Anchor Text Guidance: Grade 5, Module 3

Athlete Leaders of Social Change

Text and author: *Promises to Keep: How Jackie Robinson Changed America* by Sharon Robinson
Lexile®: 1030

Text Overview

EL Education's Grade 5, Module 3 is designed to prompt consideration of these compelling questions:

- How have athletes broken barriers during the historical era in which they lived?
- What factors can contribute to an individual's success in changing society?

Promises to Keep: How Jackie Robinson Changed America is a biography of the iconic baseball player Jackie Robinson, told from the perspective of his daughter, Sharon. The book details Robinson's accomplishments on the field as well as his extraordinary contributions to the civil rights movement. The book includes photographs, newspaper clippings, posters, and letters from the time. The biography connects Jackie's experiences to the larger world in which he lived and explores the impact he has had on all Americans.

Text Rationale

EL Education is committed to promoting students' character development. *Promises to Keep* anchors a module-long exploration of factors that contributed to the success of professional athletes who were/are leaders of social change. This study begins with the story of Jackie Robinson, told from the perspective of his daughter, Sharon, and then expands to other athletes who have had an impact on society by combating racial inequality and other injustices.

Students use *Promises to Keep* to determine the main ideas of each section and identify key details, using these to summarize chapters of the book. As they work, students think about the relationship between people and events in the text and gather information on the factors that led to Jackie Robinson's success in leading social change. Students examine related texts and

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videos, describing each author's opinion on various factors that led to Jackie's success in leading social change, and comparing these points of view. Finally, students synthesize their thinking in an opinion essay about which factor they think was most important in Jackie Robinson's success.

Additional Considerations

In designing this module, EL Education accessed research and first-person accounts of the experiences of athletes who have contributed to social change. Teaching notes throughout the module identify potentially troubling content and provide suggestions for teachers to guide students through this content with sensitivity. Investigate the routines, practices, rituals, beliefs, norms, and experiences that are important to your students and their families. Integrate this background into the classroom as students explore the topics of inequality specifically related to slavery, racial injustice, and segregation.

EL Education recommends that school leaders and teachers read the texts in advance, with their specific school community in mind, to become familiar with the issues presented so that they can discuss them with students and families as needed.

Examples of sensitive topics that teachers should be prepared to address are detailed below.

1. Slavery, Racial Injustice, and Segregation

The first seven chapters of *Promises to Keep* cover sensitive topics about the history of the enslavement of others, racial injustice, and segregation in the United States and in Jackie Robinson's life. In Jackie Robinson's lifetime, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) were relegated to second-class-citizen status through a legal system that promoted white supremacy as an ideal.

Explain to students that there were laws at this time that enforced segregation in transportation, schools, movie theaters, hotels, and restaurants. Called Jim Crow laws, these federal, state, and local laws enforced a racial caste system, particularly in the Southern United States. Many examples exist in the text, such as the following:

> "My great-grandparents were slaves; my grandmother was a sharecropper; my father was born into a segregated world." (8)
>
> "[Thomas D.] Rice called his character 'Jim Crow.' White audiences laughed at the clowning and foolish antics of the character. Black people found the performances demeaning. They began to use the term 'Jim Crow' to mean discrimination." (8)
>
> "The black families who fled the South during this period hoped to find a better life and escape Jim Crow life. However, they soon discovered that Jim Crow traveled, too." (10)
>
> "When Dad and Mom arrived in New Orleans, they were forced to give up their seats on the plane. Then they were bumped from the next two flights. To add to the humiliation, they quickly discovered that because they were now in the heart of the South, they couldn't eat in the coffee shop." (30–31)

The use of the term *slaves* to describe African Americans suggests that an individual's humanity was defined as such. Using the word *enslaved*, meanwhile, demonstrates the condition of an individual within the class and economic system of the dominant society of the time. By changing from the use of a noun—*slave*—to an adjective—*enslaved*—we grant these individuals an identity as people and describe their position in society rather than reducing them to just

that position. In a small but important way, we acknowledge and carry them forward as people, not the property that they were considered to be during that time. For more information on the language of slavery, such as *master*, *owner*, etc., visit the National Park Service's Underground Railroad: Language of Slavery page (https://eled.org/2930).

This idea of white supremacy is long standing in this country. Teachers should be aware that many laws continue to legalize racism, bias, and social injustice to promote a white-centric culture, and should invite students to raise these existing laws in connection to the things they are reading about in the texts. Additionally, the story references similar views held outside of America, on pages 16–17:

> "The Nazis, who rose to power in Germany in the 1930s, believed that select white people known as Aryans were superior to all other races, including blacks and non-Aryan whites."
>
> "Adolf Hitler gave Schmeling, his idea of the ideal 'racially pure' man, a hero's send off."

