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Jackie Robinson Steals Home

By

PETER MANOS

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(JACKIE ROBINSON STEALS HOME)

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Jackie Robinson Steals Home was premiered by The WordPlayers of Knoxville, Tenn., in February 2020.

CAST:

ACTOR 1 James Williams
ACTOR 2 Ethan Norman
ACTOR 3 Joseph Brown
ACTOR 4 Kristina Walker
ACTOR 5Jeni Lamm

PRODUCTION:

Director Tracey Copeland Halter
Artistic Director Terry Weber
Managing DirectorJeni Lamm

Jackie Robinson Steals Home

CHARACTERS

JACKIE ROBINSON
ANNOUNCER
UMPIRE
REPORTER 1
REPORTER 2
MOTHER
CHILD'S VOICE
CONDUCTOR'S VOICE
LITTLE GIRL
DADDY
CARL ANDERSON
KARL DOWNS
RACHEL
JOE LOUIS
ARMY COLONEL
MAJOR HAFNER
OFFICER
SERGEANT
BUS DRIVER
VOICE OF ARMY OFFICER
BRANCH RICKEY
LEO DUROCHER
PEE WEE REESE

SETTING: Yankee Stadium, 1947. Various scenes in flashback.
All baseball action can be mimed.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play is designed to be done with minimal set or lighting requirements to be good for touring companies.

Other than Jackie, who is onstage at all times, the presence of the other characters is up to the director's discretion. For instance, they can be in full view of the audience and step in with minimal costume elements or even just "voice" their part from the periphery of the onstage area. Perhaps a hat rack and small prop table where actors can grab elements as needed can also be on the side or in plain view of the audience as the director sees fit. However the show is produced, the action, including any entrances and exits should be fluid.

Additionally, casting notes, a study guide and sheet music for "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" can be found in the back of the book.

Jackie Robinson Steals Home

(The cast enters sings "Take Me Out to the Ball Game.")

CAST.

TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME
TAKE ME OUT WITH THE CROWD
BUY ME SOME PEANUTS AND CRACKER JACK
I DON'T CARE IF I NEVER GET BACK
LET ME ROOT ROOT ROOT FOR THE DODGERS
IF THEY DON'T WIN IT'S A SHAME
FOR IT'S ONE, TWO, THREE STRIKES YOU'RE OUT
AT THE OLD BALL GAME!

(Cheers. The roar of a crowd is heard.)

ANNOUNCER. April 1947, and it's a great day for baseball, sports fans! The Brooklyn Dodgers against their age-old rivals, the New York Yankees. And here we go!

UMPIRE. Batter up!

(JACKIE ROBINSON enters. He wears a Brooklyn Dodgers uniform. He is holding a bat and a Brooklyn Dodgers cap in his hands. He swings the bat in practice a few times, then steps out of the batter's box and addresses the audience.)

JACKIE. Hello. My name is Jack Roosevelt Robinson. Everybody calls me Jackie. I want you take a good look at me. I am not tall. I am not short. I got good strong arms and legs, but there are other folk that are bigger and stronger. What I got inside me is what made me what I am. But I never had it made. And here's why. Look at my face. Look at my

hands. *(Pulls up his pant leg.)* Yep, it even goes down to my legs. Dark skin. Maybe it's not important to you, my skin color. I hope it's not. But for America in the 1940s, it was very important. It kept people who were dark like me from getting good jobs, getting a good place to live, getting safety and protection for my family, getting respect. People like me could not become major league professional baseball players, for instance. I changed that. Now excuse me. I'm up.

ANNOUNCER. And now coming up to the plate for the Dodgers in this first game of the World Series, the man who is making history. Jackie Robinson. The first black player to play in major league baseball.

(JACKIE steps up to the plate. There are cheers and boos mixed together.)

ANNOUNCER *(cont'd)*. These Yankees fans don't like it. And there are many people who hate the idea of a colored man playing in America's pastime. But there are thousands of black fans in the bleachers and some of them have come from far away to see the first black man in the major leagues. Attendance for all the Dodgers games has been way up thanks to all manner of fans from across the country coming here to New York just to see Jackie play.

JACKIE. Here we go, 1947.

REPORTERS 1 & 2. Jackie Robinson! Jackie! Jackie Robinson! Over here, Jackie!

(Lights change to a press conference. JACKIE puts down bat, reluctantly.)

JACKIE. Oh now can't you just let me bat?

REPORTER 1. Jackie, you know there are a lot of folks who don't think African Americans should play major league baseball, including many players. What will you do if a racist pitcher tries to throw a pitch at your head?

JACKIE. Duck.

REPORTER 2. Before you, no black player was able to play in the major leagues. How does it feel to have changed the complexion of the game in America?

JACKIE. I don't know what you mean by that. Baseball and everything else doesn't have one complexion in America. People who say it does—they're the ones not being American if you ask me.

REPORTER 1. But what do you say to those who say baseball, America's pastime, isn't ready to integrate races?

