

# Breaking Barriers



## Language Arts, Social Studies & Character Education

### FEATURING

Lessons, Activity Sheets,  
and Digital Interactives



**Welcome, teachers!** Every year, April 15 marks the anniversary of Jackie Robinson's breaking the color barrier in baseball. The character education program **Breaking Barriers: In Sports, In Life** brings classrooms the story of this historic event, and also extends my father's legacy of change to students today. As a founder of this program with Major League Baseball and in collaboration with Scholastic, I am proud how **Breaking Barriers** teaches students the values my father exhibited in his life, showing kids how to use these values to face and overcome their own barriers.

Teachers have been incredible partners to **Breaking Barriers** since the program started in 1997. We thank you for your support, and for encouraging your students to tell their stories. I am amazed and inspired by their grit and optimism, as well as their tremendous courage, as they move forward in spite of their barriers. Although we will not host the national essay contest in 2020, I hope you'll use these lessons and activities to motivate your class and encourage students to write about their barriers and successes.

Enjoy the **Breaking Barriers** program!

Sincerely,

**Sharon Robinson**

Educational Consultant, MLB,  
and author, [sharonrobinsonink.com](http://sharonrobinsonink.com)

### LESSON 1 Learning About Barriers

**Objective:** Students will understand the concept of a barrier, and read about how Jackie Robinson faced and overcame barriers in his life.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:** About My Father activity sheet 1A (grades 4–5) or 1B (grades 6–8); or see digital interactive version of 1A at [bit.ly/3060nOu](http://bit.ly/3060nOu).

#### LESSON STEPS

1. Start by asking students what a *barrier* is. Guide them to define it as: *A challenge or obstacle that makes it difficult for you to move forward.* Discuss that some barriers can be seen, such as a fence, disability, or event, while others cannot, such as fear, inexperience, or lack of skills.
2. Ask the class to think of different barriers that people face and how these barriers make it difficult for people to move forward. Create a list on the board. Ask: *What are some ways that people overcome their barriers?*
3. Divide the class into small groups and distribute Activity 1A (grades 4–5) or 1B (grades 6–8): About My Father. Have volunteers read passages from the story. Then have groups discuss the story, using text evidence to support responses to the following questions.

#### Grades 4–5:

- *Why do you think Sharon Robinson wrote this article?*
- *What is the main idea of the article?*
- *How did the color barrier prevent black baseball players from playing in Major League Baseball before 1947?*
- *What did the scouts tell Branch Rickey to convince him that Jackie Robinson could be successful?*
- *Why did Rickey describe to Jackie Robinson the rough conditions he would have to face?*
- *The article says that “Rickey hoped my father would have the strength of character to fight back with his bat and not his fist.” What does this mean?*
- *How did Jackie Robinson respond to the racism he faced in baseball?*

#### Grades 6–8:

Use the first three questions above, then add:

- *Why were Jackie Robinson's college statistics at UCLA and his accomplishments with the Kansas City Monarchs important information for Branch Rickey?*
- *Why was it important to Rickey that Jackie Robinson had strength of character?*

(continued)



- *What evidence in the article suggests that Jackie Robinson succeeded in breaking barriers in Major League Baseball?*

4. Ask groups to share their answers.
5. Referring back to About My Father, instruct students to write a paragraph about what made Jackie Robinson a good candidate to break the color barrier.
6. Then, from the list created in Step 2, ask students to choose one of the barriers (or assign one barrier to each student). Instruct students to write a few sentences about how Jackie Robinson's character traits might be helpful in facing this barrier.
7. Divide students into small groups to share their work.



#### WATCH THE VIDEOS

Visit [scholastic.com/breakingbarriers/videos](https://www.scholastic.com/breakingbarriers/videos) for film clips teaching extensions from *Jackie Robinson*, a film by Ken Burns & Sarah Burns & David McMahon

### LESSON 2 How Values Help Us Face Barriers

**Objective:** Through reading and class discussion, students will understand what values are and how they are important in facing barriers.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:** Values and Barriers activity sheet 2; also see digital interactive flashcard version of values at [bit.ly/30awE6W](https://bit.ly/30awE6W).

