

# *Book Talk Prep: Jackie and Me by Dan Gutman*

Prepared by Amy Cline

## *Summary of Text:*

Joe Stoscack 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.

## *About the Author:*

Dan Gutman was born in New York City on October 19, 1955. When he was about a year old, his family moved to Newark, New Jersey, where he spent his childhood. It was pretty uneventful until June 1, 1968, when he came home from a Little League game and found that his dad had suddenly abandoned his mom, his sister Lucy, and himself. It was pretty traumatic, as you can imagine, but everyone survived.

Gutman attended Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, graduating in 1977 with a degree in psychology. After he decided that psychology was not for him and decided to become a writer. He wanted to write humor, so he moved to New York City. His essays weren't particularly funny, though they did publish some in a Staten Island newspaper, the *Advance*. His first check was for \$15.

In 1982 the video game Pac-Man was a huge craze, so he started a video games magazine called *Video Games Player*. Later it was renamed *Computer Games* and most importantly, he met his future wife Nina while working on the magazine. She is an illustrator, and the company hired her to draw game screens. Eventually, his writing crept into *Esquire*, *Newsweek*, *Science Digest*, *Writer's Digest*, *Success*, *Psychology Today*, *New Woman*, *USA Today*, and *The Village Voice*, but he still hadn't found the type of writing he really wanted to do.

In 1987, he decided to try writing about sports. He sold an article to *Discover* magazine about the science behind the spitball, scuff ball, and corked bats. This led to his first adult baseball book, *It Ain't Cheatin' If You Don't Get Caught*. Although he was writing for adults, in 1992, when his son, Sam, was two years old, he decided to

try writing for children. He wrote a few baseball books, then branched out to other sports — ice skating and gymnastics.

Up until this point, all his books were nonfiction, so he gave fiction a try. The first novel sold was sold, *They Came From Centerfield*. Around the same time, he started visiting schools, giving a program in which got students excited about reading and writing. Finally, after 15 years, I figured out what my career should be — writing fiction for kids and visiting schools.

He is a member of SABR (Society for American Baseball Research), NWU (National Writers Union), and SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators). He currently lives in Haddonfield, New Jersey, with his wife, Nina, and their children, Sam and Emma.

Dan Gutman's website: <http://www.dangutman.com/>

### *Display Items:*

- ❖ Baseball cards – Joe, the main character, uses baseball cards to travel back in time to visit baseball players.
- ❖ Baseball Bat (wooden) – Represents the kind of bat that Jackie Robinson would have played with.
- ❖ Dodgers Baseball Hat – Jackie Robinson played for the Dodgers and baseball players always wear a hat to play ball.
- ❖ Baseball Jersey – Represent what players wore; lay out a Phillies jersey, Dodgers jersey, etc.
- ❖ Glove (old and new) – Gloves back then were not what they are now. Lay out both an old and new glove to show the difference between the two.
- ❖ Picture Books – enhance the curriculum, motivate the reader, and references about Jackie Robinson other than the information given in *Jackie & Me*.
  - *Stealing Home: Jackie Robinson: Against the Odds* by Robert Burleigh
  - *Jackie's Bat* by Marybeth Lorbiecki
  - *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* by Jim Burke
  - *Companeros de Equipo* by Peter Golenbock (Spanish)
- ❖ Letters written by Jackie Robinson – Documents to reference and read to liven the text
- ❖ Books relating to Civil Rights Movement: – Other books help to paint the picture and given students additional opportunities to read about important contributors during the Civil Rights movement
  - Rosa Parks
  - Martin Luther King Jr.

# *Jackie & Me Summaries*

## **Introduction (pp. 1-2)**

Joe Stoshack explains how he discovered his “gift” of being able to travel through time by holding a baseball card and wishing himself back in time.

## **CHAPTER 1 (pp. 3-6) THE BRAWL**

Joe, who plays on the Yellow Jackets team, tries to fight the pitcher, Bobby Fuller, who continuously heckles him, calling him big, dumb, slow and ugly. But when Bobby uses the racial slur, "dumb Polack," Joe has had enough. He flings the bat at him and goes after him, ending up being suspended from the team. Through all the heckling, the coach and umpire seem to ignore the remarks.

## **CHAPTER 2 (pp. 7-11) THE TINGLING SENSATION**

Joe realizes how foolish he's been in letting Bobby get the best of him. At school, the class is assigned an oral report to celebrate Black History Month. Joe decides to do his report on Jackie Robinson and go back in time to meet him.

