

history theatre

Play Guide



The Incredible Season of Ronnie Rabinovitz

A world premiere by Eric Simonson

February 1 – 23, 2014



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Table of Contents

Synopsis of the Play*	3
The World of the Play: The Kohler Strike*	4
The World of the Play: The 1960 Presidential Primary*	5
About Jackie Robinson's Post-Baseball Life*	6
About John Fitzgerald Kennedy.....	8
About Ronnie Rabinovitz and his father, David*	11
For Further Research and Suggested Reading*	13
Activities	
• Race in the U.S.: Now and Then.....	16
• Evaluating Websites for Bias.....	18
• Writing Activity: What Inspires You?	19
• Fact Baseball	20
• Baseball Math	21
• Analyzing the Language of Presidential Debates.....	23

*Material provided by Laura Weber.

Synopsis of the Play

February 1960: The Rabinovitz family of Sheboygan, Wisconsin—father, David; mother, Charlotte; and 13-year-old son, Ronnie—are back home after attending a Brotherhood Week banquet at the Armory in nearby Manitowoc. With them is their dinner guest, the banquet’s keynote speaker—Jackie Robinson, the first African-American to play baseball in the Major Leagues. Though the event was a big success, the evening has taken a negative turn.

David Rabinovitz is chief counsel for the United Auto Worker (UAW) Local 833 in Sheboygan. UAW members at the local Kohler Company have been on strike at this point for six long years. On the way home from the banquet, the group has noticed racist graffiti painted on the wall of David’s law office. Jackie frequently experienced far worse during his baseball years and advises that they ignore the graffiti and enjoy the rest of the evening. David calls the local sheriff, who arrives to take a report.

In spite of their age difference, forty-one-year old Jackie became friendly with the Rabinovitz family through his pen-pal relationship with young Ronnie. Ronnie is not the only member of the Rabinovitz family with a prominent friend, however. Through David’s work as a legal adviser to a congressional investigation looking into labor union corruption in the late 1950s, he met and became friends and supporters of Senator John F. Kennedy and his brother, Robert. Now JFK is running for president, and David is a key leader of his campaign effort in the upcoming Wisconsin primary. Through flashbacks, we see that John Kennedy has been a houseguest of the Rabinovitz family.

Throughout the evening, David attempts to convince Jackie to endorse JFK in the important upcoming primary, but Jackie is highly skeptical of JFK’s support for civil rights, which is his primary concern. Meanwhile, the sheriff returns with a suspect in the graffiti incident, Harvey, a striking worker at the Kohler plant. This man, once a supporter of the strike, has grown upset over the length of the strike, and the fact that nonunion “scabs” have begun working at Kohler. David is confronted with whether or not to press charges against Harvey, who he knows. The interactions with the sheriff and Harvey, in Jackie’s presence, highlight the racial tensions that the Rabinovitz family, who are Jewish, would rather not see.

The play concludes with Ronnie’s reflections on “something I will remember all my life—the times that Jack Kennedy and Jackie Robinson spent at my house.”

About the Playwright



Eric Simonson, a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has been a member of the Steppenwolf ensemble since 1993. His plays include *The Last Hurrah*, *Work Song: Three Views of Frank Lloyd Wright* (with Jeffrey Hatcher), *Edge of the World*, *Lombardi*, and *Speak American*. His work has been produced in Japan and throughout the United States at theaters including The Huntington Theatre Company, L.A. Theatre Works, City Theatre of Pittsburgh, The Kennedy Center, Arizona Theatre Company, Madison Repertory Theatre, Kansas City Repertory Theatre and Crossroads Theatre Company. His adaptation of *Moby Dick* at Milwaukee Repertory Theater was chosen as one of Time Magazine’s top ten productions of 2002. Eric is also an accomplished theatre, film and opera director. His production of Steppenwolf’s *The Song of Jacob Zulu* received six Tony® Award nominations, including one for best direction. He received the 2006 Academy Award for his documentary short *A Note of Triumph*, as well as the 2005 Princess Grace Statue Award for sustained artistic achievement. He is currently in New York City overseeing the opening of his newest play *Bronx Bombers* at Circle in the Square Theatre on Broadway.

The World of the Play

The play takes place in the first months of 1960, the beginning of a decade that would see major upheavals in American society, including the civil rights movement, the escalation of the war in Vietnam, student protests against the war, and the women's movement. Meanwhile, in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, the play's setting, a strike at the Kohler Company, a manufacturer of plumbing products located in the nearby company village of Kohler, had been going on for six years.

Kohler strike

The Kohler Company was founded in 1873. The company was long known for treating its workers well. However, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, profits plummeted. The United Auto Workers union wanted to represent the Kohler workers, replacing the company-sponsored worker's association. Management refused, and closed the plant in 1934. This led to a violent strike where two men died and 43 were injured. In spite of various rulings by federal agencies and courts giving the workers the right to organize and bargain collectively without employer interference, Kohler Company maintained the company union until 1952, when the UAW won a union certification election.

Company management refused to grant union demands during contract negotiations. Another strike began in April 1954. After a two-month shutdown, Kohler resumed production for the remainder of the decade with non-union labor. Sporadic violence erupted from time to time between strikers and strikebreakers (called "scabs," by union supporters). The national UAW provided \$12 million in assistance to continue the strike. Herbert Kohler, company president, resisted all efforts to settle, including a public appeal from his nephew, Wisconsin Governor Walter J. Kohler Jr.