#### LESSON STEPS

1. Ask students what the word *values* means. Guide them to define *values* as: *Beliefs that are important to you and that help to guide your life.*
2. Display the Values and Barriers activity sheet. Have students read the examples on the activity sheet from other students who wrote about different barriers they faced. Ask:
  - *What different barriers did these students face, and how did they use values to face them?*
3. Divide students into nine small groups and assign each group a value from the activity sheet. Have students respond to the following questions, making text inferences in their responses:
  - *Explain the meaning of your assigned value in your own words.*
  - *Why is this value important for people to have?*
  - *What is an example of how this value can help people face and overcome a barrier?*
4. After students finish their discussions, ask groups to share their answers with the class.
5. Have students reflect on their own barriers, and how they have used Jackie Robinson's values to face those barriers, in preparation for writing essays.

#### EXTENSIONS

- Discuss the concept of *character*, which can be defined as the features and traits of an individual that reflect the sort of person he or she is. How do *values* reflect a person's *character*? How do a person's *actions* display his or her values and character? What does it mean when a person is described as having "strength of character"?
- Have students research and discuss modern examples of individuals who have broken barriers, as well as the values they relied upon. (Examples might include historical figures or someone in their local community.)
- Encourage students to interview family members and friends to discuss barriers they have faced, as well as the values they used to face and overcome them.

### LESSON 3 Essay Organizer:

#### Writing About Barriers

**Objective:** Students will develop an outline in preparation for writing an essay about using values to overcome barriers.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:** Breaking Barriers Essay Organizer activity sheet 3 or digital interactive version at [bit.ly/2s9Gvx3](https://bit.ly/2s9Gvx3).

#### LESSON STEPS

1. To reinforce concepts of barriers and values, as well as the history of Jackie Robinson, refer to previous lessons and activity sheets.

2. Distribute the Breaking Barriers Essay Organizer activity sheet. As a class, review the steps of the essay-writing process.

**Step 1: Choose a topic.** Ask students to identify a barrier they've faced and a value they've used to overcome the barrier. Remind students to be as specific as possible. Example: Saying you're afraid or too young is too general. Narrow the topic to "fear of failing" or "too young to be in Little League." Likewise, saying you used "courage" or "integrity" is too general. Discuss specifics of the value(s) used.

**Step 2: Write your main ideas.** Assign students to do a quick three-minute "freewrite" of a sentence or two for each of the writing prompts below:

- *What was the barrier you faced?*
- *What are some basic details about the barrier? (For example: When did you face the barrier? Who was involved in the situation? Where did it occur?)*
- *Which of Jackie Robinson's Nine Values did you use to overcome the barrier?*
- *How did you use the value to face or overcome the barrier? (Write a separate sentence for each value, if you used more than one.)*
- *How was your barrier similar to the barriers that Jackie Robinson faced? How was it different?*
- *What was the outcome of using your value(s)?*

**Step 3: Create an outline.** Explain to students that outlines help them organize their essays. Tell them that they can move items around or take them out as they create their outlines. Their goal should be to arrange their ideas in a logical way. Remind students that each main idea needs details to support it.

**Step 4: Write topic sentences.** Explain that in this step they will write topic sentences based on their outlines. Generally, each topic sentence begins a new paragraph. Supporting sentences follow and provide information to support the topic sentence.

3. Once students have completed their essays, encourage them to store a copy in a safe, easily accessible place (e.g., a binder pocket). When students next face a challenge, they can draw inspiration and strength from rereading their own personal accounts of overcoming an obstacle.

More resources at [scholastic.com/breakingbarriers](https://www.scholastic.com/breakingbarriers)

- Additional Tools for Grades 4–8
- Grade 9 Lessons
- Spanish Language Version of Program

Student Activity 1A  
(Grades 4–5)

# About My Father

By Sharon Robinson  
Author of *Child of the Dream*  
and *Promises to Keep*



Jackie and Rachel Robinson and their three children (left to right), 1956: David, Sharon, and Jackie Jr.

**A**pril 15 marks the anniversary of Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color barrier in Major League Baseball. A student once asked me: "What is the color barrier?" The color barrier refers to the time in U.S. history when black- and brown-skinned ballplayers were kept out of the Majors. In 1947, my father, Jackie Robinson, broke through that barrier. He made it easier for others to follow.