## **CHAPTER 3 (pp. 12-17) A GREAT DEAL**

Joe finds out that the Jackie Robinson card he needs to travel back in time is part of a set worth \$5000. The store owner, Flip Valentini, offers to sell it for \$400, but then relents and loans Joe the card. Flip got his nickname, because when he was a kid, they used to flip baseball cards against a wall. The kid, who got closest to the wall, won all the cards. Today those cards would be worth a lot of money.

## **CHAPTER 4 (pp. 18-24) GOING BACK...BACK...BACK**

Joe's mom isn't enthusiastic about Joe going back in time, but his dad gets really excited. He gives Joe a suitcase to collect baseball cards from back in Jackie Robinson's time, thinking he'll make a fortune on them. Joe starts getting that "tingling feeling" as he wonders what it would be like to be Jackie Robinson ...he dozes off to sleep.

## **CHAPTER 5 (pp. 25-30) A SLIGHT CHANGE**

Joe goes back in time and doesn't quite end up where he expected, at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, NY or at Jackie Robinson's house. Instead, he finds himself in an alley where he meets a man named Dan Bankhead, who is badly cut from being attacked. Joe walks by a store window and suddenly realizes he is black.

## **CHAPTER 6 (pp. 31-39) THE ROBINSON FAMILY**

The Robinson's welcome Joe into their home and let him sleep on the couch after he helps Dan. Joe tries to explain to Jackie how important Jackie is ...or will be, in the future. He tries to explain the ideas of Black History Month and Rookie of the year, which don't exist in Jackie's time.

## **CHAPTER 7 (pp.40-54) THE NEW BATBOY**

When Joe gets to the field, he nearly gets into an altercation with a batboy named "Ant," who calls him a "Polack" and a "nigger." Jackie stops him and explains why he can't retaliate. Ant mistakes him for the new batboy and he takes the job.

## **CHAPTER 8 (pp. 55-61) EBBETS FIELD**

Joe goes to the game at Ebbets Field, but is surprised at how withdrawn Jackie is from the crowd and their desire for shaking his hand and signing autographs. Jackie asks Joe [Stosh] to warm him up. He is amazed at how hard Jackie throws the ball.

He gets up the courage to ask Dixie Walker what he has against Jackie. He compares whites and blacks living together to pigs and chickens living together. He says its nothing personal. Joe doesn't feel he's in a position to argue with him, even though he doesn't agree. While the Star Spangled Banner plays the other players move away from Jackie, so as not to appear too "friendly" toward him.

## **CHAPTER 9 (pp. 62-69) OPENING DAY**

Jackie reports early for opening day, taking Joe with him. Joe doesn't hear any racist comments against Jackie, but Jackie's reluctant to interact with the crowd too much. There's a bad call, but Jackie and the manager, Barney Shatton doesn't argue about it. Jackie has to leave by a special exit after the game. No one congratulated Jackie for making history. As Ant and Joe clean up after the game alone both of them feel a little uncomfortable. Ant gives Joe a dollar, and they seem to come to an understanding. Though both seem to dislike each other, they realize they have a job to do.

## **CHAPTER 10 (pp. 70-79) THE STREETS OF FLATBUSH**

Joe is invited to play stickball with a group of kids who are divided about letting him play. One calling him a "colored boy," another, "nigger." They call him "Jackie Robinson" when he gets up to bat. He hits a homerun, which crashes through a window. They all run off..Joe escapes to town, where he starts looking for baseball cards. He soon finds out they're called "bubblegum cards." He meets Flip Valentini (who loaned him the card to "time travel".) He advises him to hang onto his cards instead of flipping them and take them when he moves out of his mom's house.

Joe meets the Bond Bread Man who gives the cards away for free., and agrees to meet him to get some more. Apparently the cards aren't very popular.

## **CHAPTER 11 (pp, 80-94) FIGHTING BACK**

Rumors are flying among the players that Jackie isn't as good as they expected him to be, and newspapers hint that he might be sent to the minors for more "seasoning." Joe meets up with the "Bond Bread" man and gets his dad's cards. He could leave, but he decides to go to the Dodgers/Phillies game. He is appalled by the abuse Jackie puts up with from the Phillies manager, Ben Chapman, and his players. Pee Wee Reese stands up to the crowd by walking across the field and putting his arm around Jackie's shoulders (like a buddy) after Jackie gets the winning run.

## **CHAPTER 12 (pp. 95-101) EARLY EXIT**

After the Phillies game things seem different.... Other players stop by Jackie's locker to rehash the game. Ant figures out that Joe is from the future after going through his things, and finding the Ken Griffey Jr. card Joe knows he needs to get back to the future. Joe retrieves the card, but ends up being chased by a group of kids and a policeman. He ducks into the Brooklyn Botanical Garden and wishes to go home. The tingling sensation begins as he loses consciousness.

