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# How Jackie Robinson Changed Baseball

By Jessica McBirney  
2017

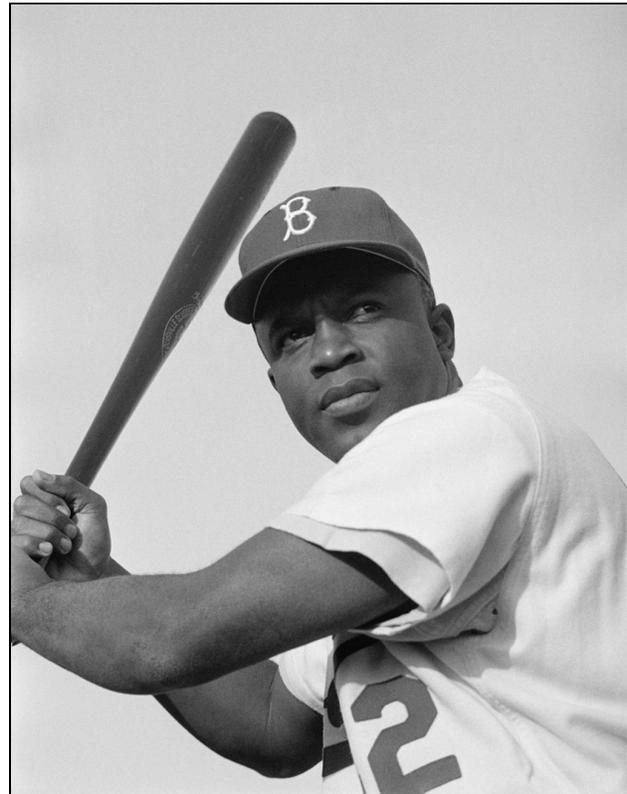
*Jackie Robinson (1919-1972) was a professional baseball player and the first African American to play in the Major Leagues. This informational text discusses Robinson's life and accomplishments, and the impact his role in baseball had on the Civil Rights Movement. As you read, take note of the different ways that Jackie Robinson fought back against racial discrimination and segregation throughout this life.*

- [1] Today you may not be surprised to see an African-American or Latino player when you turn the TV to Major League Baseball. Maybe your favorite player is a person of color. But baseball has not always been as welcoming to diversity<sup>1</sup> as it is now. In 1947 the famous Jackie Roosevelt Robinson became the first African American to play on a Major League Baseball team. The road he paved was an important, but difficult one.

## Early Athletic Success

Robinson was born in Georgia on January 31, 1919, the youngest of five children. His father left the family just a year later, and his mother moved herself and her children to Pasadena, California. She worked odd jobs to support her family, but Robinson still grew up in relative poverty.

When Jackie enrolled in high school, his siblings encouraged him to get involved in school sports teams. He excelled in football, basketball, track, and baseball, and he broke many school records.



*"Jackie Robinson, Brooklyn Dodgers, 1954" by Bob Sandberg is in the public domain.*

Robinson continued to play all of these sports in junior college. Ironically, he viewed baseball as his weakest sport. He transferred to UCLA to complete his degree, where he became the first athlete to letter<sup>2</sup> in all four of those sports. UCLA had some of the most racially integrated college sports teams at the time, but Robinson was still among a very small minority of non-white athletes on all his teams.

1. the inclusion of different types of people (such as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization  
2. to earn an award for excellence in school activities

## Fighting Racism

- [5] Even early in his life, Robinson confronted racism head on. In 1938, while still at junior college, he was arrested after disputing the police's detention of one of his black friends. He managed to escape a long jail sentence, but this and other run-ins with the police earned him a reputation of being very combative against racial oppression.

When the U.S. entered World War II, Robinson enlisted in the army. He never saw direct combat, but his military career was marred<sup>3</sup> by racial problems. While stationed in Texas, Robinson boarded a non-segregated bus, but he was instructed to sit in the back anyway. He refused, and military police took him into custody for his insubordination.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, one month later, an all-white jury acquitted<sup>5</sup> him, but the situation foreshadowed only more of the same prejudice he'd face later in life.