David Rabinovitz was legal counsel for UAW Local 833, from the beginning of the strike and was still in that position in 1960, when the National Labor Relations Board ruled that the Kohler Company had not bargained in good faith and therefore must reinstate 1,700 workers. It took two more years of lawsuits and negotiations to work out a contract, and three additional years to finally resolve the issue of pay for strikers. In December 1965 the Kohler Company agreed to pay \$3 million in back wages to some 1,400 former employees and \$1.5 million in pension-fund contributions. The union agreed to make no further charges. The longest major strike in American history had ended.

Today, the thriving Kohler Company, still family-owned, has a more positive relationship with the union. UAW Local 833 continues to represent Kohler workers to this day.

The World of the Play

The 1960 presidential primary in Wisconsin

Fewer states had presidential primaries in 1960 than today, making each one even more important. In 1960, Wisconsin's April 5 primary was second only to New Hampshire, then as now the first in the nation. One of the frontrunners in the race for the Democratic nomination was Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota. Humphrey was sometimes called Wisconsin's "third senator." Kennedy hoped to beat Humphrey in his back yard and establish himself as a national candidate.

Humphrey knew his main advantage was his oratorical abilities. He challenged Kennedy to debate the issues, but Kennedy refused. Kennedy used his wealth, attractive family members (who campaigned for him), and charisma to attract voters.

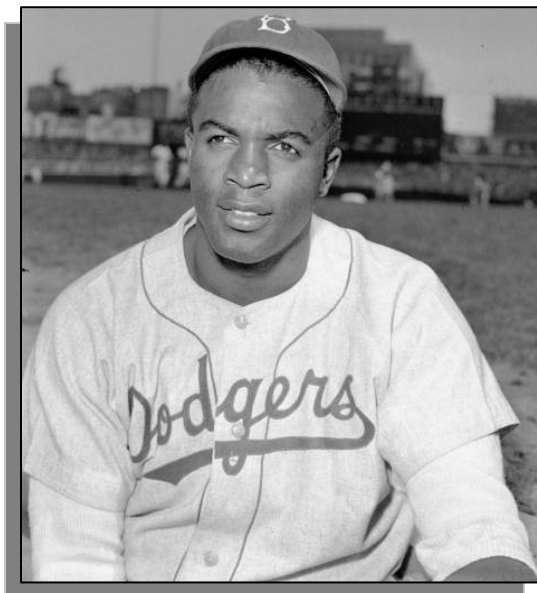
The Wisconsin turnout was the largest of the post World War II-years. Kennedy beat Humphrey, 476,000 to 366,753. Humphrey stayed in the race for the West Virginia primary, which he lost by an even larger margin, and then dropped out. Though Kennedy won the general election by a narrow margin, he lost Wisconsin's electoral votes to Richard Nixon.



About Jackie Robinson's Post-Baseball Life

Jackie Robinson's baseball exploits are well known and documented. The sport, however, was not the primary focus of his post-baseball life, which dates from his retirement on January 5, 1957, to his death of a heart attack in 1972 at age 53. The theme that ran through all his activities was outspoken pursuit of racial justice.

The civil rights movement had been gaining momentum through the 1950s following the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ruled that "separate but equal" public schools for African-Americans was unconstitutional. Implementation of this ruling was painfully slow.



Robinson was much admired and honored for being the first African-American to play in baseball's major leagues. He became a Brooklyn Dodger in 1947, after spending one year in their farm system. However, Robinson also experienced a great deal of racial hostility during his career, from fans and even some fellow players. Though he was a major league baseball star, when travelling in the south, Robinson and other black players had to stay in separate, inferior hotels, or even sleep on the team bus, while white teammates enjoyed fine eating and sleeping accommodations. While Jackie Robinson was a player, he was limited in how much he could speak out against racial injustice, though it was impossible for him, due to his personality and his strong feelings, to stay completely silent.

On February 1, 1960, the same month *The Incredible Season of Ronnie Rabinovitz* takes place, four black college students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro, North Carolina, staged the first sit-in, at a segregated Woolworth lunch counter. This began a campaign eventually waged by 7,000 students, both white and black, over the next eight months, in sit-ins across the nation. As the civil rights movement evolved, Robinson frequently traveled to the segregated south to lend his prestige to many potentially dangerous marches and rallies.

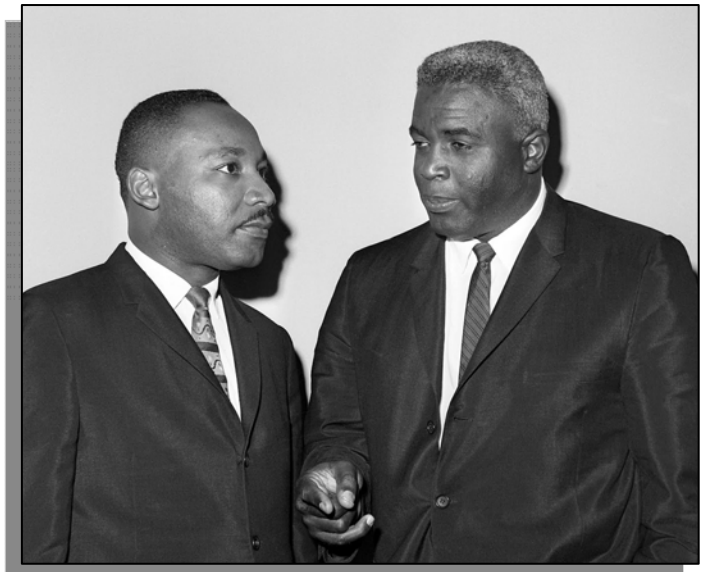
Upon his retirement from baseball in 1957 due to the visible effects of diabetes, Robinson became vice president of personnel for Chock Full O' Nuts, a New York coffee and restaurant company. Many of the company's employees were black, and some said company owner Bill Black hired Robinson to pre-empt attempts by employees to unionize. However, for the next seven years Black allowed Robinson to freely speak his mind on racial issues, including taking many public speaking engagements for the NAACP, National Council of Christians and Jews, and other groups. Jackie became "a forceful, respected part of the civil rights debate, able to hold his own on programs such as 'Meet The Press,'" writes biographer Arnold Rampersand.