Fifty years later, the education program *Breaking Barriers: In Sports, In Life* was created to help diverse students of all backgrounds understand Jackie Robinson's accomplishments. By learning about his life, you'll come to understand the values that made my father successful on the field and that guided him as a parent. I hope you'll also discover strengths in your own character to help you overcome barriers in your life. Here is his story:

American baseball became popular during the Civil War. Briefly in the late 1800s, two black players, Bud Fowler and Moses Fleetwood Walker, played alongside white players. But by 1890, Major League Baseball, like most of the U.S., was "segregated." Black- and brown-skinned players were in the Negro Leagues. Whites played in the Majors.

In 1945, Branch Rickey wanted to break baseball's color barrier. Rickey was the president and

general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. He sent scouts to check out the Negro League players—many were well-known and highly skilled. Players such as Satchel

**“ Rickey hoped my father would have the strength of character to fight back with his bat and not his fist.”**

Paige and Josh Gibson topped the list provided by Mr. Rickey's scouts. But they agreed on Jack Roosevelt Robinson.

The scouts told Mr. Rickey that during his season with the Negro League team the Kansas City Monarchs, Robinson played shortstop. He had a very high batting average of .387, honed his skill at stealing bases, and was chosen for the league's All-Star Game.

They presented his college statistics next. While at UCLA, he was the leading basketball scorer in his conference. He was also the national champion in the long jump, an All-American halfback in football, and a varsity baseball shortstop. In fact, he was the first athlete at UCLA to letter in four sports in a single year.

In a now-famous meeting, Mr. Rickey explained the rough conditions Robinson would likely face in the Majors. Racist fans would shout

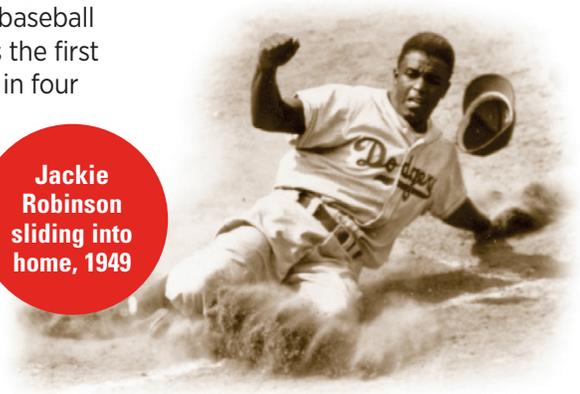
angry insults. A spiteful opponent might spike him with metal cleats. Rickey hoped my father would have the strength of character to fight back with his bat and not his fist. He agreed to this plan. Two months later, he signed with the Montreal Royals, the Dodgers Minor League team.

Rickey was right: Jackie Robinson faced amazing odds. He fought back with perfectly timed bunts, hard line drives, and stolen bases. On April 15, 1947, he stepped onto the grass of Ebbets Field as a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers. He went on to play 10

seasons and earned such awards as Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player.

It took 13 seasons before every Major League Baseball team had at least one black player. Today, things have changed. Major League Baseball players come from around the world. They break barriers of culture, language, race, identity, and religion. Like you, they meet challenges with the same set of values that helped my father succeed on and off the field. ♦

Jackie Robinson sliding into home, 1949



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In 1945, Branch Rickey, president and general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, stepped forward to break baseball's color barrier. He

studied the field, using scouts to explore the pool of players. There were many Negro League players who were well-known and proven professional baseball players.

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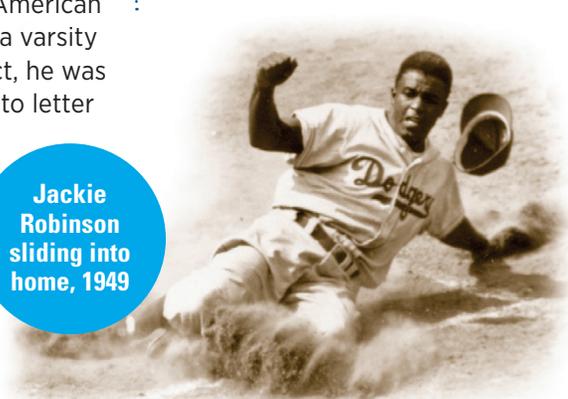
role-played a racist fan shouting angry insults. A spiteful opponent might spike him with metal cleats. Rickey was testing whether my father would have the strength of character to fight back with his bat rather than his fist. He convinced Rickey that he would. Two months later, he signed with the Montreal Royals, the Dodgers Minor League team.

