Segregation in Sports (1947)

Jackie’s Bat, Marybeth Lorbiecki, Simon Schuster, 2006.

(The story has real historical figures in imagined situations)

This story is told in a first-person point of view by Joey, a batboy for the major-league baseball team, the Dodgers, who is growing up in segregated America during 1947. At that time, segregation in sports was also active.

When the story begins, a boy named Joey has recently become a Dodgers batboy, and is very excited. Joey is also especially curious because that was the very first season a black person, Jackie Robinson, would be playing in Major League Baseball, and it just so happened that he would be joining the Dodgers baseball team. Throughout the beginning and middle of the baseball season, Joey did not think that a white boy would serve a black man because of what his father told him, so Joey treats Jackie worse than the other players. Then, after a later game, a black boy gives Joey a bat and baseball cards to deliver to Jackie, and after the gifts are delivered, Jackie thinks that the gifts were from Joey. After Joey sees that Jackie assumes this, Joey quickly tells Jackie that the gifts were not from him, but from a boy in the crowd.

Joey’s selfishness showed when Joey was wanting to fit in and obey his father, Joey decided to do less for Jackie than the other players. Joey is also naive because while treating Jackie poorly, Joey doesn’t realize that what he is doing is wrong. Joey is truthful as well because he explains the truth to Jackie about the bat and cards. Joey realizes from Jackie that you shouldn’t judge someone by their looks, but by their personality and character. This is the theme of the story. At the end of the story Joey feels that he was treating Jackie unfairly, and begins to be kind to Jackie because Jackie had never done anything bad to him.

If the story were to be told from the perspective of Jackie, it would most likely sound sad and angry because of its reflection of Jackie’s emotions during times when he was treated unfairly. He as well as many other blacks at the time, were face with unfairness like not be allowed by law to stay at the same hotels as whites, as well as not getting a locker in professional baseball, and only getting a nail in the wall and a folding chair.

The interactions of the characters Jackie and Joey can teach readers about history in terms of whites often did not treat blacks fairly. I know this because, for little to no reason, other than his race, Joey was doing less work for Jackie than for the other players. Another way that Jackie’s and Joey’s interactions teach readers about history is by explaining how children were influenced by parents with opinions that treating blacks unfairly was correct. Joey did not question his father’s words in the slightest, and instead continued to treat Jackie unfairly. This shows that the children at the time of the book’s setting often followed their parent’s opinions about how to treat blacks and did not commonly form their own opinion.

Detailed facts from the story that I think are true:

1. Jackie’s teammates did not want to play baseball with Jackie until he began to do very well in baseball.
2. Jackie was not aloud to stay at the same hotels as his teammates.
3. The batboy, if there was a batboy he would be white.

Detailed facts from the authors notes that I think are part of history:

1. People sent hate mail to Jackie.
2. Jackie’s teammates did not want to play baseball with Jackie in spring training.