## A Negro Player with Guts

Robinson joined the professional Negro Leagues to play baseball in early 1945. He signed with the Kansas City Monarchs and had great success, but he was frustrated by all the disorganization that plagued<sup>6</sup> the Negro Leagues. At the time, a few Major League teams were recruiting from the Negro Leagues, and Robinson struck up a relationship with the General Manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Branch Rickey.

Rickey liked the potential he saw in Robinson, but he had one question. He knew Robinson would face racial discrimination and injustice if he joined the Major Leagues. Could he be “a Negro player with enough guts *not* to fight back?” Robinson promised that he could, and signed a contract with the Montreal Royals, the Dodgers' top minor league team. After just one season, he transferred to the Brooklyn Dodgers.

As he stepped onto the field as first baseman in 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first Major League baseball player to break the color barrier<sup>7</sup> since 1880. He was 28 years old.

- [10] African-American fans flooded to Dodgers games, and even the general public and the press had a mostly positive view of the team's newest addition. However, Robinson faced discrimination from a few of his own team members, who threatened to sit out of games if he was allowed to play. Management took Robinson's side — “I say he plays,” said the manager. “I say he can make us all rich. And if any of you cannot use the money, I will see that you are all traded.”

Other teams also disliked Robinson's admittance into the League. Many threatened not to play against him. Most managers rejected these threats and forced the players to participate anyway. Instead, they took it out on Robinson directly during the games. Some players were physically violent — he once received a 7-inch gash in his leg from an opponent who spiked him with his cleats — while others hurled verbal racial insults at him and his teammates. The racism from other teams only united the Dodgers, however, and the team grew more accepting of him.

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3. **Mar** (*verb*): to damage or spoil to a certain extent
  4. **Insubordination** (*noun*): defiance of authority
  5. to free someone from a criminal charge by verdict of not guilty
  6. **Plague** (*verb*): to cause continual trouble or distress
  7. an unspoken social code of racial segregation or discrimination

## Major Success

Robinson won Rookie of the Year in 1947. In later seasons, more African-Americans joined other teams in the Major Leagues, as Robinson continued to excel. His success gained him fans from all over the country. He started at second base for the National League in the 1949 All-Star game, and he helped the Dodgers win the 1949 National League pennant.

Over the next several years his success grew, and by 1955 the Dodgers pulled out a win in the World Series. Robinson was 36 and starting to feel the effects of his age. In 1956 he did not dominate the league as much as he used to, partially because of side effects he suffered from diabetes. When the Dodgers traded him to the New York Giants, Robinson decided to quit baseball altogether and become an executive for a coffee company instead.

## A Legendary Impact

After his retirement Robinson remained a baseball legend. In 1962, he received baseball's highest honor when he was elected into the Hall of Fame. His playing style changed many team strategies. For example, he inspired players to be more aggressive in their base-running, rather than relying only on the distance they could hit the ball.

- [15] Robinson also made important racial breakthroughs in the sports world. The first baseball player to break the color barrier in 60 years, he paved the way for many future African-American and minority athletes. His career helped the upcoming Civil Rights Movement by giving Americans a heroic African-American sports figure to rally around.

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following identifies a central idea of the text? [RI.2]
  - A. Jackie Robinson's undeniable talent made it easy for coaches and team members to accept him, despite the racial tension of the era.
  - B. While Jackie Robinson faced racial discrimination early on in his life, this stopped once he became the first African-American Major League Baseball player.
  - C. As the first African-American Major League Baseball player, Jackie Robinson was significant in the increased racial diversity that followed in baseball and in other aspects of American culture.
  - D. Once Jackie Robinson left baseball, the impact he had on the sport dwindled, and the racial diversity present on teams decreased.
  