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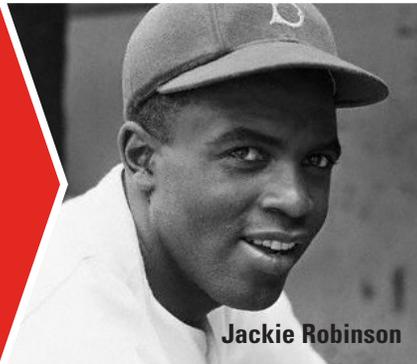
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Jackie Robinson sliding into home, 1949



# Values and Barriers



Jackie Robinson

We all face different kinds of barriers in our lives. Read on to learn how students across the country have overcome their unique barriers by using Jackie Robinson's Nine Values.

## Asma, Grade 5, New York

**Barrier:** Wearing a head covering as part of her Muslim culture  
 "Like Jackie Robinson, I was discriminated against and treated poorly. **Integrity** is a value Jackie and I used to help us get through being treated this way.... He didn't fight back and never let others get the reaction they wanted. I've done the same."

## Zoe, Grade 5, Ohio

**Barrier:** Dyslexia  
 "I was determined to take my feelings of sadness and frustration and turn them into something positive.... Like Jackie Robinson, I was going to be **persistent** and not 'wait 'til next year.' "

## Hafsa, Grade 6, New York

**Barrier:** Mother's death  
 "I can't forget that day, but I did have to find a way to move on.... One of Jackie Robinson's values, **courage**, has helped me through this challenge. Courage has helped me live a day at a time without the love and guidance my mom provided."

## Colin, Grade 7, Iowa

**Barrier:** Parents' divorce  
 "The thought of my parents leaving each other was horrifying enough but it actually happening was much worse than I ever thought.... I stayed strong through all of this by using Jackie Robinson's value of **excellence**.... Even though everything was pretty bad, I did my best."

## Gabrielle, Grade 8, Michigan

**Barrier:** Racial bullying at school  
 "I knew that it would require **teamwork** for me to gather up **courage** to stand up to her.... I reached out to all of my friends and asked them if she had ever said anything racist towards them.... I was shocked and I knew we had to tell the principal about this."

## KEY TERMS

> **VALUE** A belief that is important to you and helps to guide your life

> **BARRIER** A challenge or obstacle that makes it difficult for you to move forward

## JACKIE ROBINSON'S NINE VALUES

### CITIZENSHIP

Making a contribution that improves the lives of others

### COMMITMENT

Making a promise and following through on it

### COURAGE

Doing what you know is the right thing even when it is hard to do

### DETERMINATION

Staying focused on a plan even though the path to its end may be difficult

### EXCELLENCE

Doing the best that you possibly can

### INTEGRITY

Sticking to your values, regardless of what others think you should do

### JUSTICE

Treating all people fairly, no matter who they are

### PERSISTENCE

Working toward a goal and continuing to move forward even though you face obstacles or barriers

### TEAMWORK

Working with other people toward a common goal

Cut out your own Jackie Robinson's Nine Values bookmark.

# Breaking Barriers Essay Organizer



**I**n baseball, you have to follow bases as you run. Likewise, when you write an essay, each step is important to make sure what you write is effective. Follow these four steps to make sure you're off to a good start.

## Start Here

### 1 CHOOSE YOUR TOPIC

Brainstorm some ideas of barriers in your life. Choose one that you overcame, or are overcoming, by using one of Jackie Robinson's Nine Values.

### HOME PLATE

### 4 WRITE YOUR TOPIC SENTENCES

Use details from your outline to help you write topic sentences. Try writing practice sentences to get to the topic sentences you want. **Now begin writing your essay!**

### FIRST BASE

### THIRD BASE

### 2 WRITE OUT YOUR MAIN IDEAS

Make sure you write out main ideas related to your topic. Remember that each main idea will need details to support it.

### SECOND BASE

### 3 CREATE YOUR OUTLINE

Use an outline to help organize your main ideas. The outline will keep you on track as you write your essay.