## **CHAPTER 13 (pp. 102-107) UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Joe's dad is upset that he left the baseball cards in the past and allowed himself to be bullied by Ant. Joe decides to go back to 1947, but as a white boy, to "finish business."

## **CHAPTER 14 (pp.108-112) PROOF**

Joe ends up at Jackie's new house and convinces him that he is the same Joe Stoshack that he met 6 months earlier. He reminds Jackie that he knew about the "Rookie of the Year Award" and other things he knew from being with them. He shows the Robinsons the article he copied out of the newspaper and he explains that, though things are better between blacks and whites, there are still problems.

## **CHAPTER 15 (pp. 113-128) GAME 6**

Joe shows up at Yankee Stadium as the new "batboy." Ant thinks he recognizes him, but doesn't because he's no longer black. Joe can't believe how things have changed for Jackie. He's now accepted as "one of the guys" by his teammates. He's surprised to meet Dan Bankhead, who was the guy he helped in the alley the first time he travelled to see Jackie —he's now a team member too. Every seat in the Stadium is filled. Joe sees many famous players...Joe Dimaggio, Phil Rizzuto, Yogi Berre . He even sees Babe Ruth in the stands and gets an autograph for his father, though he won't reveal the secret about whether he pointed to the spot he would hit the "famous" homerun or not. The Dodgers beat the Yankees in an exciting 8-6 game and have to go to game seven. Ant finds Joe's wallet and Game Boy and questions his identity. Instead of getting in a fight like he would have before, he walks away.

## **CHAPTER 16 (pp.129-131) EAT AND RUN**

Joe returns from a dinner with the Robinson's only to find that Jackie's house has been broken into and his suitcase full of baseball cards has been stolen. Meanwhile the police call and say that they had an anonymous tip that Jackie kidnapped a white boy. Joe suspects that Ant is behind the two incidents, and wants to go after him. Jackie insists that Joe has to go back to his time before the police arrive.

## **CHAPTER 17 (132-133) A PRESENT**

Joe returns home and his dad rushes over to retrieve the suitcase full of baseball cards. Joe explains that they were stolen. His father is angry, but Joe gives him the Babe Ruth autograph that he got for him. Dad is speechless.

## **CHAPTER 18 (134-136) LESSONS**

Joe presents his report to the class about Jackie Robinson; including a lot of firsthand knowledge he gained by being around Jackie. He said he used baseball cards for his report, because he can't reveal how he really got the information. The teacher awards him the four tickets to Kentucky Kingdom.

## **CHAPTER 19 (137-141) A NEW BALLGAME**

Joe finds himself facing Bobby Fuller again, this time in the championship game, but things are a little different this time. Joe has learned a few things from his mentor, Jackie. Joe has a different attitude and strategy for dealing with him and he comes out a winner in more ways than one.

## *Word List Group #1*

**snickered-** (verb) to laugh in a half suppressed, or disrespectful manner.

**sportsmanship-**(noun) the character practice or skills as fairness and courtesy.

**converging-**(verb) to tend to a common result or conclusion(meet at a point).

**smirked-**(verb) to smile in an affected, smug or offensively familiar way.

**prejudice-**(noun) any unreasonable feeling opinions or attitudes regarding a racial, religious, or national group.

**endorse-**(verb) to approve support or sustain

**homogenized-**(verb) to make uniform or familiar

**suspiciously-**(adj) inclined to suspect, questionable distrustful

**ambush-**(noun) an act or instance of lying concealed so as to attack by surprise.

**uncanny-**(adj) beyond the ordinary ordinary or normal

**hesitant-**(adj) undecided, doubtful, or disinclined

**sharecropper-**(noun) a tenant farmer who pays to rent a share of the crop

**guffaw-** (adj) a loud unrestrained burst of laughter.

## *Word List Group #2*

**turnstile**-(noun) a structure of four horizontally revolving arms in a gateway or opening (passage of people)

**mythical**-(adj) imaginary, fictitious

**assertive**-(adj) confidently aggressive or self-assured, positive

**humiliated**-(verb) to cause a person pain or loss of pride, self respect or dignity, mortify

**forthcoming**-(adj) about to appear, friendly, sociable

**translated**-(verb) to change one condition(convert)

**wandering**-(adj) roaming, rambling, moving from one place to another

**promotions**-(noun) advertise or publicize a product

**Meshuga**-(adj) crazy, insane

**cordial**-(adj) courteous gracious , friendly and sincere

**wearily**-(adj) physically or mentally exhausted by hard work fatigue

**razzed**-(verb) to make fun of and tease

**crumpled**-(verb) to break apart into small fragments

**intimidated**-(verb) to make timid with fear

**consciousness**-(noun) aware of one's own existence thoughts and surroundings.