

JACKIE
ROBINSON'S
REAL
GONE

Baseball Poems
of New York



MATTHEW JOHNSON

***Jackie Robinson's Real Gone:
Baseball Poems of New York***
By Matthew Johnson

**Book Club Discussion Guide
and Reflection Questions**

- How does *Jackie Robinson's Real Gone: Baseball Poems of New York* construct a historical arc from the early days of baseball, such as pre-integration and the Dead-ball Era to the 2020s, using New York City as the stage? To what extent does the city function as a narrative character and a lens through which to observe changes in society and culture? Poems to consider include, "Colored Ballplayer Grows Impatient," and "Rooting Interest for My Grandparents," among others.
- Race and athletic identity: How are poems in *Jackie Robinson's Real Gone: Baseball Poems of New York* that are centered on figures like Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays, and Mickey Mantle (and other key figures) woven to explore themes of national identity? What role do these athletes play in shifting baseball from a public sport to a social symbol? Poems to consider include, "Jackie Robinson Hopping on Third Base," "The Last Call for Mickey Mantle," and "Willie Mays Playing Stickball," and among others.
- How does *Jackie Robinson's Real Gone: Baseball Poems of New York* blend and hybridize different genres, such as poetry and regional and sports writing, to tell the story of baseball in New York? How does this mixture enrich or challenge the idea of sports literature?
- What function does the media, such as sports radio and newspapers serve in building or critiquing the imagined world of baseball in the city? How do works like *Ball Four* and *The Boys of Summer*, which are referenced in *Jackie Robinson's Real Gone: Baseball Poems of New York* blend, position themselves as counterpoint or reflective commentary to the dominant media narrative? Poems to consider include, "If There was Required Reading for Baseball" and "The October Backpages of 2003 and 2004."
- Examine how *Jackie Robinson's Real Gone: Baseball Poems of New York* parallels the undercurrent of urban reality with sports. Poems to review could center on: (1) the modern integration of Jackie Robinson with the Brooklyn Dodgers prior to the start of the modern Civil Rights Movement; (2) migration to the Sun Belt, framed by the Dodgers and New York Giants leaving New York; (3) in an era amid fiscal crisis and civic unrest, the Bronx is Burning Yankees serving as a barometer of a city; (4) the 1986 Mets as a team and story coincides with an Age of Excess; and (5) baseball in a post-9/11 world and city. Poems to consider include, "The Old Man on the Sea Meets the Boys of Summer," "Mike Piazza Brings Some Normalcy to the World," and "No Hollywood Ending for the '86 Mets," among others.
- What central themes emerge about the relationship between sport, society, race, identity and popular culture in *Jackie Robinson's Real Gone: Baseball Poems of New York*? How does the author use a personal or subjective "voice" to reflect on region and place as a living reality rather than mere backdrop for baseball? Poems to consider include, "Here Comes Night," "I Dream the Dodgers Back to Brooklyn," and "Wendell Smith and Claire Smith on Assignment," among others.