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Robinson deeply respected Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.. Jackie's entire family, including wife Rachel, and children Jackie Jr., Sharon, and David, took part in the March on Washington in August of 1963 during which they heard King deliver his famous "I Have a dream" speech. In turn, Dr. King said of Robinson "He was a legend and symbol in his own time" who "challenged the dark skies of intolerance and frustration."

Robinson was active in politics throughout his post-baseball life. He identified himself as a political independent. He admired Hubert Humphrey for his statements in support of civil rights and preferred him to John F. Kennedy as the Democratic nominee in the 1960 presidential race. When Humphrey faltered, Robinson supported Richard Nixon over JFK, though Robinson later praised Kennedy for his stance on civil rights. Conservative Republican opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 angered Robinson and he became one of six national directors for the liberal Republican Nelson Rockefeller's unsuccessful campaign for the Republican nomination in the 1964 presidential campaign. Robinson later became special assistant for community affairs when Rockefeller was re-elected governor of New York in 1966. In the 1968 presidential race, Robinson supported Hubert Humphrey against Nixon.

Jackie also had his own radio show on a New York station and a column in the New York Post. The column was syndicated to other newspapers around the country, a first by a black writer. He wrote about sports and politics, but his most frequent theme was racial injustice. He tried to persuade middle-class blacks to become active in the movement. The Post ended his column because of his support of Nixon in the 1960 presidential election. The Amsterdam News, a New York black weekly paper, soon offered Jackie a column, called "Jackie Robinson Says," and later, "Home Plate."



Another first for Jackie was first African-American TV sports analyst, for ABC's Major League Baseball Game of the Week telecasts in 1965. Robinson later worked as a part-time commentator for the Montreal Expos in 1972. In 1966, he was hired as general manager of the new Brooklyn Dodger professional football team of the Continental League. (Robinson had been a football star at UCLA, and also excelled at track in his youth. Golf was his passion in later years.)

In 1964, Robinson co-founded the Freedom National Bank—a black owned and operated bank in Harlem, New York—with businessman Dunbar McLaurin. Robinson was the bank's first chairman of the board. After Jackie's death 1972, Rachel Robinson served as chairman until 1990, when the bank closed. Over the course of his post-baseball life, Jackie Robinson was involved in a wide variety of other business ventures, involving public relations, life insurance, and real estate development and construction.

About John Fitzgerald Kennedy

“Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans – born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage, and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty.”

Those words were spoken on January 20th, 1961, by the youngest man to ever be elected as President of the United States. A Catholic that frequently spoke of religion having no place in elections, a white man that called for the equal rights of all, a combat veteran that understood the cost of war, a politician that believed that politics could once again be an honorable profession, and the son of one of the richest of America’s families that championed those that had the least: John F. Kennedy.

Born the second son to the family of Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, it could almost be said that politics was JFK’s destiny. He was born on May 29th, 1917, in Boston, Massachusetts, the city that his maternal grandfather “Honey Fitz” had been elected to represent in the Senate in 1892 and later served as mayor.

However, it was not until his return home from WWII and the death of his older brother Joe Jr. that JFK began to show any true political ambitions. He decided to run for Congress in 1946; many believed because of overwhelming pressure from his father. He started out an unsure and unpredictable candidate until one night when he spoke in front of a group of Goldstar mothers. A Goldstar mother is a mother that has lost a son or daughter serving in the military. Jack addressed the group at first stiffly and suddenly after hearing one of the mothers let out an audible sob stepped in front of the microphone and with confidence and poise delivered a heartwarming speech to the group, talking about his family and their Goldstar member status.



During that campaign the Kennedy camp highlighted the heroic actions of Jack when his PT boat had been destroyed in the South Pacific; to the strong objections of the candidate. The wrecking of the PT boat and subsequent actions that involved Jack towing one of his crewmates with his teeth by the strap of a life vest for miles until the men had reached a deserted island had aggravated the chronic back pain that Jack had endured since childhood. Due to this pain it hurt for the candidate to stand for long periods of time, bend over, or sit for too long. This made campaigning for office (which in those days was a face-to-face and shake-hands endeavor) very difficult and special precautions were taken to not wear out the candidate.

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JFK won the election in November 1946 and in January 1947 he was sworn in as a member of the U.S House of Representatives alongside Richard Nixon, who he considered a close friend in the House.

After winning his congressional reelection 4 years later, Jack set his sights on higher office. He began to take steps to run for the Senate seat in Massachusetts, running against 20-year incumbent Henry Cabot Lodge. He quickly appointed his brother, Robert, as Campaign Manager, a job which Bobby executed with ruthless efficiency. In November 1952, JFK beat his opponent by 70,000 votes.



During his run for the Senate in June 1951, JFK met his future wife Jacqueline Bouvier, a smart, witty and soft-spoken photographer for The Washington-Herald. The relationship was kept secret until Jack proposed in May 1953 and they were married on September 12th of the same year.

Soon after taking office Senator Kennedy made what many believe to be his most significant hire of his career. He hired Ted Sorenson, a young lawyer from Nebraska, as his Legislative Assistant. Over the years Sorenson wrote many, if not most, of JFK's speeches, but his most important role in the Kennedy political machine was as Senior Aide to Kennedy.