JACKIE. Well, I'll tell you who was really into keeping races apart. Hitler. And I think we just had a war to stop him. And I think we won that war too.

REPORTER 2. But there was the negro league and the major league. No blacks were allowed in the big leagues. Until you. Now you have the big bucks like all major leaguers. You have it made.

JACKIE. I said it before and I will say it again. I never had it made.

(Lights change. JACKIE puts bat up, crouches.

MOTHER, a sharecropper's wife, appears, holding a baby and carrying suitcases.)

ANNOUNCER. Robinson takes the first pitch.

JACKIE. Oh no, Mom. Don't come into my memory now.

UMPIRE. Strike one!

JACKIE. Mom! This isn't even my memory. Sixteen months after I was born. 1920. I was just a baby.

MOTHER (*addressing unseen children*). All you kids be quiet. Momma's got something important to talk about. Hush now! You hear me?

JACKIE. Mom! I can't be thinking about this now! It's the World Series twenty-seven years later!

MOTHER (*to baby*). You stop your crying, Jack Roosevelt Robinson. Suck on this hanky here, baby.

(She pulls a handkerchief out of her apron pocket and gives the corner of it to the baby, who stops crying.)

JACKIE (*trying to put the memory out of his head as he waits for the next pitch*). Concentrate, Jackie.

MOTHER. Kids, we are moving out of Georgia.

CHILD'S VOICE. Where's Daddy, Momma?

JACKIE. Gone.

MOTHER (*fighting back tears of anger and hurt*). Your father is not coming.

(The memory has won. JACKIE puts the bat down.)

JACKIE. Daddy took the raise he had gotten from the man who we sharecropped for and left us. With a new girlfriend.

MOTHER. We are on our own. We need to get our things together. We have to leave tonight or the owner of this farm is going to take all our savings and force us out. We need to pack up quick and head to the train.

CHILD'S VOICE. A train! We going on a train!

MOTHER. Yeah, more train than you'll know what to do with. Days and days of it. We will be on it all the way cross country to California where Uncle Burton and your cousins live.

CHILD'S VOICE. Where's California?

MOTHER. Other side of the world.

JACKIE. So we moved away from Jim Crow Georgia where folks like me might get killed for talking back to a white person.

(MOTHER picks up suitcases and bundles as best she can while still holding the baby.)

MOTHER. Edgar, when we get on the train, you put little baby Jackie on your lap. Willa Mae that strap is gonna break. Put it around your arm before you drop that load. Frank! You stay close! No time to dawdle. You can look around all you like when we get on the train! Move it, everybody!

JACKIE. Even getting on that train was hard for us.

CONDUCTOR'S VOICE. All aboard! Coloreds get to the black car. You can't ride up front. This way!

MOTHER. Come on, kids. We go back here.

CHILD'S VOICE. Why, Momma?

MOTHER *(irritated as she rushes off with unseen children)*.

You ask too many questions. Get on before they shove off without us.

JACKIE *(getting ready to bat again)*. No, I never had it made.

ANNOUNCER. The pitch—

JACKIE *(jumping back)*. Nearly hit me!

UMPIRE. Ball one!

REPORTER 1. So really you consider yourself from California, not Georgia, right Jackie?

JACKIE. Yeah. I guess. Pasadena, California. Momma went to work—washing and ironing. We barely scraped by. Two meals a day—breakfast and dinner—and some days we would not have eaten at all if Momma hadn't brought

leftovers back from the houses she worked at. My sister Willa Mae watched me when I was too young for school. When Willa Mae went to school, I went with her and played in the sandbox in the school yard all day until school let out.

REPORTER 1. You played all day all alone?

JACKIE. Yep. No lunch either. We couldn't afford it. Later when I went to school, I played with other kids, mostly white kids. Everybody wanted me on their team. I was good at games. Stickball. Football. Dodgeball. I was so good at sports that kids shared their lunch with me in school if I would play on their team. I didn't get any lunch for school, as I said. So I played hard to eat half of somebody else's lunch.

REPORTER 2. So you and whites got along just fine when you were a kid?

JACKIE. Kids don't hate people for their skin color until their parents tell them to. One time I was walking along and a little girl yelled, "Nigger, nigger, nigger!"

LITTLE GIRL (*appearing*). Well you yelled, "Cracker, cracker, cracker!"

JACKIE. That's what I'd heard people call white folk in Georgia. Then you threw a rock at me!

LITTLE GIRL (*mimes throwing a stone at him*). Take that!

JACKIE (*as a little boy, hit in the head by the stone*). Ow!

(He mimes throwing a stone at her.)

LITTLE GIRL (*hit by it*). OW! Daddy!

DADDY (*storming in*). Who's throwing rocks at my little girl. You? Your kind always cause trouble! I'll teach you!

(DADDY mimes throwing a rock. JACKIE throws a rock. It goes back and forth until finally DADDY and LITTLE GIRL retreat.)

