

Literature Circle Guide to JACKIE AND ME by Dan Gutman

Book Summary

Joe Stoshack has to write a report on an African American who's made an important contribution to society. Unlike every other kid in his class, Joe has a special talent: with the help of old baseball cards, he can travel through time. So for his report, Joe decides to go back to meet one of the greatest baseball players ever, Jackie Robinson, to find out what it was like to be the man who broke baseball's color barrier. Joe plans on writing a prize-winning report. But he doesn't plan for a trip that will for a short time change the color of his skin – and forever change his view of history and his definition of courage.

Author Information

Dan Gutman is the author of many books, including *Honus & Me*, *The Kid who for President*, *Virtually Perfect* and *The Million Dollar Shot*. When he is not writing books, Dan is very often visiting a school. He lives in New Jersey with his wife and their two children.

Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions

Use these questions and the activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading *Jackie and Me: A Baseball Card Adventure* by Dan Gutman.

1. What significant change does Joe undergo when he first travels back to 1947?
When Joe arrives in 1947, he is surprised to find he is black. The explanation for the transformation: just before he time traveled through his baseball card, Joe wished he could experience what Jackie Robinson went through as the first African-American to play Major League baseball.
2. On page 94, what happens on the field that makes the crowd gasp?
Before play began in the bottom of the ninth inning in the game against the Philadelphia Phillies, Pee Wee Reese left his position at short stop and ran over to first base, where Jackie Robinson was being verbally taunted by the opposing team. Reese put his arm around Robinson and chatted with him briefly. Joe speculates that the crowd is unaccustomed to seeing a white man treat a black man like a friend.
3. Which friend from the present does Joe meet in Brooklyn? What advice does he give this person?
On page 75, Joe meets Flip Valentini on the street in Brooklyn. Flip and his friends are “flipping” baseball cards, which they call, “bubblegum cards” Joe advises Flip to save his bubblegum cards in a safe place and to take them with him when he leaves his mother's place.
4. Why was Joe excited to see Jackie Robinson on the list of subjects for his Black History Month assignment? Which famous person from the list would you have chosen?
The other choices are listed on page 10: Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes,

Marian Anderson, Benjamin Banneker, W.E.B. Dubois, Paul Robeson, Sojourner Truth, and Booker T. Washington. Readers should simply indicate that Joe was excited to see Jackie Robinson on the list because he is a baseball fanatic.

5. According to Joe, why is time travel different for him than it is in the movies?

On page 25, Joe explains that unlike in the movies – where time travelers conveniently appear exactly where they need to be – for him, “things don’t always work out so perfectly.” For example, instead of arriving wherever Jackie Robinson happened to be at the moment, Joe arrived in a dark alley where Jackie’s teammate Don Bankhead has just been assaulted.

6. Compare and contrast Jackie Robinson and Joe Stoshack. Describe one way in which they are similar and one way in which they are different.

On page 34, Joe notes, “[He] had a quick temper, like me.” Readers might also note that both Jackie and Joe play baseball and that they have both been confronted by bullies. Possible differences include the fact that while Joe experiences racism as a black person for a few days, Jackie faces it in the public eye every day.

7. List two items Joe brings with him to 1947 that make Ant think he is from the future. Then, imagine you are Joe and you are able to travel to the past. Choose one item from the present you would bring with you and explain your reason for choosing this item.

The suspicious items Ant finds are a Ken Griffey Jr. baseball card, a pair of Nike sneakers, and a Gameboy. Look for answers to the second part of the question which show the reader has considered the consequences of bringing back anachronistic objects like electronics gadgets or dated items like magazines. To some the effect of introducing things like these to the past might be a thrill; others may think it is dangerous.

8. Identify one person who supports Jackie Robinson during the season. Then, imagine someone you know has to do something important that other people might not like. What advice would you give to this person to help him or her succeed?

Joe helps Jackie by encouraging him and by showing him the Rookie of the Year article. Branch Rickey helps Joe by bringing him up from the minor leagues. (Even though this did not occur during the story, Rickey’s decision to call up Jackie Robinson should count.) Rachel helps Jackie by attending games. Ed Stanky tears up Dixie Walker’s petition asking to be traded if forced to play with a black man. And Pee Wee Reese helps Jackie by consoling him when the taunting from the opposing team in Philadelphia becomes particularly vicious.

9. On page 37, Joe says that Jackie, “looked like he had taken the weight of every African-American in the country on his shoulders.” What do you think Joe meant by this statement?

Answers should indicate an understanding that the impact of Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier extended beyond baseball into the general society and helped pave the way for the Civil Rights Movement. The author deliberately places this story in the larger context of segregation so that readers see how black people

everywhere were treated differently. Therefore, readers should understand how seeing Jackie on a Major League field must have been a source of inspiration and hope for the black community.

10. In your own words, explain why you think it was harder for Jackie to believe in the idea of Black History Month than in the idea of time travel.

While Black History Month will be a cultural norm for most readers today, answers must demonstrate an understanding that BHM was unthinkable in 1947. Readers should see that any society which tolerates institutional racism toward a certain community will be very unlikely to devote a month every year to honoring important figures of that same community.