During the Democratic National Convention in 1956 and against the strong urging from his father to sit the fight out, JFK put his name into the list of people to be considered for the Vice-Presidential candidacy alongside the Democratic Presidential Candidate Adlai Stevenson. For a while Jack was in second place for the honor of running in a national campaign until suddenly support began to shift. In a moment of political brilliance JFK made his way to the stage and called for his delegates to vote for Estes Kefauver and to make the nomination unanimous so that the Democratic Party would speak with one voice.



This was the first time much of the United States had seen this young senator. The first national speech he delivered to national members of his own party and to the nation at home was one of unity, delivered with charisma and poise. It was apparent that the ambitious young man was not going to remain a senator for long.

Building off his national appearance and the council of his family and closest advisors, JFK launched his bid for the presidency in 1960. His nomination from the Democratic Party was far from assured though; he would first need to win more primaries than his chief opponent, Hubert Humphrey.

Humphrey and Kennedy came face to face during the Wisconsin Primary of 1960. Humphrey had the distinct advantage leading into the primary. An incredibly popular senator from the neighboring state of Minnesota, Humphrey was known affectionately in Wisconsin as "Wisconsin's third Senator."

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Despite his lead, Humphrey led a negative campaign that attacked Kennedy's inexperience and wealth. He even went as far as to allude that a Kennedy presidency would be directed by the Pope because of Kennedy's Catholicism, a strange accusation as Humphrey was Catholic himself.

Kennedy arrived later to the state than Humphrey but that had not stopped him from sending his family as surrogates. His brother Bobby, who also was serving as Campaign Manager, stumped up and down the state while Jackie and Jack's mother, Ethel, hosted "Kennedy Tea Parties" designed to target the woman's vote.

When he arrived in Wisconsin to campaign Kennedy showed what was quite possibly his greatest trait: an indifference to criticism. He addressed a crowd in Milwaukee on his first day and proclaimed that he did "not intend to speak ill of his opponent. I will, however, when his name is mentioned, speak well of him and his service."

His youth, vigor, and refusal to run a negative campaign against his popular opponent resonated with not only the voters of Wisconsin but many of their public officials. He won forty percent of the popular vote in the primary over Hubert Humphrey. After securing his party's nomination Kennedy began to put forth a set of challenges to the American people, a stark change from the long list of promises that the electorate was used to hearing from their campaigning politicians.

A defining moment of his campaign was when Martin Luther King Jr. was jailed for driving in the state of Georgia without a Georgia Driver's License. Both parties' candidates were asked for help in freeing King. The Republican Nominee Richard Nixon decided to ignore the request and stay away from the rocky political terrain. Kennedy, however, used his influence to get King released from Jail. The action gained him the support of the African American community in the general election.

This as much as anything else led to his victory in the Presidential Election of 1960 against Richard Nixon and his running mate Henry Cabot Lodge, and on January 20th, 1961, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was sworn in as President of the United States.



His term in office was full of highs and lows, including the "bungling" of the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the forced integration of colleges in the south, and the aversion of nuclear war with Russia during the Cuban Missile Crisis. With his foreign and domestic policy tested again and again in the one thousand days that he occupied the White House he did not send one combat division abroad or drop one bomb and used the presidency to break down the barriers of religion in politics and racial inequality in United States.

On November 22nd, 1963, while riding in his motorcade through the streets of Dallas, the President was shot and killed by Lee Harvey Oswald, a communist sympathizer who worked in the Dallas School Book Depository.

JFK was buried in Arlington National Cemetery on November 27th, 1963, and his grave is marked by an eternal flame. Fifty years after his death John F Kennedy is remembered by the American public as being one of the country's best presidents. He has a posthumous approval rating of 90%, higher than any other president. His life and legacy inspired a generation, led the world, and changed the United States. Since his inauguration in 1961 he is remembered by his immortal words, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

About Ronnie Rabinovitz and His Father, David

“Ronnie” is a real person: Ron Rabinovitz, now in his late 60s, and living in suburban Minneapolis. The play based on his friendship with baseball legend Jackie Robinson is, he says, “99 percent true,” or in the word of Eric Simonson’s script, “the heart of it is true. It’s true in my heart.”

In his teen years, Ron had the “incredible experience of working closely with my father, David, who reported directly to John F. Kennedy in the 1960 Wisconsin presidential primary. I am still passionate about politics to this day.”



David Rabinovitz was a Sheboygan attorney, specializing in equal rights. David’s connection to the Kennedys began in 1958, when he advised Robert Kennedy, chief counsel to the U.S. Senate’s Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field, known as the McClellan Committee after its chair, Democrat John McClellan. The committee investigated corruption and ties to organized crime in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, including two of its presidents, Dave Beck and Jimmy Hoffa. The committee included Senators John F. Kennedy and Barry Goldwater. The televised hearings were watched by 1.2 million American households.