2. PART B: Which section from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
  - A. "African-American fans flooded to Dodgers games, and even the general public and the press had a mostly positive view of the team's newest addition." (Paragraph 10)
  - B. "The racism from other teams only united the Dodgers, however, and the team grew more accepting of him." (Paragraph 11)
  - C. "Robinson was 36 and starting to feel the effects of his age. In 1956 he did not dominate the league as much as he used to, partially because of side effects he suffered from diabetes." (Paragraph 13)
  - D. "Robinson also made important racial breakthroughs in the sports world. The first baseball player to break the color barrier in 60 years, he paved the way for many future African-American and minority athletes." (Paragraph 15)
  
3. PART A: What is the meaning of "combative" in paragraph 5? [RI.4]
  - A. compliant
  - B. ready to fight
  - C. ineffective
  - D. reckless
  
4. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
  - A. "Even early in his life, Robinson confronted racism head on." (Paragraph 5)
  - B. "When the U.S. entered World War II, Robinson enlisted in the army." (Paragraph 6)
  - C. "He never saw direct combat, but his military career was marred by racial problems." (Paragraph 6)
  - D. "Robinson boarded a non-segregated bus, but he was instructed to sit in the back anyway." (Paragraph 6)

5. How does paragraph 8 contribute to the development of ideas in the text? [RI.5]

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions:** *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. In your opinion, why did Branch Rickey ask Jackie Robinson to not fight back against discrimination? Why was this considered having “guts”? How would this idea be treated today?
2. In the context of the article, what makes a hero? How did Jackie Robinson’s accomplishments in baseball make him a hero to many? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In the context of the article, how has America changed over time? How has America changed in its treatment and acceptance of people of color? In what capacity did Jackie Robinson represent the beginning of this change?
4. In the context of the article, how does a person overcome adversity? How did Jackie Robinson overcome the discrimination he experienced (in life and in baseball) despite being told not to fight back? How did Robinson continue to challenge discrimination during this time?

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## The Three Questions

By Leo Tolstoy  
1885

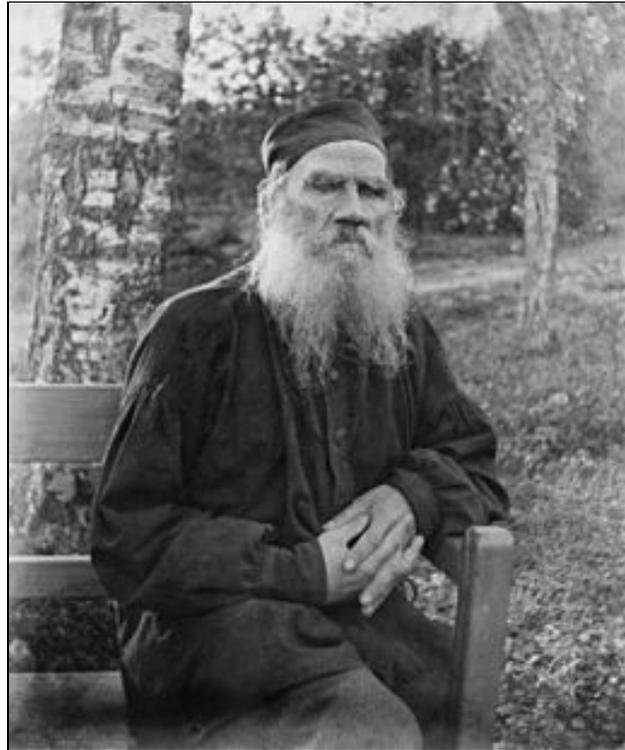
*Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) was a famous Russian author, perhaps best known for his novels War and Peace and Anna Karenina. In the following short story, a king looks for answers to three questions in order to make himself a better ruler. As you read, take notes on the varying responses that the king receives.*

- [1] It once occurred to a certain king, that if he always knew the right time to begin everything; if he knew who were the right people to listen to, and whom to avoid; and, above all, if he always knew what was the most important thing to do, he would never fail in anything he might undertake.

And this thought having occurred to him, he had it proclaimed throughout his kingdom that he would give a great reward to anyone who would teach him what was the right time for every action, and who were the most necessary people, and how he might know what was the most important thing to do.

And learned men came to the King, but they all answered his questions differently.