11. Joe has two confrontations with Bobby Fuller – one at the beginning of the story and one at the end of the story. Using specific examples from the book, show what you believe Joe learned from Jackie about fighting back. Hint: you may want to reread parts of chapters 7 and 11.

In the first confrontation, which begins on page 3, Bobby Fuller – the opposing pitcher – provokes Joe by calling him a Pollack. Joe takes the bait and tries to solve the problem by fighting. He is suspended from the league; Bobby Fuller receives no punishment. In the second confrontation, which begins on page 137, Joe keeps his cool when Bobby attempts to provoke him. Joe has realized that Bobby is only taunting him so that he will fight back and be tossed from the game. Instead, Joe gets on base and – just like Jackie did against the Phillies – taunts Bobby good-naturedly from first base. Ultimately, he rattles Bobby without throwing a punch and wins the game for his team. Look for answers which reference two other incidents from the story. First, on page 46, Jackie explains to Joe what it means to “fight back” when Joe is tempted to fight the racist Ant. Second, in chapter 11, Joe watches as Jackie ignores the verbal insults from the Phillies and “fights back” by stealing first, second, and then third base before scoring an important run. Joe will imitate Jackie almost play-for-play at the end of the book.

12. In chapter 15, when Joe enters the Dodgers’ clubhouse during the World Series, he says he almost didn’t recognize the team. How has the mood of the team changed since his first visit? What do you think is one reason for this change?

On page 115 Joe says, “Even though they were behind three games to two, they were loose, chatting, laughing, and snapping towels at one another. There were card games going on – poker, bridge, hearts. Jackie was right in the middle of everything, one of the guys.” Joe goes on to describe Jackie sharing a joke with another player and receiving advice on his batting stance from Dixie Walker, the same person who had passed around the petition early in the season. Readers will have to speculate about the reason for the improvement in team chemistry. Certainly winning helps, as do Jackie’s home runs and base-stealing. (Look for answers which reference Joe’s observation on page 64 that to some teammates, the color of the uniform mattered more than the color of Jackie’s skin). Also, readers should see that for people like Dixie Walker, the more they knew Jackie as a man, the harder it became to hate him for irrational reasons.

13. On page 104, Joe says that he has let his father down by not returning with the suitcase of full of baseball cards. Do you agree that Joe let his father down? Why or why not?

Readers who believe Joe did let his father down might argue that Joe made a promise to bring back baseball cards and failed to keep this promise. Readers who argue that Joe is being too hard on himself have an easier case to make. First, Mr. Stoshack is not a sympathetic character. He treats Joe disrespectfully and is only using his son's "talent" to profit financially. Second, Joe "fails" to return with the baseball cards only because Ant is swinging a baseball bat at him and later, because someone has stolen the suitcase. Readers might also note that Joe did go to great lengths to acquire the baseball cards in the first place.

14. Besides Jackie and Joe, which character in the story do you most admire? Explain why using specific examples from the story.

See answer to question 8 for a list of people who supported Jackie during the season. Other people worth of admiration might be the grocery store owner who treats Jackie respectfully and Joe's Little League coach, who disciplines Joe for his role in the fight even as the opposing coach ignores Bobby Fuller's racist comments.

15. In the chapter beginning on page 142, the author explains that the real Dodgers' batboy was not exactly like Ant, the batboy in the story. How was the real batboy different? Why do you think the author chose to change some details in the book but not others?

The author explains that, "The real name of the Dodgers' batboy was Charley DiGiovanna and he was not bigoted or crazy." In the story, Ant is portrayed as racist (reflecting the time-period in which he lived), unintelligent, and violent. Readers should see that the author created the character of Ant so that Joe's character could accomplish his goal of experiencing the racism Jackie experienced. Ant's violent tendencies are also an obstacle to Joe's other goal: returning to the present with the suitcase of baseball cards. Look for answers which indicate a general understanding of the difference between biography and historical fiction.

Note: These questions are keyed to Bloom's Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-6; Application: 7-8; Analysis: 9-10; Synthesis: 11-12; Evaluation: 13-15

Activities

1. Near the end of the story, Joe shows Jackie and Rachel a newspaper article which reveals that Jackie will win the Rookie of the Year Award at the end of the 1947 season. Imagine you can travel through time and read a newspaper article about you written in the future. What have you done to be in the newspaper? What would the article say. Write the first paragraph of the article as you think it might appear in the newspaper. Be sure to date the article to show when in time it is written.

The newspaper article appears on page 111.

2. Draw a map of New York City showing the places Joe visits during his trip to 1947. Be sure to include Times Square, where Joe first arrives, Ebbets field in Brooklyn, and Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. You might want to add places where other events occurred like the stickball game or the Mr. Herskowitz's grocery store.

3. Write the word EBBETS FIELD across the top of a blank sheet of paper. Then, see how many new words you can create by rearranging the letters you have written. Each new word should have at least three letters. Extra points for longer words or words that are also baseball terms!