

“Shoeless Joe” Reading Comprehension and the Black Sox Scandal

Name _____

Joseph Jefferson Wofford Jackson was born in Pickens County, South Carolina, on July 16, 1888. When he was only six years old, he went to work at a textile mill sweeping cotton dust off the floors. Joe never learned to read or write because he had to work instead of going to school. Joe began to play baseball on a team called the Brandon Mill team when he was 13.

Joe started out as a pitcher on the mill’s team, but he threw the ball so hard that he broke the catcher’s arm. Joe was moved to the outfield where his incredible skills attracted attention. He could throw the ball more than 400 feet. The newspapers called Joe’s home runs “Saturday Specials,” his line drives “Blue Darters,” and his glove, “a place where triples go to die.”

Joe got his nickname in 1908 when he was playing semi-pro ball with the Greenville Spinners. He had a new pair of spikes that made blisters on his feet, so he began to play in just his socks. When he was running to third after he hit a triple, a fan yelled, “you shoeless son of a gun!”

Joe played professional baseball with the Philadelphia Athletics, Cleveland Naps (which became the Indians in 1915), and the Chicago White Sox. Many think he is the greatest natural hitter in the history of baseball. Joe’s lifetime batting average was .356, which is the third-highest in Major League Baseball history. Joe believed that bats had only so many hits in them, and when he went into a slump, he would discard his bat and get a new one. Joe had a name for all his bats. His favorite, and most famous, was Black Betsy. He also had Blond Betsy, Carolyn, Ol’ Genril, and Big Jim.

In 1919, however, members of the White Sox conspired to lose the World Series to the Cleveland Indians because they were unhappy with owner Charles Comiskey. The ensuing scandal came to be known as the Black Sox scandal. Joe is said to have admitted that he was involved. He was supposed to get \$20,000, more than three times his annual salary, but received only \$5,000. He later told *the Sporting News*:

“Regardless of what anybody says, I was innocent of any wrong-doing. I gave baseball all I had. The Supreme Being is the only one to whom I’ve got to answer. If I had been out there booting balls and looking foolish at bat against the Reds, there might have been some grounds for suspicion. I think my record in the 1919 World Series will stand up against that of any other man in that Series or any other World Series in all history.”

Joe hit .375 for the Series, the highest on either team; had twelve hits (a tie for the World Series record at the time); six RBIs and made no errors in eight games. He scored eleven of the Sox twenty runs and hit the only home run in the series. The extent of Joe’s part in the conspiracy remains controversial. Charles Comiskey came to believe that Joe was totally innocent.

Since Joe was banned from Major League Baseball after the scandal, he played, coached and managed various minor league and semi-pro teams. In 1933, he opened Joe Jackson’s Liquor Store. He would help local children learn how to play baseball. They knew him as Mr. Joe and never knew how famous he had been. Joe died on December 5, 1951, in Greenville, South Carolina.

- 1. Who gave “Shoeless Joe” his nickname?**
 - A. The Greenville spinners
 - B. Players on the Brandon Mill team
 - C. A fan
 - D. The Philadelphia Athletics

- 2. Why was Joe moved to the outfield?**
 - A. Because he was so fast
 - B. Because he threw so hard he hurt the catcher
 - C. Because the team needed outfielders
 - D. Because he could throw the ball 400 feet

- 3. Which of the following supports the idea that Joe WAS NOT involved in the Black Sox Scandal?**
 - A. He was angry at Charles Comiskey
 - B. After he was banned from baseball, he helped children learn the sport
 - C. He said he was innocent
 - D. He scored over half of his team’s runs and hit the only home run

- 4. Which of the following questions might someone who did not believe Joe Jackson was involved in the scandal ask?**
 - A. If Joe Jackson was involved in the Black Sox Scandal, why did he play so well against the Cleveland Indians in the 1919 World Series?
 - B. If Joe Jackson was involved in the Black Sox Scandal, why did he help teach kids the game of baseball after he was banned?
 - C. If Joe Jackson was involved in the Black Sox Scandal, why did he claim he had no involvement?
 - D. If Joe Jackson was involved in the Black Sox Scandal, why do people think he was one of the greatest baseball players of all time?

- 5. According to the owner of the Chicago White Sox...**
 - A. Joe Jackson was not involved in the Black Sox Scandal
 - B. Joe Jackson was probably involved in the Black Sox Scandal
 - C. Joe Jackson may have been involved in the Black Sox Scandal
 - D. Joe Jackson was definitely involved in the Black Sox Scandal

6. What was the effect of the Black Sox Scandal?

- A. Everybody thought that Joe was guilty
- B. Joe became known as "Shoeless Joe"
- C. Joe would never be allowed to play Major League Baseball again
- D. Joe's life was totally destroyed

7. What question is answered in the final paragraph?

- A. When was it proved that Joe Jackson was not involved in the Black Sox Scandal?
- B. What besides baseball did Joe Jackson do after the Black Sox Scandal?
- C. How did Joe Jackson die?
- D. What semi-pro teams did Joe Jackson play for and manage?