In reply to the first question, some said that to know the right time for every action, one must draw up in advance, a table of days, months and years, and must live strictly according to it. Only thus, said they, could everything be done at its proper time. Others declared that it was impossible to decide beforehand the right time for every action; but that, not letting oneself be absorbed in idle<sup>1</sup> pastimes, one should always attend to all that was going on, and then do what was most needful. Others, again, said that however attentive the King might be to what was going on, it was impossible for one man to decide correctly the right time for every action, but that he should have a Council of wise men, who would help him to fix the proper time for everything.



*"Leo Tolstoy 1897, black and white, 37767u" by F. W. Taylor is in the public domain.*

- [5] But then again others said there were some things which could not wait to be laid before a Council, but about which one had at once to decide whether to undertake them or not. But in order to decide that, one must know beforehand what was going to happen. It is only magicians who know that; and, therefore, in order to know the right time for every action, one must consult magicians.

1. **Idle (adjective):** not busy, working, or active

Equally various were the answers to the second question. Some said, the people the King most needed were his councilors; others, the priests; others, the doctors; while some said the warriors were the most necessary.

To the third question, as to what was the most important occupation: some replied that the most important thing in the world was science. Others said it was skill in warfare; and others, again, that it was religious worship.

All the answers being different, the King agreed with none of them, and gave the reward to none. But still wishing to find the right answers to his questions, he decided to consult a hermit, widely renowned for his wisdom.

The hermit lived in a wood which he never quitted, and he received none but common folk. So the King put on simple clothes, and before reaching the hermit's cell dismounted from his horse, and, leaving his bodyguard behind, went on alone.

- [10] When the King approached, the hermit was digging the ground in front of his hut. Seeing the King, he greeted him and went on digging. The hermit was frail and weak, and each time he stuck his spade into the ground and turned a little earth, he breathed heavily.

The King went up to him and said: "I have come to you, wise hermit, to ask you to answer three questions: How can I learn to do the right thing at the right time? Who are the people I most need, and to whom should I, therefore, pay more attention than to the rest? And, what affairs are the most important, and need my first attention?"

The hermit listened to the King, but answered nothing. He just spat on his hand and recommenced digging.

"You are tired," said the King, "let me take the spade and work awhile for you."

"Thanks!" said the hermit, and, giving the spade to the King, he sat down on the ground.

- [15] When he had dug two beds, the King stopped and repeated his questions. The hermit again gave no answer, but rose, stretched out his hand for the spade, and said:

"Now rest awhile—and let me work a bit."

But the King did not give him the spade, and continued to dig. One hour passed, and another. The sun began to sink behind the trees, and the King at last stuck the spade into the ground, and said:

"I came to you, wise man, for an answer to my questions. If you can give me none, tell me so, and I will return home."

"Here comes some one running," said the hermit, "let us see who it is."

[20] The King turned round, and saw a bearded man come running out of the wood. The man held his hands pressed against his stomach, and blood was flowing from under them. When he reached the King, he fell fainting on the ground moaning feebly. The King and the hermit unfastened the man's clothing. There was a large wound in his stomach. The King washed it as best he could, and bandaged it with his handkerchief and with a towel the hermit had. But the blood would not stop flowing, and the King again and again removed the bandage soaked with warm blood, and washed and rebandaged the wound. When at last the blood ceased flowing, the man revived and asked for something to drink. The King brought fresh water and gave it to him. Meanwhile the sun had set, and it had become cool. So the King, with the hermit's help, carried the wounded man into the hut and laid him on the bed. Lying on the bed the man closed his eyes and was quiet; but the King was so tired with his walk and with the work he had done, that he crouched down on the threshold, and also fell asleep — so soundly that he slept all through the short summer night. When he awoke in the morning, it was long before he could remember where he was, or who was the strange bearded man lying on the bed and gazing intently at him with shining eyes.

"Forgive me!" said the bearded man in a weak voice, when he saw that the King was awake and was looking at him.

"I do not know you, and have nothing to forgive you for," said the King.

