

# iArriba Roberto!

Read our original play based on the heroic life of Roberto Clemente—the first Latin-American baseball superstar

## Characters

Sign up for the character you're going to read.  
\*Starred characters are major roles.

\*Narrator 1

\*Narrator 2

\*Roberto Clemente [Kleh-MEN-teh]

Ephraim [EFF-rum],  
young Roberto's friend

Jaime [HI-meh], young Roberto's  
friend

\*Luisa [Loo-EEZ-ah] Clemente,  
Roberto's mother

\*Melchor [MehI-CHOR] Clemente,  
Roberto's father

Roberto Marín [Mah-REEN],  
Roberto's first coach

Mr. Murtaugh [MURR-tog],  
Manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates

Coach Samples, a coach for the  
Brooklyn Dodgers

Vera Clemente, Roberto's wife

Announcer Smith, a radio announcer

TV Announcer Prince

## SCENE 1

**Narrator 1:** It is 1945 in a tiny town in Puerto Rico, called Carolina [Cah-roh-LEE-na]. Most of the men in Carolina work in the sugarcane fields.

**Narrator 2:** Young Roberto Clemente, 11, is playing catch with his friends Ephraim and Jaime. Their ball is old and worn from use. Their gloves are made out of an old sack.

**Ephraim:** C'mon, Jaime, you have the good arm. Give Roberto a high one, as high as you can throw it.

**Jaime:** Try getting this one, Roberto. It's going all the way to the sugarcane fields. You can say hello to your *Papi* in the fields.

**Roberto:** It'll be good to see

Spanish words are in *italics*. Look for a glossary on page 5.

## Readers Theater Play: Roberto Clemente

Papi. Toss it a mile, Jaime. I could use the exercise.

**Narrator 1:** Jaime throws and Roberto takes off in a mad sprint toward the sugarcane fields. The wind carries the ball far and fast, but Roberto is even faster.

**Jaime:** Darn! That was my hardest throw.

**Narrator 2:** The ball falls with a smack into Roberto's burlap glove. It's a perfectly timed catch. Roberto spins around, pulls back, and throws the ball to his friends. It's a masterful maneuver.

**Ephraim:** ¡Fantástico!

**Jaime:** DUCK!

**Narrator 1:** Ephraim and Jaime fall to the ground as the ball hits the tree right between them—a perfect bull's-eye!

**Roberto:** You're out at the plate, *amigos!*

**Narrator 2:** Just then Roberto's mother, Luisa, comes outside, carrying a lunch pail.

**Luisa Clemente:** Roberto, quit knocking your friends down. They're nice boys. Now run to the fields and bring your father his lunch.

**Roberto:** Mmmm. Smells good, Mama.

**Luisa:** It's chicken, salad, and *plátanos* for *su padre*. It's his lunch for a hard day's work. No nibbling, Robertino.

**Narrator 1:** Roberto drops

his glove, picks up the lunch pail, and runs off to the cane fields.

### SCENE 2

**Narrator 2:** On the road to the fields, Roberto sees a beautiful sight—a bicycle shop. The bikes are used but in fine shape, and one is just Roberto's size. He rushes off to the fields.

**Roberto:** *Hola, Papi*, here's your lunch.

**Melchor Clemente:** *Gracias*, Roberto.

**Roberto:** *Papi*, you'll never believe what I saw on the road coming over here.

**Melchor:** Could it be ... a bike?

**Roberto:** How'd you know?

**Melchor:** I walked the same road this morning. I saw the bike, too.

**Roberto:** So ... ?

**Melchor:** So ... what?

**Roberto:** Can I have it?

**Melchor:** Yes.

**Roberto:** Will you buy it for me?

**Melchor:** No.

**Roberto:** Then how can I get it?

**Melchor:** You'll earn it.

**Narrator 1:** Roberto soon gets a job lugging a heavy milk can from a neighbor's farm to a local store half a mile away. At six every morning, he drags the heavy can. It takes him three years

to save to buy the bike, but he does it.

### SCENE 3

**Narrator 2:** As Roberto grows up, his talent for baseball grows, too. The world has no idea yet who this young man is, but the word about his talent is traveling around Puerto Rico.

**Narrator 1:** When Roberto is 14, Roberto Marín, the manager of a semi-professional softball team in Puerto Rico, sees him play.

**Narrator 2:** Marín summons him to his office one day.

**Marín:** Come on in, young man. Glad you could stop by.

**Roberto:** So ... you saw one of my games?

**Marín:** Yes. You're terrific. I appreciate your talent a lot. I want to put you on my team. You can use that rifle arm of yours in the outfield.