Segregation was part of daily life for Jackie Robinson. He played in the Negro League for one season because Black people were not allowed to play in the Major League at the time. Black players also did not have equality of pay with their white counterparts and were required to abide by Jim Crow laws when traveling in the South. Be aware that these topics may be sensitive for students and that some students may connect with them personally or deeply. Monitor students to determine whether issues are surfacing that need to be discussed in more detail as a whole group, in smaller groups, or independently. Be aware that reflections may be personal and students are not required to share.

Investigate the routines, practices, rituals, beliefs, norms, and experiences that are important to your students and their families. Be sensitive to students' experiences and perspectives on the topics in *Promises to Keep* and foster inclusive action by creating space for students to express their feelings about issues embedded in the text, while also being aware that these discussions may unearth trauma or social stigma. Consult with a guidance counselor or school social worker for further investigation of diversity and inclusion.

Note that the Mini Language Dives in Unit 1 focus primarily on sentences addressing segregation, allowing students to understand this issue more deeply through the text, as well as providing time to reflect as a class. Refer to the Module 1 Teacher Guide Appendix or the Language Dives in the Curriculum document on the Tools page (https://curriculum.eleducation.org/tools/k-8) for additional information on Language Dives.

Affirm students' identities as you raise awareness about inequities, and create conditions for brave and safe discussions in your classroom. Conversations about identities are powerful. They help educators truly know their students and encourage classroom communities to develop strong bonds. Solidifying these relationships will help with challenging and courageous conversations.

Prior to reading, invite students to create identity maps or webs as an entry point for conversations about identity. In her book *Being the Change*, Sara K. Ahmed describes identity webs as "personal graphic tools that help us consider the many factors that shape who we are." Consider modeling this by creating and sharing your own identity map. This can be an invitation for students to include both their personal identifiers (favorite music, food, sports, etc.) as well as social identities (race, ethnicity, religion, etc.)

For example, you might show your identity map and say, "Some of my identities are that I am . . . " and intentionally name race, gender, occupation, familial relationships, and more. Then explain, "We bring each of our identities to every text we read, and our identities influence our understanding of a text. They can help us perceive more in a text, particularly when we share identities and experiences with the people being written about. Our identities can also help us recognize our limited understandings about the lived experiences of others. We'll want to remain alert to this as we read *Promises to Keep*."

It is important to note that inviting students to share and discuss their identities is truly an invitation, not a requirement. When students feel safe and comfortable to do so, they will. This work is fluid. Returning to identity maps regularly can inspire students to make additions and revisions as they see fit, and students can be guided to think about which of their identities they are more attuned to as they read a text and consider why that is.

Finally, establishing community agreements, or "contracts," can help nurture classroom environments where powerful and productive discussions can thrive. The following resources can aid in this effort:

- Let's Talk: Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students (https://eled.org/2927)—Offers classroom-ready strategies to plan discussions and to facilitate conversations with students.
- Facing History and Ourselves: Creating a Classroom Contract (https://eled.org/2928)—Provides guidance for creating a classroom contract that establishes a reflective classroom environment where all students feel known and heard.
- Mindful Schools: Creating a Safe Container for Students with Community Agreements (https://eled.org/2929)—Provides prompts and guidance for co-constructing community agreements with students.

Tasks

Throughout the module, there are tasks that intentionally or incidentally serve to mitigate possible concerns and support students' enthusiastic, informed, and safe reading.

Unit 1

Lesson 1: In this lesson, students infer the topic they will be studying throughout the module. Be aware that the topics of racial prejudice and segregation presented in *Promises to Keep* may be sensitive for students and that some students may connect with these issues personally and deeply. After exploring each chapter in the text, students will have time to reflect. Monitor students to determine if issues are surfacing that need to be discussed in more detail as a whole group, in smaller groups, or independently. Be aware that reflections may be personal and students are not required to share them.

Lesson 2: In this lesson, students read the first two chapters of *Promises to Keep*, determining main ideas and key details on pages 8–9, "A Black and White World." This section of text provides a brief background on the enslavement of other peoples and racial prejudice in the United States. After reading for gist, students have time to reflect.

Lesson 3: In this lesson, students build on their understanding of main ideas and details to write a summary of "A Black and White World." Continue to monitor students throughout the rest of the unit to determine if issues are surfacing that need to be discussed as a whole group, in smaller groups, or individually.

Unit 2

This unit connects the work done in Unit 1, identifying factors that led to Jackie Robinson's success in breaking the color barrier in baseball, to the focus of this unit: developing an opinion about which factor was most important to Jackie's success. Continue to monitor students throughout the unit to determine if there are issues surfacing that need to be discussed.

Including Families

Families of students working through this module are invited to discuss any concerns they have about the texts with their children and the teacher. Teaching notes throughout the module recommend that teachers speak to families of students who may be particularly affected by the topics encountered. Notes in the homework materials distributed to families recommend that they reach out to teachers with questions or concerns about the texts. These materials also encourage families to talk with their children about the texts they are reading, particularly if any of the topics raised might be sensitive to a particular student.