MOTHER (*entering*). Jack Roosevelt Robinson, I heard you have been throwing rocks at people!

JACKIE. Momma, they started it!

MOTHER. Then you end it. You walk away. You hear me, Jackie? You walk away. You don't play their game.

ANNOUNCER. The pitch!

(JACKIE quickly takes up his bat, swings through it.)

UMPIRE. Strike two!

JACKIE. Man, that is a nasty curveball!

MOTHER. Look at me when I am talking to you, young man. I don't ever want to see you fighting just because of what someone calls you.

JACKIE. She threw a rock at me, Momma!

MOTHER. Just because somebody didn't raise her right doesn't mean you need to behave that way.

JACKIE. We just gonna stand for it?

MOTHER. We don't stand for anything. But you do not lower yourself to their level. You want rats to have their way? Be a rat yourself.

JACKIE. I ain't no rat—

MOTHER. Prove it. Better is as better does. And don't say "ain't." That's old south Jim Crow talk. We are out of there for good.

ANNOUNCER. Here comes the next pitch!

JACKIE (*to himself*). I ain't no—I am not a rat ...

(JACKIE doesn't swing.)

JACKIE (*cont'd*). That pitch is low.

UMPIRE. Ball two.

ANNOUNCER. Two and two. Full count on strikes, so Jackie will have to protect the plate.

REPORTER 1. So California was no better than Georgia?

JACKIE. In some ways it was the same. Some folks didn't want us in their neighborhood. They got up a petition to try to get us to move out. Somebody called the police on my brother Edgar one time because his roller skates on the street were too noisy. Lots of folks complained about me too.

REPORTER 1. You got in trouble a lot?

JACKIE. Well, I tried to be good—had a paper route, mowed lawns for extra money. But I also ran with a gang. All outcasts. We were a diverse group: blacks, Japanese, Mexicans. Everybody hated us so we hated everybody.

ANNOUNCER. Here comes the pitch!

(JACKIE swings—there is a loud “crack.”)

ANNOUNCER *(cont'd)*. Fouled off. Still two and two.

(CARL ANDERSON, a man dressed as a garage mechanic, enters.)

CARL ANDERSON. I've been watching you, Jackie.

JACKIE. Two men, both named “Carl,” they set me straight when I was a kid.

(CARL ANDERSON puts his arm around JACKIE's shoulder.)

JACKIE *(cont'd)*. Mr. Carl Anderson was a mechanic that worked in an auto shop near where I lived.

CARL ANDERSON. You don't belong in a gang.

JACKIE. We're not a gang. We're just a bunch of kids.

CARL ANDERSON. Well, I heard you “bunch of kids” were caught stealing stuff.

JACKIE. One kid took one apple from a fruit stand.

CARL ANDERSON. Throwing stuff at passing cars.

JACKIE. Dirt. Just a little fun.

CARL ANDERSON. That “little fun” is going to put you in jail one day, boy. You better get yourself together.

JACKIE (*not looking at him*). I’m together.

CARL ANDERSON. Suit yourself.

(He starts to go.)

JACKIE. Mr. Anderson. You’re not gonna tell my mom, are you?

CARL ANDERSON. You don’t think your mom already knows? She can see it in you when you talk to her. Surly. Lying. Talking tough. You hang out with the wrong people you become wrong yourself. You are better than that, Jackie.

(He exits.)

ANNOUNCER. Here comes the next pitch.

(JACKIE swings, crack!)

ANNOUNCER (*cont’d*). Another pitch fouled away.

JACKIE. I quit that gang.

ANNOUNCER. The pitch.

(JACKIE swings, crack!)

JACKIE (*cont’d*). Fouled off again. This is a real battle of wits between pitcher and batter.

(Reverend KARL DOWNS enters with a golf club.)

KARL. Jack, you know I'm a minister of God so I'm not allowed to bet you, but I've got to bond you ten cents.

JACKIE. You're on, Reverend Karl.

(KARL takes a few practice swings, concentrating.)

JACKIE *(to audience)*. Reverend Karl Downs from our church. We hung out together. Played golf. Talked. I wanted to be like him. I got a sports scholarship to UCLA, played football and basketball as well as baseball, but always made sure to get back to teach Sunday school, help any way I could. He helped so many people. I never wanted to let him down.

(KARL swings the golf club—both look out to where the ball is going.)

KARL. Beat that, college boy.

ANNOUNCER. Pitcher checks the sign from the catcher. Nods—Here comes the windup—

(JACKIE hits the imaginary ball with a crack! He drops his bat and runs.)

KARL. Woeee! Is there any sport you can't play, Jack Robinson?

ANNOUNCER. It's a line drive to right! First baseman's got it on the bounce. Here comes Jackie!

(JACKIE rushes to the base.)

UMPIRE. Safe!

(Crowd roars, KARL pats JACKIE on the back, smiling, and then exits.)