**Roberto:** Really?

**Marín:** When I see you slamming homers with a bat made of a tree branch and snagging fly balls with a glove made of an old coffee-bean sack, I say to myself, "This Clemente will go far." I'll help you learn the game, so you'll do well in the major leagues in America. That's where you're bound to end up.

**Roberto (smiling):** When do I start?

## Readers Theater Play: Roberto Clemente

### SCENE 4

**Narrator 1:** Roberto runs home to tell his parents the exciting news.

**Roberto:** *Mama, Papi, el señor* Marín has chosen me to play on his team! Look, he gave me a real baseball glove!

**Melchor:** That is a great honor, Robertino.

**Luisa:** We are so proud of you, *hijo*. You have our *bendición*.

**Roberto:** Thank you for the blessing, Mama.

**Narrator 2:** Roberto pounds his fist into the pocket of his new glove.

### SCENE 5

**Narrator 1:** It is 1954, and Roberto Clemente is on his way to play in America. It is a rocky road to the big leagues, though.

**Narrator 2:** Several teams are interested in Roberto, but the Brooklyn Dodgers make the first offer. Roberto gives his word that he will join them, and soon he is on his way to New York City. When he arrives, it's not what he expects.

**Coach Samples:** No need to put on your uniform, Clemente. You won't be playing today.

**Roberto:** Why not, Coach?

**Coach Samples:** Orders from the front office. We're shipping you to our minor-

league team in Montreal.

**Roberto:** But I'm one of your best rookies, Coach!

**Coach Samples:** You want the truth, kid? You're too good. We heard the Giants are trying to draft you. If you go there, our main competition will get even stronger.

**Narrator 1:** The Giants already have Willie Mays, the best player in the league. Samples knows that if they got Roberto too, they'd be unstoppable.

**Coach Samples:** We're going to keep you from them by sending you to the minors in Canada. Don't expect much playing time when you get there, either.

**Narrator 2:** This is not good news for Roberto.

**Roberto:** I've worked every day since I was a little kid. Now, baseball is my job. I've got to play. Is there any team you'll let me trade to?

**Coach Samples:** There is one team. They're in last place, so they are no threat to us: the Pittsburgh Pirates.

**Roberto:** Playing for the worst team is better than not playing in the majors at all.

**Narrator 1:** Roberto Clemente joins the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1955. Pittsburgh is a strange city to Roberto.

**Narrator 2:** There are very

few people of Hispanic heritage there, unlike in New York. Roberto's English is limited, and the people he meets don't make him feel welcome.

**Narrator 1:** There are other problems. Puerto Rican baseball stars are new in the big leagues, and there are few of them. Black players and other people of color are often treated very badly.

**Narrator 2:** Opposing teams' fans yell racist insults. Roberto hears these words, and they sting him. Still, he plays on, and he plays well. Yet, even as he makes his mark in baseball, his own manager behaves badly toward him.

### SCENE 6

**Narrator 1:** Roberto is called to the office of Pirates Manager Murtaugh.

**Murtaugh:** The fans like you, Clemente. You're an exciting player. I just heard you're going to be on the rookie baseball-card series.

**Roberto:** That's great! I'll call my family with the good news.

**Murtaugh:** Wait, Clemente. You don't mind if they change your name on the card, do you?

**Roberto:** Change my ... To what?

**Murtaugh:** "Bobby" Clemente.

**Roberto:** But that's not my real name.

**Murtaugh:** I know, but “Roberto” sounds too, well ... Puerto Rican. You’re in America now. OK ... Bobby?

### **SCENE 7**

**Narrator 2:** For years, Roberto is known as Bobby Clemente on the baseball cards that show his amazing batting average, runs batted in, and home runs. As good as he is, though, his success is often ignored by sports reporters who seem to be uncomfortable with a player named Roberto.

**Announcer Smith:** Here with me is Pittsburgh Pirate Bob Clemente, a fan favorite. Say hello to the fans, Bobby.

**Roberto:** Hello.

**Announcer Smith:** Bob, 1961 has been a breakout year for you. A .351 batting average, 89 RBIs, 100 runs scored, and you beat out Hank Aaron for the right-field Gold Glove award. It seems like Willie Mays is the only player who matches your overall skill at the game.

Bobby, tell the fans how you’d like to see your career develop from here.

**Roberto:** Well, first of all, thank you for those kind words, but I always feel like I can improve my skills. As for my career, I’d like the ladies and gentlemen of the press to do me a big favor.

**Announcer Smith:** What’s that, Bob?

**Roberto:** Call me “Roberto.”

### **SCENE 8**

**Narrator 1:** Roberto continues to have problems with reporters, but the fans of Pittsburgh grow to love the hard-working hitter.

