKE WILEY



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PRODUCTIONS

# JACKIE ROBINSON: A GAME APART

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



### Mike Wiley – The Playwright and Actor

Actor and playwright Mike Wiley has spent the last decade fulfilling his mission to bring educational theatre to young audiences. In the early days of his career, Wiley found few theatrical resources to shine light on key events and figures in black history. To bring these often ignored stories to life, Wiley started his own production company. Through his work, he has introduced countless students to the stories and legacies of Emmett Till, the Tuskegee Airmen, Henry “Box” Brown and more. Most recently he has brought Timothy B. Tyson’s acclaimed book “Blood Done Sign My Name” to the stage. Mike Wiley has a Masters of Fine Arts from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has appeared on the Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel and the National Geographic Channel and was recently profiled in *Our State* magazine.

### Jackie Robinson Bio

Jack Roosevelt “Jackie” Robinson was an exceptional athlete, activist and businessman. In 1939 he enrolled in the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and was the first athlete in school history to letter in four sports – football, baseball and track and field. Jackie was drafted into the Army in 1942 and eventually became a lieutenant.

After the Army, Jackie played in the Negro Baseball League. Branch Rickey, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, felt strongly about bringing African-American players to the league and asked Jackie if he would consider playing for his team. Jackie was told he would be offered a contract if he had “guts enough not to fight back” when racial slurs were shouted from the stands or if players attempted to injure him on the field.

Despite enormous pressure, Robinson earned the Rookie of the Year award in his first season with the Brooklyn Dodgers. In his second year, Jackie won the national League MVP award and batting title. Eventually, Jackie won respect and became an inspiration and a symbol of opportunity for all African Americans.

### Synopsis

*A Game Apart* provides a glimpse of Jackie Robinson’s life during a bygone era of separate and unequal locker rooms, of whites only hotels, and of restaurants with only a back door for colored athletes to enter. Witness the hopeless humiliation of a star player who was showered with adulation on the field and became a second-hand citizen when he walked off the diamond. Meet Jackie’s compatriots fighting the same battles between the end zones, inside the ring and around the track. *A Game Apart* is a powerful lesson of courage through dedication, perseverance, and leadership.



### The Setting

Modern Day

### Themes

Racism, hope, determination, nonviolence

### Key Characters

Jackie Robinson – National baseball hall of fame member, broke baseball's color barrier

Mallie Robinson – Jackie's mother

Mack Robinson – Jackie's brother and Olympic track and field athlete

Isaac Murphy – Kentucky Derby Champion

Langston Hughes – Famous American writer

Fritz Pollard – American football star

The Mayor of Clarksville, Tennessee in 1960

Branch Rickey – President of Brooklyn Dodgers (1940s)

Charley Thomas – Ohio Wesleyan baseball player

Joe Louis – Professional Boxer

### Vocabulary

Jim Crow

Racism

Plessy vs. Ferguson

Sharecropping

Negro Baseball League

The Noble Experiment

## Discussion Topics

- Jackie let his abilities speak for him instead of fighting back verbally or physically when treated badly by fans, teammates and competitors. Share a time when you felt proud of yourself for using self-control and courage to turn a bad situation into something positive.
- Jackie Robinson credited his mother, minister and brother Mack for keeping him out of trouble and on the right track. Are there adults in your life who influence you to be the best you can be? Make a list of those people and make it a goal to say “thank you” to those people for being positive role models. What are ways you can be a positive role model to someone you know?
- Why was it so important to Adolph Hitler that his athletes beat African-American competitors like Jesse Owens in the 1936 Berlin Olympics? Why are the performances of athletes in international competitions so closely linked to pride in one's country?
- After the 1936 Olympics, Jackie's brother Mack returned to a country “that closed its eyes to the Negro,” yet he stated that he still felt “the pride of an individual who had represented a great nation on an international scale.” Discuss the reasons Mack might feel this way.
- Why was Jackie Robinson adored for his efforts on the baseball field yet prevented from eating at some restaurants or staying at some hotels? How do you think some fans justified feeling differently about Jackie while watching him play than if they were to meet him on the street?
- Why were African Americans accepted more readily on the athletic field than in everyday life?
- Why were African Americans asked to fight the battles of WWII to protect the principles of democracy, yet unable to participate as full-fledged citizens (e.g. voting, equal access to schools and restaurants, etc.) when they returned home?
- What was “The Noble Experiment” and why might those words have been used to describe the event?
- Jackie Robinson once said, “Life is not a spectator sport. If you're going to spend your whole life in the grandstand just watching what goes on, in my opinion you're wasting your life.” Discuss how the events of his life reflected this belief. Do you agree? What are some issues that would motivate you to “get out of the grandstand”?
- Discuss the tone and meaning behind Langston Hughes' poem *I, Too, Sing America*. Has “tomorrow” come?

## Recommended Reading & Viewing

“Did You See Jackie Robinson Hit That Ball?” – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnDp45PfOC0>

*I Never Had it Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson* by Jackie Robinson (high school)

*Out of the Shadows: A Biographical History of African-American Athletes* by David K. Wiggins (high school)

*Promises To Keep: How Jackie Robinson Changed America* by Sharon Robinson (Grades 4-7)

*Stealing Home: The Story of Jackie Robinson* by Barry Denenberg (Grades 4-6)