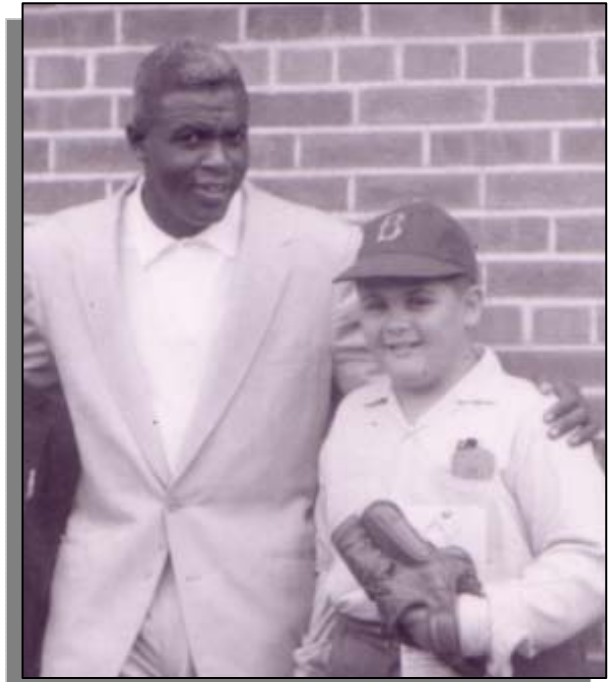
During this time, David Rabinovitz was the chief counsel to the UAW local representing striking Kohler workers. Ron has vivid memories of soup kitchens and other terrible conditions brought on by the strike, which began in 1954 and stretched into 1965, making it the longest major strike in American history. As president, JFK appointed David to a federal judgeship in September 1963. To become final the appointment needed Senate confirmation before the end of the session, which did not occur. In January 1964, after Kennedy’s assassination President Lyndon Johnson formally nominated David for the seat on the United States District Court for Western District of Wisconsin, but his service was terminated on Oct. 3, 1964, after the nomination was not confirmed by the Senate. David returned to private law practice in Sheboygan until his death in 1986.

Ron’s early career ambitions centered on the field of communications. He moved to Minneapolis at age 20 to attend Brown Institute. He became a radio disc jockey and later found his real niche in sales as manufacturer’s representative for children’s clothing. In his 25 years in that industry he was president of a number of sales associations. Today he is a sales rep for Liberty Carton Co. in Golden Valley.

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Over the last quarter-century, Ron has shared the story of his bond with Jackie Robinson with thousands of people in appearances at schools, corporations, and organizations. Ron's many appearances and interviews include The Baseball Hall of Fame, USA Today, CBS Evening News with Katie Couric, CBS Radio, ESPN, THE WEEK, Minneapolis Star Tribune, St. Paul Pioneer Press, and "The Story with Dick Gordon" on NPR, and most recently, "Larry King Now," just to name a few. He is an active member of The Jackie Robinson Foundation, The Baseball Hall of Fame, and The Creative Memory Foundation.

Ron is the happy husband of Abby, and the proud father of a daughter and son and their spouses; two stepdaughters and their spouses; eight grandchildren, and his precious niece, her husband, and son. When not working or spending time with his family and friends, Ronnie can be found in his den relaxing with his beloved sports events and political affairs.



For information on speaking engagements, contact Ron:
ronrabinovitz42@gmail.com or 612-597-0314.

Check out his Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/JackieRobinsonTheKid>

For Further Research and Suggested Reading

Books

Bremer, Aaron, et. al, editors. *The Encyclopedia of Strikes in American History*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe Company, 2009.

Kahn, Roger. *The Boys of Summer*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics; Reissue edition, 2006. Originally published 1972.

“The classic narrative of growing up within shouting distance of Ebbets Field, covering the Jackie Robinson Dodgers and what’s happened to everyone since.”

Long, Mike, editor. *Beyond Home Plate: Jackie Robinson on Life After Baseball*. Syracuse University Press, 2013.

Collection of Robinson’s writings, including columns he wrote for the New York Post and New York Amsterdam News, and letters to elected officials.

Rampersand, Arnold. *Jackie Robinson: A Biography*. Alfred Knopf, 1997.

Robinson, Jackie. *I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography*.

“Originally published in 1972, the year Robinson died, is not about baseball: it’s about the deep commitment that Robinson made to achieve justice for himself and all Americans.” – Publishers Weekly

Robinson, Sharon (daughter of Jackie Robinson) has written a number of children’s books about her father. Check them out at her website:

<http://www.sharonrobinsonink.com>

Film

Letters from Jackie: The Private Thoughts of Jackie Robinson (DVD) Lionsgate Home Entertainment, 2013. Includes references to Ronnie Rabinovitz.

42: The True Story of an American Legend, Warner Bros. 2013

Jackie Robinson’s Dodger uniform number was 42. It was retired by the Dodgers in 1972. Major League baseball retired the number in 1997, the first and only time a jersey number had been retired throughout an entire professional sports league

Primary (DVD) Drew Associates

Documentary that follows presidential hopefuls John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey during the 1960 Wisconsin primary. Described as one of the most influential documentary in the medium.

Turner Classic Movies website:

<http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article.html?isPreview=&id=775864%7C719891&name=Primary>

IMDB: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054205/?ref_=nv_sr_2

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Additional commentary on *Primary* by Richard Brody, The New Yorker (online edition only)
“DVD of the Week: *Primary*,” December 28, 2001
<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/movies/2011/12/dvd-of-the-week-primary.html>
“J.F.K. Before The Camera,” November 22, 2013
<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/movies/2013/11/jfk-before-the-camera.html#entry-more>

Web

Interview of Ron Rabinovitz on “Larry King Now,” December 17, 2013
http://www.ora.tv/larrykingnow/jackie-robinsons-pen-pal-ron-rabinovitz-0_akvjh8vs
Mentions History Theatre play, *The Incredible Season of Ronnie Rabinovitz!*

Jackie Robinson: The Official Website
<http://www.jackierobinson.com/>

42 Facts About Jackie Robinson
Mental Floss
<http://mentalfloss.com/article/50059/42-facts-about-jackie-robinson#ixzz2la7yGn71>

Campaign of 1960
John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum
<http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Campaign-of-1960.aspx>

“A Primary that Mattered,”
<http://portalwisconsin.wordpress.com/2012/03/20/a-primary-that-mattered/>

Activities

Race in the U.S.: Now and Then

Objective: For students to gain a clearer understanding of how the current racial climate in the U.S. parallels and deviates from historical racism. Also for students to be able to imagine what the effects of racism would be on their lives or on the lives of someone they know.