**Narrator 2:** In 1964, Roberto falls in love and marries Vera Zabala. They make their home in Puerto Rico, where Roberto spends the off-season playing in the winter leagues.

**Narrator 1:** Soon Roberto and Vera have three sons. Roberto loves playing with his kids. He also spends his free time working for good causes.

**Narrator 2:** Over the next few years, Roberto lives up to his promise of baseball greatness and surpasses it. In 1966, he earns the Most Valuable Player title for the league. He is the first Puerto Rican player to win this award.

**Narrator 1:** September 30, 1972, is a very special Saturday afternoon game against the New York Mets.

**Narrator 2:** On this day, Roberto joins one of baseball’s most elite clubs.

**Announcer Prince:** The fans are screaming “¡Arriba Roberto!” as Clemente approaches the batter’s box

with 2,999 hits. And there’s the pitch! Clemente connects. It’s a line drive to left center field in the gap! Ladies and gentlemen, Roberto Clemente is the 11th major leaguer in history to collect 3,000 hits, and the first Latino baseball player to reach this remarkable milestone!

**Narrator 1:** The fans stand up and cheer. Willie Mays, who now plays for the Mets, runs across the field to congratulate Roberto.

**Narrator 2:** Later, Clemente speaks to reporters.

**Roberto:** I dedicate this hit to the Pittsburgh fans, to the people of Puerto Rico, and to one man in particular, Roberto Marín, my very first coach.

### **SCENE 9**

**Narrator 1:** When the season is over, Roberto goes home to Puerto Rico as usual.

**Narrator 2:** On December 23, 1972, he and Vera get the bad news that an earthquake has hit the Central American country Nicaragua.

**Roberto:** The earthquake has killed 7,000 people. It left at least 250,000 homeless.

**Vera:** I wonder how all of our friends are doing. We know so many young people from when you coached that international tournament.

## Readers Theater Play: Roberto Clemente

**Roberto:** Vera, it breaks my heart. Babies are dying there. We must collect money, food, medical supplies, and clothing for those poor people.

**Vera:** Will it do any good? We both know the political situation there is very bad.

**Roberto:** I know we can't trust the dictator of Nicaragua to deliver the supplies to the truly needy people.

**Vera:** Then what can we do?

**Roberto:** I will go there myself and make sure the supplies get to the right people.

**Vera:** Roberto, no! It's too risky.

**Roberto:** Sí, there's a risk, but I must help. Remember my parents giving me la bendición, the blessing. I have been so blessed in my life. I must try to give la bendición to others.

**Narrator 1:** Roberto and Vera spend the rest of their Christmas holiday organizing relief efforts. On New Year's Eve, Dec. 31, 1972, the supplies are ready to be flown to Nicaragua in an old, donated plane.

**Narrator 2:** The flight is delayed several times because of mechanical problems, but nothing can stop Roberto from keeping his promise.

### SCENE 10

**Reporter Jones:** I have tragic news to report tonight. A DC-7 cargo plane carrying Roberto Clemente and four other volunteers has crashed into the sea. They were on a relief mission to Nicaragua. There were no survivors in this terrible accident.

**Narrator 1:** The world mourns Roberto's death.

**Announcer Prince:** *Arriba* Roberto Clemente, for your life as a baseball hero and a hero to all mankind!

**Narrator 2:** Roberto Clemente was **inducted** into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1973, the first Hispanic player to achieve this timeless honor.

**Narrator 1:** Today, young people who trade baseball cards may come upon an old card with the name Bob Clemente. They may also come upon names like Alex Rodriguez, Sammy Sosa, and Nomar Garciaparra. Hispanic players make up 20 percent of the major leagues today. It was Roberto Clemente who paved their way to success.

—Danton Stone

## Glossary of Spanish Words

### NAMES

**Papi** [PAH-pee] An affectionate name for father

**Robertino** [Roh-behr-TEEN-o] This is a nickname for Roberto. The "ino" ending means that the person is young, dear, or familiar—the same way that Daniel becomes Danny or Kate becomes Katie in English.

### WORDS

**¡arriba!** [ah-REE-bah] – hurrah, bravo

**amigos** [ah-MEE-goes] – friends

**fantástico** [fahn-TAH-stee-co] – fantastic

**su padre** [soo PAH-dray] – your father

**plátanos** [PLAH-tah-nos] – plantains; Latin American fruits similar to bananas that are usually fried or baked

**hola** [OH-lah] – hello

**gracias** [GRAH-see-ahss] – thank you

**el señor** [el say-NYOR] – sir, mister

**hijo** [EE-hoe] – son

**bendición** [bain-dee-SYON] – a blessing

**sí** [see] – yes