"You do not know me, but I know you. I am that enemy of yours who swore to revenge himself on you, because you executed his brother and seized his property. I knew you had gone alone to see the hermit, and I resolved to kill you on your way back. But the day passed and you did not return. So I came out from my ambush to find you, and I came upon your bodyguard, and they recognized me, and wounded me. I escaped from them, but should have bled to death had you not dressed my wound. I wished to kill you, and you have saved my life. Now, if I live, and if you wish it, I will serve you as your most faithful slave, and will bid my sons do the same. Forgive me!"

The King was very glad to have made peace with his enemy so easily, and to have gained him for a friend, and he not only forgave him, but said he would send his servants and his own physician to attend him, and promised to restore his property.

[25] Having taken leave of the wounded man, the King went out into the porch and looked around for the hermit. Before going away he wished once more to beg an answer to the questions he had put. The hermit was outside, on his knees, sowing seeds in the beds that had been dug the day before.

The King approached him, and said:

"For the last time, I pray you to answer my questions, wise man."

"You have already been answered!" said the hermit, still crouching on his thin legs, and looking up at the King, who stood before him.

"How answered? What do you mean?" asked the King.

[30] "Do you not see," replied the hermit. "If you had not pitied my weakness yesterday, and had not dug those beds for me, but had gone your way, that man would have attacked you, and you would have repented<sup>2</sup> of not having stayed with me. So the most important time was when you were digging the beds; and I was the most important man; and to do me good was your most important business. Afterwards when that man ran to us, the most important time was when you were attending to him, for if you had not bound up his wounds he would have died without having made peace with you. So he was the most important man, and what you did for him was your most important business. Remember then: there is only one time that is important — Now! It is the most important time because it is the only time when we have any power. The most necessary man is he with whom you are, for no man knows whether he will ever have dealings with anyone else: and the most important affair is, to do him good, because for that purpose alone was man sent into this life!"

*The Three Questions by Leo Tolstoy is in the public domain.*

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2. **Repent** (*verb*): to feel sorry for or dissatisfied with something one has done

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following statements best summarizes how the three questions and the king's desire for their answers contribute to the overall narrative?
  - A. The three questions provide the framework for the story's structure – their answers are revealed over the course of the story.
  - B. The three questions propel the action of the story. The king goes out in search of their answers.
  - C. The three questions help create the story's mysterious mood.
  - D. The three questions symbolize three things that cannot be known, but that one must search for throughout his or her whole life.
  
2. Which of the following best summarizes how the "learned men" of the kingdom answer his questions?
  - A. Their answers are similar.
  - B. Their answers are unified and concise.
  - C. Their answers are contradictory.
  - D. Their answers are too varied for the king to decide.
  
3. Which of the following statements summarizes the most likely relationship between these answers and the people who answered them?
  - A. The answers most likely reflect what the people learned from their own masters.
  - B. The answers most likely reflect each person's own values and occupations.
  - C. The answers most likely support what would be best for the individuals' lifestyles and gain.
  - D. None of the above
  
4. Which of the following statements best describes how the theme of power is developed in this story?
  - A. The king wishes to be all-powerful, dominating everything around him. At the end of the story, he finds the knowledge to make this possible.
  - B. The king is an incredibly powerful ruler whose power is threatened by a crazed man who wants to seek revenge for his family's death.
  - C. The king wants to have greater control over the future. He goes out in search of answers only to realize that his original wish was in vain.
  - D. The king is weak, and very few people recognize him as an important man. By the end of the story, he has gained power in an unexpected way.

