

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Thank You, Jackie Robinson

by

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Book Information

Barbara Cohen, Thank You, Jackie Robinson

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125 Pages

Book Level: 4.4

Interest Level: MG

A fatherless white boy, who shares with an old black man an enthusiasm for the Brooklyn Dodgers and first baseman Jackie Robinson, takes a ball autographed by Jackie to his elderly friend's death bed.

Topics: Family Life, Death; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; People, Elderly; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Sports/Recreation, Baseball

Main Characters

Davy a black chef who cooks at the Greenes' inn and shares Sam's love for the Dodgers

Elliot Henrietta's husband, a Giants fan

Henrietta Davy's only daughter

Mrs. Greene Sam's widowed mother who runs an inn in New Jersey

Sam Greene a young boy who is absolutely crazy about the Brooklyn Dodgers of the 1940s

Vocabulary

enrapture to fill with ecstasy or joy

judiciously acting in a way that exhibits sound judgement

remote distant from

vindictive inclined to revenge

Synopsis

This is the story of a young boy, Sam Greene, growing up in the 1940s with his widowed mother and three sisters in an inn his mother owns. Sam is

a huge fan of the Brooklyn Dodgers. He loves the Dodgers so much that he not only recalls the statistics of all the Dodgers games of the last four years, but he can also retell the games from start to finish. Sam has never found anyone to understand his feelings for the Dodgers, until he meets Davy.

Davy is the new chef for his mother's inn. Sam and Davy strike up a friendship the first day Davy begins working at the inn, when Davy offers Sam some apples and listens to Sam retell a Dodgers game. Happy to have found a fellow Dodgers lover, Sam does not even notice that his friendship with Davy may seem odd to strangers, since Sam is a white boy and Davy is a black man.

Davy and Sam begin going to Dodgers games together. Sometimes Davy's daughter, Henrietta, and her husband, Elliot, join them on their trips to the ball park. Sam enjoys arriving during batting practice and lingering in the park after the game is over. Over a few summers they develop a very close bond. One summer they even decide they should travel to as many ball parks as they can to watch the Dodgers play in order get a feel for the other stadiums. The ultimate road trip comes when they go all the way to Pittsburgh to watch two Dodgers games. Though Sam's mother thinks they are crazy, she agrees to allow Sam to go.

The summer after the big trip, Davy suffers a heart attack and is hospitalized. Since Sam is not family, he is not allowed to visit Davy in the hospital. He decides that he might make Davy better by getting a ball autographed by some Dodgers as a gift for Davy. Though he is almost kicked out of the ball park by an usher, Sam manages to get the players to autograph the ball and shakes hands with Jackie Robinson and four other Dodgers. Elliot manages to sneak Sam in to see Davy. Sam gives Davy the ball and visits with him for awhile. After leaving, he realizes Davy will not get better.

A short time later Davy dies. Sam goes to Davy's funeral and tries to come to grips with the concept of Davy going to heaven. In his anger and grief, he struggles with the meaning of listening to another

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Dodgers game without Davy to share it with. When he finally does turn on the game, he finds peace as Jackie Robinson hits a double and gives Sam a wonderful image in his head, which he knows will never die.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Tell how Sam acted when he tried to convince Jackie Robinson to sign a ball for Davy.

To catch Jackie's attention, Sam had to shout "as loud as a thunderbolt" while an usher tried to move him off the dug-out roof. It took courage for him to climb up there and stick with his plan. Then, as he spoke with Jackie, Sam was honest, telling him Davy's story. Finally, Sam acted "nervy," as he told Jackie to be sure to get a hit with the ball he brought back for Davy.

Literary Analysis

Why does Sam want his mother to lie to him about Davy "going to heaven"?

Henrietta's beliefs seem to give her comfort as she faces the loss of her father, and Sam envies that sense of comfort. However, Sam and his mother are of a different faith and cannot take the same comfort as Henrietta in the idea of heaven. At first, Sam wishes his mother would put comfort ahead of her own beliefs and tell him Davy is in heaven. He soon realizes that he could not have believed her "fib" anyway. Each person must find his or her own faith and comfort.

Inferential Comprehension

Why do the other Dodgers want to meet Sam after the game?

When Jackie Robinson says, "...these guys wanted to meet Davy's friend," the reader knows that Jackie has been telling them Sam's story in the dugout. The story of a young white boy being friends with an older African-American man parallels the team's struggle to win acceptance for Jackie in the white world of baseball. "Jackie's friends" have a lot in common with "Davy's friend."

Constructing Meaning

What is probably the most important part of Sam and Davy's respect for Jackie Robinson?

As an African-American man, Davy understands how important Jackie Robinson is as a symbol of racial progress for America. Sam mostly admires Jackie the ballplayer, but through Davy he comes to better understand the racial problems in America and the symbolic importance of Jackie's career. Davy and Sam, by sharing their feelings for baseball and Jackie Robinson, prove that people of different races really can love and understand each other.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors This story takes place in the 1940s when racial tension was very strong. There are many instances in the story where race limits the characters and influences their decisions. Find another story relating to an event or person from this time and compare the accounts of how race played a part in the characters' lives.

Recognizing Feelings After Davy's funeral, Sam goes through some of the typical stages of grief, such as anger and denial. Look up the stages of grief and identify which of these stages he experiences. Discuss how valuable these stages are to a survivor's mental health and how people move through them at different rates and sometimes many times over. Share your own experience with the death of a loved one and how you felt.

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Responding to Literature Sam's obsession with the Brooklyn Dodgers was so extreme he could retell a whole ball game from start to finish for any of the years he listened to them. Recall an event, group, or hobby in your life that comes closest to Sam's baseball obsession. Retell and record the event or describe the time in as much detail as possible. Don't forget to add feelings, smells, and visual descriptions of the place or time. Try to recreate it in a picture or drawing as well.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Jackie Robinson was the first black player in major league baseball. Since many people did not want him playing with the white players, they did things to intimidate him and drive him from the game. Find a biography of Jackie's experiences in the major league. More advanced readers might enjoy Jackie's autobiography, *I Never Had it Made*. Discuss the abuses he suffered and how difficult the experiences must have been for him to go through all alone.