Materials Needed: Paper and a writing utensil.

Outcome: A loosely guided discussion about race, racial discrimination, racism, and the progress toward civil rights in the U.S.

Instructions: Read the following newspaper excerpts (links to articles included below). Have the students respond to the four subsequent questions. Discuss those responses as a group.

About events that took place in 1960

“David Rabinovitz's law office in downtown Sheboygan, Wis., was vandalized, but it was the message in large block letters scrawled across the window that left [Ronnie] trembling in fear. ‘Someone had spray-painted, ‘Rabinovitz is bringing ‘n-words’ to Sheboygan,’ says his only son, Ron. The year was 1960. John F. Kennedy was elected president in a narrow victory against Richard M. Nixon. The first demonstration to protest segregated seating occurred in Greensboro, N.C., prompting sit-ins throughout the South. The United States launched its first weather satellite. And Ronnie Rabinovitz, 14, was rudely welcomed to the world of racism. The motive behind the hate crime was simple. Jackie Robinson, who had received letters of admiration from Rabinovitz's father, was scheduled to spend the night at the family's home during a business trip; he later changed plans.”

Nightengale, Bob. "Letters Reveal Part of Robinson, Open World for a Young Fan."

USA Today. N.p., 12 Apr. 2007

http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/baseball/2007-04-12-robinson-letters_N.htm.

About events that took place in 2013

“A famous statue of Jackie Robinson in New York was found defaced with hateful words on Wednesday, police said. Anti-Semitic writing was discovered by staff of MCU Park in Coney Island – home of the Brooklyn Cyclones baseball team – and New York police got a call around 8:30 a.m., said Detective Kellyann Ort. The larger-than-life statue depicts Pee Wee Reese with his arm around Jackie Robinson – celebrated for being the first African American in the major leagues – in their Brooklyn Dodger uniforms. MCU Park’s director of communications, Billy Harner, said that park maintenance employees were preparing the field for an 11 a.m. game when they found ‘vulgar writing that was both racist and anti-Semitic’ and notified the park’s general manager. Harner said the words were written by the vandals in black marker. NBC New York reported that the graffiti included the n-word and a swastika and said ‘F--- Jackie Robinson.’”

Fieldstadt, Elisha. "Jackie Robinson Statue Vandalized with Offensive Words, Symbols.."

Online posting. *NBC News*. N.p., 07 Aug. 2013

http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/08/07/19917048-jackie-robinson-statue-vandalized-with-offensive-words-symbols

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Answer the following questions:

- 1) Have you ever seen an example of racism/racial discrimination (either one instance or a trend)? If so, describe what happened and how it made you feel. If you haven't, why do you think you haven't?

- 2) Is a person's experience in life different based on their race?
(Example: Do you think a white person's reaction to seeing the vandalism versus a person of color's reaction. Try to think broader than just this example.)
Why or why not would their experiences be different?

- 3) What can we as individuals do when we are confronted with racism? (write about both individual instances and trends of racism)

- 4) What should we as a society do about racism? (write about both individual instances and trends of racism)

Evaluating Web Sites for Bias

Subjects: Social Studies, Language Arts

Description: Students use a checklist to evaluate web content about President Kennedy and/or Jackie Robinson for bias.

Objective: As with traditional print resources, one must use a method of critical analysis to determine its value. Students will become familiar with the checklist they use to evaluate web content for bias. The student will use the checklist to evaluate to web sites from very different sources.

Materials Needed: Internet access.

Instructions: In this activity, pairs of students will visit two sites about President Kennedy or Jackie Robinson and evaluate the content for credibility. The criteria can be decided amongst the whole class or you can use the ones listed below. You can either have all students use the same two websites to see how different people view the same material or have each pair pick two individual websites.

Once the students are done evaluating the websites, get the class back into a large group to discuss their findings. Discuss how personal bias can help mold students views. Did the partners agree on each item or were there disagreements? Was it hard to decide where some of the items ended on the spectrum?

Website Bias Checklist

Authority

- a. Is the information reliable?
- b. Check the author's credentials and affiliation. Is the author and expert in the field?
- c. Does the resource have a reputable organization or expert behind it?
- d. Are the sources of information stated? Can you verify the information?
- e. Can the author be contacted for clarification?

Scope

- a. Is the material at the site useful, unique and accurate? Or is it derivative, repetitious, or doubtful?
- b. Is the information available in other formats?
- c. Is the purpose of the resource clearly stated? Does it fulfill its purpose?
- d. What items are included in the resource? What subject area, time periods, formats or types of material are covered?
- e. Is the information factual or an opinion?
- f. Does the site contain original information or simply links?
- g. How frequently is the resource updated?

Format and Presentation

- a. Is the information easy to get to? How many links does it take to get to something useful?
- b. What is the quality of the graphical images? Do these images enhance the resource or distract from the content?
- c. Is the target audience or intended users clearly indicated?
- d. Is the arrangement of links uncluttered?

Writing Activity: What Inspires You?

Instructions: Have your students choose one of the quotes listed below and write an essay on why they chose that particular quote and how it pertains to their life. Students can also research their own quote from either Jackie Robinson or President Kennedy if they don't connect with one of the ones below. This can also be used as a speech assignment.