5. What does the final paragraph reveal about the story's theme?

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## We Wear the Mask

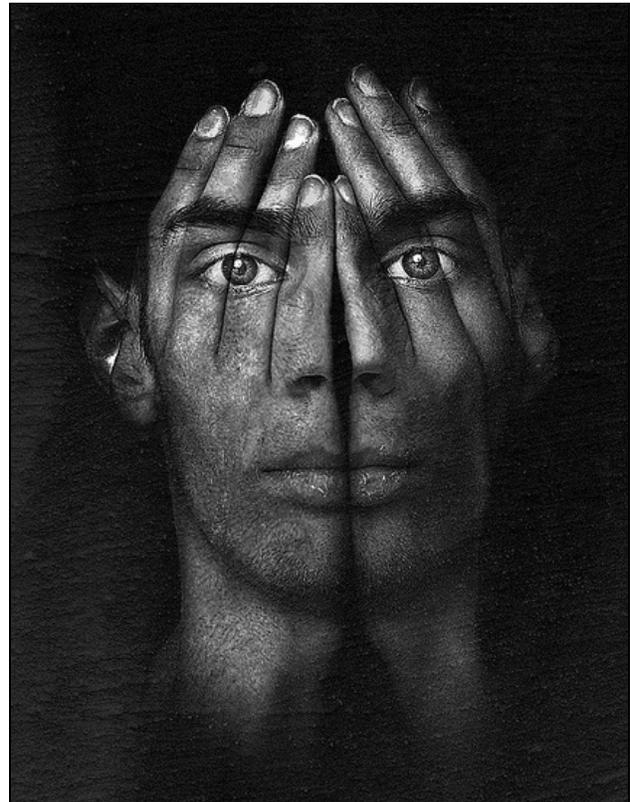
By Paul Laurence Dunbar  
1896

*Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) was an influential African American poet during the early twentieth century. He was the son of freed slaves and a friend of Frederick Douglass. Critics have said that “[h]e was the first to rise to a height from which he could take a perspective view of his own race. He was the first to see objectively its humor, its superstitions, its short-comings; the first to feel sympathetically its heart-wounds, its yearnings, its aspirations, and to voice them all in a purely literary form.” As you read the poem, take notes on Dunbar’s use of figurative language and diction, and what these devices reveal about the poem’s theme.*

- [1] We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, —  
This debt we pay to human guile;<sup>1</sup>  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
[5] And mouth with myriad<sup>2</sup> subtleties.<sup>3</sup>

Why should the world be over-wise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.

- [10] We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile<sup>4</sup>  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
[15] We wear the mask!



*"Insomnia" by Evan is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0*

*"We Wear the Mask" by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1896) is in the public domain.*

1. **Guile** (*noun*): sly or cunning intelligence; the use of clever and usually dishonest methods to achieve something
2. **Myriad** (*adjective*): countless
3. **Subtleties** (*noun*): small details or differences that are important but not obvious
4. **Vile** (*adjective*): extremely unpleasant; wicked or immoral

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a central theme of the text?
  - A. Identity comes from what we do and are, not what we look like.
  - B. Resilience comes in many forms, such as silence, though this silence does have consequences.
  - C. Tragedy should be openly mourned and not hidden away.
  - D. Social Pressure can turn independent people into just faces in a crowd.
  
2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "We wear the mask that grins and lies, / It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes" (Lines 1-2)
  - B. "This debt we pay to human guile" (Line 3)
  - C. "O great Christ, our cries / To thee from tortured souls arise." (Lines 10-11)
  - D. "We sing, but oh the clay is vile / Beneath our feet, and long the mile" (Lines 12-13)
  
3. Why must the people (the "we" mentioned) wear the mask?
  - A. The people wear the mask to protect their faces and themselves.
  - B. The people wear the mask because they are told to by the larger society.
  - C. The people wear the mask to keep their identities a secret.
  - D. The people wear the mask to hide their suffering.
  
4. In the final stanza, what does the setting of the "long... mile" contribute to the message of the poem?
  - A. The setting of a "long... mile" suggests that the masked people feel lost and cannot figure out which way to go, thus contributing to the message of identity.
  - B. The figurative setting suggests that the masked people have been on a long 'journey' (or mile) facing many challenges but still have farther to travel, thus contributing to the message of resilience.
  - C. The setting of the "long... mile" is paved with "vile" clay, implying that hiding one's feelings is wrong and thus adding to the message of honesty.
  - D. The setting is paved with "vile" clay, implying that the masked people hate the world for making them walk such a "long... mile" and thus adding to the message's demand for change.

5. Does the speaker seem genuine when he recommends wearing 'the mask'? Consider when the poem was written and the tone the speaker uses. Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

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