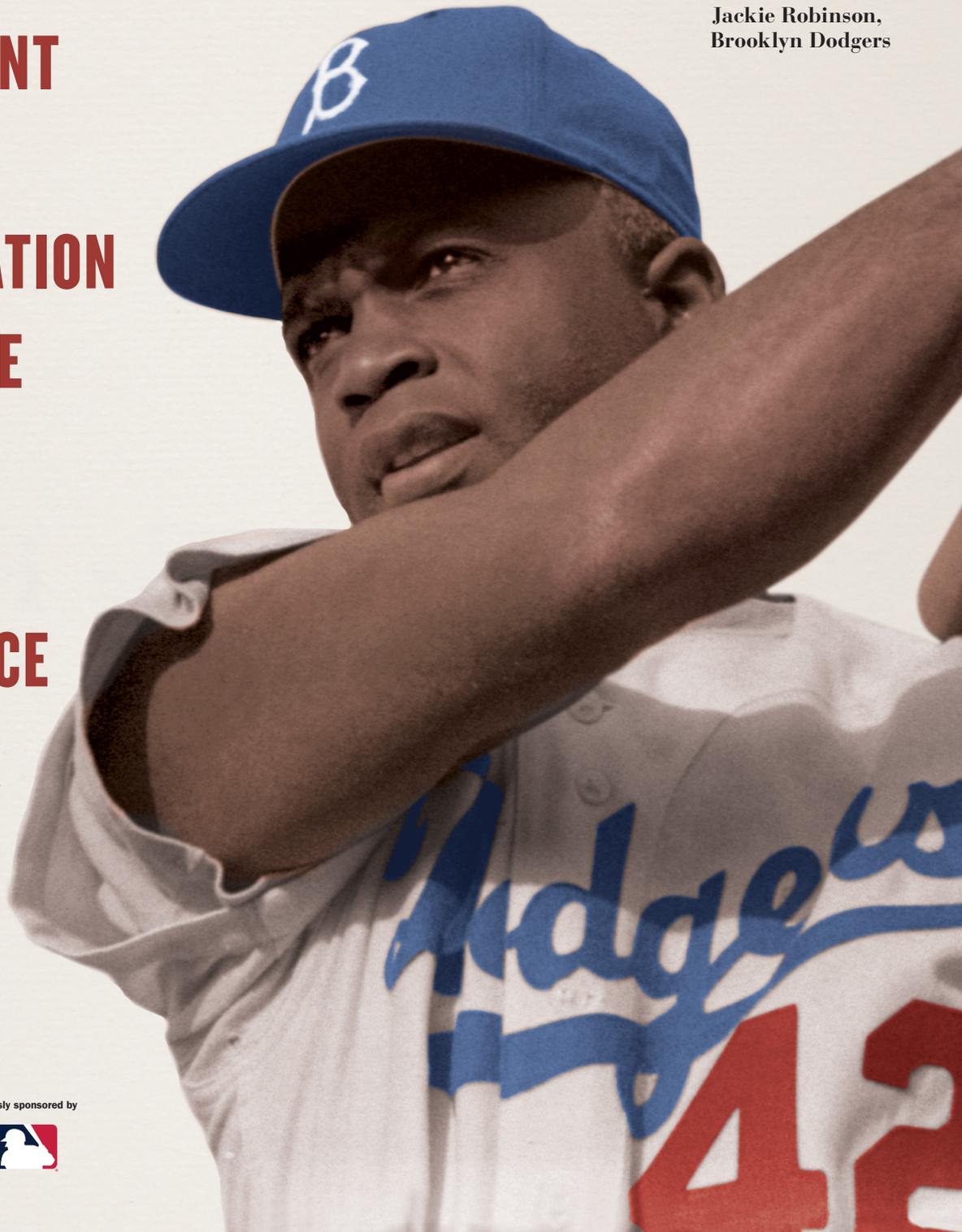
**Jackie Robinson's Nine Values** > **Citizenship • Commitment • Courage**  
**Determination • Excellence • Integrity • Justice • Persistence • Teamwork**

# BREAK YOUR BARRIERS

## WITH JACKIE'S VALUES

- CITIZENSHIP
- COMMITMENT
- COURAGE
- DETERMINATION
- EXCELLENCE
- INTEGRITY
- JUSTICE
- PERSISTENCE
- TEAMWORK

Jackie Robinson,  
Brooklyn Dodgers



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