Questions to Answer:

- 1) Why is this quote special to me?
- 2) How does this quote relate to me?
- 3) What experiences have I had in my life that substantiates this idea?
- 4) What does this quote make me think about?

Quotes by Jackie Robinson:

A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.

I'm not concerned with your liking or disliking me... all I ask is that you respect me as a human being.

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.

I guess you'd call me an independent since I've never identified myself with one party or another in politics. I always decide my vote by taking as careful a look as I can at the actual candidates and issues themselves, no matter what the party label.

There's not an American in this country free until every one of us is free.

Quotes by John F. Kennedy:

The rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.

We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives.

Conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth.

One person can make a difference, and everyone should try.

Too often we enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.

Fact Baseball

Objective: Through self-guided learning, students will research the life of Jackie Robinson and his impact on the civil rights movement.

Instructions:

DAY ONE:

Split the class into two teams and have them choose team names.

Each team should research and share facts on the life of Jackie Robinson and his contribution to the Civil Rights Movement.

DAY TWO:

Each team has a turn to be in the “infield” and in the “outfield.”

The infield team sends a player up to “bat.” The “outfield” team pitches a question to the person at the bat.

If the person answers the question correctly, he or she progresses to first base. If not, it’s an out.

As in baseball, each person at bat who gets a “hit” pushes the base runner forward. Four correct answers given at bat will propel the first runner to score a point for the team.

Three “outs” sends the outfield in and the infield out.

The class can play as many innings as time permits.

Baseball Math

Objective: Through examples featuring baseball statistics, students will apply basic math skills and understand how graphs help to represent numeric information.

Instructions:

- 1) Tell students that in sports and in life, people keep track of facts and information through groups or sets of numbers called *statistics*. In sports, statistics can represent touchdowns, points, runs, etc. Types of statistics outside of sports include size, income, population, etc.
- 2) Distribute copies of the next page titled **The Math of Baseball** and read the instructions aloud. Have students look over the graph on the page.
- 3) Ask students what information is displayed in the bar graph (how many hits and who made them). Explain that the information on the left side (vertical axis) of the graph and the bottom (horizontal axis) of the graph tells you what statistics are being shown.
- 4) Instruct students to answer the questions on the printable. Once everyone has finished, review the answers as a class.

Printable Answers:

1. 9 players
 2. 295 more hits
 3. about 182 hits per season
- 5) Have students create their own bar graph following the instructions at the bottom right of the printable.

Extension:

Divide students into small groups to research average annual income statistics in the United States. Possible areas of research include people with different levels of education, different occupations, different age groups, etc. Have groups represent their findings in a bar graph, and make presentations to the class.

The Math of Baseball

Graphs are useful for displaying data. A **bar graph** (like the one below) compares different categories of data by showing each category as a bar whose length is proportional to the number it represents.

Study this graph and then answer the questions that follow to learn more.

Use a separate piece of paper to calculate your answers.

1. How many players have between 2,000 and 2,500 hits?
2. How many more hits does Johnny Damon have than Ichiro Suzuki?
3. Derek Jeter has played in 17 MLB seasons. About how many hits has he averaged per season? (Round answer to the nearest whole number.)



Analyzing the Language of Presidential Debates

Objective: In this lesson, students will analyze an excerpt from a 1960 debate between presidential candidates Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy. Then, students will watch or read a debate between current presidential or vice-presidential candidates and reflect on how their verbal patterns may relate to their overall political positions as well.

- Evaluate word choice and linguistic patterns in a historic presidential debate
- Watch or read a debate between current presidential or vice-presidential candidates
- Analyze word choice and linguistic patterns in a self-selected debate transcript excerpt

Instructions:

Reading and analyzing an excerpt from a historic presidential debate:

- Explain to students that they will be analyzing an excerpt from a historic 1960 debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy — the first televised debates between presidential candidates.
- Distribute copies of the October 7, 1960 debate excerpt between Nixon and Kennedy, and have students follow these directions:
"Carefully read both Nixon's and Kennedy's responses to debate panelist Harold R. Levy's question to Vice President Nixon on the topic of 'party labels.' As you are reading, try to make note of how Nixon and Kennedy emphasize particular words and phrases in their responses. Underline those words and phrases that stand out to you. Which words or phrases do the candidates tend to repeat? What words or phrases are familiar or unfamiliar to you? What other verbal patterns do you detect in these candidates' responses?"

Exploring repetition as a means of emphasis:

- Elicit students' comments about any language patterns they detected in Nixon's and Kennedy's responses to Levy's question, and list any specific words or phrases that they underlined on the board. Steer students to pay close attention to the candidates' usage of the word "party." Why do students think that Kennedy uses the word "party" four more times than Nixon, even though Nixon's response is twice as long as Kennedy's response?
- Display the Visual Thesaurus word map for the word "party" on the white board and have students identify which definition of "party" is relevant to the debate responses (i.e., "an organization to gain political power"). You could also then click on this definition for "party" to reveal the multitude of political parties that exist or have existed beyond the Democratic and Republican parties (e.g., the Black Panthers, the Know-Nothing Party, the Free Soil Party, etc.).
- Establish that repetition is a common form of emphasis and that Nixon's reluctance to use the word "party" may be related to his greater point: that a candidate should be judged as an individual, rather than as a mere representative of a party.

Continued >>

Investigating the term "free world":

- Call attention to Nixon's usage of the term "free world" and his repeated stance that the 1960 election race between himself and Kennedy would determine "leadership for the whole free world."
- Display the Visual Thesaurus word map for the term "Free World" and reveal that Nixon was referring to "anti-Communist countries" by using this phrase.
- Explain to students that Nixon and Kennedy were candidates vying for presidency during the Cold War, the post-WWII "cold" conflict between Western allies (headed by the U.S.) and Communist countries in the East (led by the Soviet Union).

Analyzing language usage in a contemporary debate:

- Assign students the task of watching a recording of a debate. Ideally, students could watch one of the debates in its entirety and then examine a transcript of the debate after viewing.
- Have students use the "Analyzing a Candidate's Verbal Patterns" sheet] to record their general reactions to the debate. Who do they think "won" the debate? Why? How did each candidate try to convince viewers of his or her point of view? In general, what verbal or rhetorical patterns did each candidate use in an effort to reinforce their points?
- Direct students to choose a particular question posed by a debate moderator or panelist and to more closely examine each candidate's responses to this question. Have students write the question on the "Analyzing a Candidate's Verbal Patterns" sheet and then supply brief summaries of candidates' responses to the question
- Have students next examine how candidates used specific words and phrases in their responses. Which words or phrases did candidates repeat or emphasize and why?
- Holding a roundtable analysis of a debate:
- Rearrange students' desks so that there is a central "roundtable" of students' desks in the center of the room.
- The students in the center of the room should act as debate analysts who are discussing the pros and cons of each candidate's debate performances, much like the political analysts who are featured immediately following a televised debate.
- Begin the discussion by having a roundtable participant read excerpts from his or her comments on the "Analyzing a Candidate's Verbal Patterns." Try to encourage a lively discussion that seeks to answer the central question: "How do candidates' word choices reflect their greater points or political positions?"

Extending the Lesson:

- By using the Commission on Presidential Debates web site (www.debates.org), students could compare and contrast transcripts of historic debates with more contemporary debates and draw some conclusions about how political language and rhetoric has changed throughout recent American history.
- If applicable, you can watch the whole speech on you tube. Split the class into two groups. Have one of the groups watch the debate while the other half only listens to the speech. Once the debate is over, have the class get back together and have a vote on who won the debate. Talk about why they voted this way. Discuss with the class the history regarding this issue: during the live debate, those that watched it thought Kennedy won, those who listened to it thought Nixon had won.

Excerpt from the Second Kennedy-Nixon Presidential Debate (October 7, 1960)

MR. LEVY: Mr. Vice President, you are urging voters to forget party labels and vote for the man. Senator Kennedy says that in doing this you are trying to run away from your party on such issues as housing and aid to education by advocating what he calls a me-too program. Why do you say that party labels are not important?

MR. NIXON: Because that's the way we elect a president in this country, and it's the way we should. I'm a student of history as is Senator Kennedy, incidentally; and I have found that in the history of this country we've had many great presidents. Some of them have been Democrats and some of them have been Republicans. The people, some way, have always understood that at a particular time a certain man was the one the country needed. Now, I believe that in an election when we are trying to determine who should lead the free world – not just America – perhaps, as Senator Kennedy has already indicated, the most important election in our history – it isn't the label that he wears or that I wear that counts. It's what we are. It's our whole lives. It's what we stand for. It's what we believe. And consequently, I don't think it's enough to go before Republican audiences – and I never do – and say, "Look, vote for me because I'm a Republican." I don't think it's enough for Senator Kennedy to go before the audiences on the Democratic side and say, "Vote for me because I'm a Democrat." That isn't enough. What's involved here is the question of leadership for the whole free world. Now that means the best leadership. It may be Republican, it may be Democratic. But the people are the ones that determine it. The people have to make up their minds. And I believe the people, therefore, should be asked to make up their minds not simply on the basis of, "Vote the way your grandfather did; vote the way your mother did." I think the people should put America first, rather than party first. Now, as far as running away from my party is concerned, Senator Kennedy has said that we have no compassion for the poor that we are against progress – the enemies of progress, is the term that he's used, and the like. All that I can say is this: we do have programs in all of these fields – education, housing, defense – that will move America forward. They will move her forward faster, and they will move her more surely than in his program. This is what I deeply believe. I'm sure he believes just as deeply that his will move that way. I suggest, however, that in the interest of fairness that he could give me the benefit of also believing as he believes.

MR. McGEE: Senator Kennedy.

MR. KENNEDY: Well, let me say I do think that parties are important in that they tell something about the program and something about the man. Abraham Lincoln was a great president of all the people; but he was selected by his party at a key time in history because his party stood for something. The Democratic Party in this century has stood for something. It has stood for progress; it has stood for concern for the people's welfare. It has stood for a strong foreign policy and a strong national defense, and as a result, produced Wilson, President Roosevelt, and President Truman. The Republican Party has produced McKinley and Harding, Coolidge, Dewey, and Landon. They do stand for something. They stand for a whole different approach to the problems facing this country at home and abroad. That's the importance of party; only if it tells something about the record. And the Republicans in recent years – not only in the last twenty-five years, but in the last eight years – have opposed housing, opposed care for the aged, opposed federal aid to education, opposed minimum wage and I think that record tells something.

Analyzing a Candidate's Verbal Patterns

Debate date: _____

Debate Participants: _____

Who do you think “won” this debate and why?

In general, what verbal or rhetorical patterns did each candidate use in an effort to reinforce their points?

Now, choose a particular question posed by a debate moderator or panelist to more closely examine.
Write out the question here:

Briefly summarize how each candidate responded to the question:

Which words or phrases did candidates repeat or emphasize in their responses?

Do these particular word choices reflect their greater political positions? If so, how?