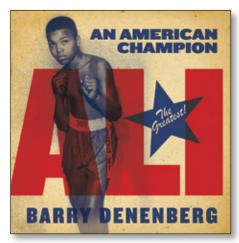
## A CURRICULUM GUIDE to

## AN AMERICAN CHAMPION

The est!

# BY BARRY DENENBERG





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#### **Background/Summary**

Muhammad Ali is considered by many to be among the all-time greatest heavyweight boxers. After winning a 1960 Olympic gold medal, he went on to become the only three-time world heavyweight-boxing champion. But that is only part of his story. Muhammad Ali is a man known for his magnetic personality, his stand on religious freedom, his opposition to the war in Vietnam, and his loyalty to America.

Author Barry Denenberg allows the reader to experience the development of Ali's impressive career as it happened. Denenberg's goal is to show us the controversial aspects of Ali's life that have become buried in legend that now surrounds him. *Ali: An American Champion* is designed to transport the reader back in time; to provide a sense of immediacy and recreate a feeling of being present at the creation of Cassius Clay becoming Muhammad Ali—the catalyst of and target for heated and diverse opinions. To achieve that goal, Denenberg presented well-researched material—articles in newspapers and periodicals, "man-on-the street" interviews, letters to the editor, and "breaking news" announcements. This material clearly shows how Ali transformed himself and ultimately transformed the public's view of him.

*Ali: An American Champion* also provides information about the historical context in which Muhammad Ali grew and developed—the Civil Rights Movement and the war in Vietnam. In addition, readers experience a satisfying ending to the book as Ali lights the Olympic flame in 1996, an act that former President Clinton said moved him to tears. Taken together, the various pieces of this book create a complex portrait of a complex man.

#### **Discussion Questions & Activities**

#### MAIN IDEA AND KEY DETAILS

The Common Core State Standards suggest that students should be able to identify the main idea of a text and explain the key details that support it (**RI.3–7.2**), be able to explain events in a historical text, telling what happened and why, based on specific information in the text (**RI.3–7.3**), and cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources (**RH.6-8.1**). The activities and questions below incorporate these skills by focusing attention on key ideas and supporting evidence.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1. Author's Note. Read and discuss the author's note, which explains the unique features of the book. What is the author's point of view about Ali? How did he shape the book to reflect this view? Here are some additional questions to consider:
  - Over time, what has happened to the life story of Muhammad Ali?
  - How does the author plan to "transport the reader back in time"?
- 2. After Ali won an Olympic gold medal, a Russian reporter asked him what he thought about racial discrimination in America. He replied: "Tell your readers we've got qualified people working on that problem, and I'm not worried about the outcome. To me the USA is still the best country in the world, counting yours."

What does this show about Ali?

- **3.** Ali's career developed during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Explain how the following people and events made an impact on Ali and others:
  - Emmett Till
  - Rosa Parks
  - Sit-ins
  - The Children's Crusade (1963)
  - The March on Washington (1963)

- **4.** Ali's career also developed during the Vietnam War. At that time he refused to serve in the military. What happened as a result? What do these events show about Ali?
- **5.** Many people responded to Ali's decision not to serve in the military. Examine the "Letters to the Editor." What different viewpoints are offered?
- 6. Over the years, people offered differing perspectives on Muhammad Ali's ability as a boxer. Reread the following "Manon-the Street Interviews" and then give your overall assessment of Ali's ability:
  - "Whom do you like: Reigning heavyweight champion Charles 'Sonny' Liston or top-ranked contender Cassius 'The Lip' Clay?"
  - "Who do you think will win the upcoming rumble in the jungle: Muhammad Ali or George Foreman?"
  - "Why do you think Muhammad Ali defeated George Foreman in Zaire?"
- 7. In 1974, the History Teachers of America launched a contest for students. They posed this question: Who in American life—past or present—is your hero and why? The winning team of students chose Muhammad Ali. What reasons did they give? Which of their reasons is most convincing? Why? (Reread "Who's Your Hero? Contest" to review this information.)
- **8.** In the last article in the book, "Full Circle," the fictional author Keith Kincaid poses this question about Ali: "So what was he—a good guy or a bad guy?" He concludes that he was a good guy. What evidence does he use to draw that conclusion? Do you agree? Why?
- 9. Why is the title Ali: An American Champion a good one? What makes Ali distinctly American?

#### **CRAFT AND STRUCTURE**

The Common Core State Standards ask students to pay attention to how a text presents information and uses structure to advance an explanation. Standards **RI.4–7.4** ask students to investigate how words and phrases are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings, and technical text. Standards **RI.4–7.5** and **RH.6–8.5** emphasize how the overall structure of a text contributes to its meaning.

- **10.** The Poetry and Wit of Muhammad Ali. Ali is known for his rhyming poems and his one-liners, several of which appear in *Ali: An American Champion*. Ali is even considered by some to be the first rapper. Here are a few examples of Ali's rhymes about how he will defeat his opponents:
  - "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, His hands can't hit what his eyes can't see."
  - "This boy likes to mix so he must fall in six."

This was revised to read:

"I'm changing the pick I made before Instead of six, Doug goes in four."

"Joe's gonna come out smokin' But I ain't gonna be jokin'; I'll be pickin' and pokin' Pouring water on his smokin' This might shock and amaze ya But I'm gonna destroy Joe Frazier."

Here are a few one-liners:

- "I'm so mean I make medicine sick."
- "This man [has] two chances: slim and none."
- "I'm so fast that last night I turned off the light switch in my hotel room and got into bed before the room was dark."
- "If they can make penicillin out of moldy bread, they can sure make something out of you."
- "If you even dream of beating me, you'd better wake up and apologize."

After studying these examples, watch the video "10 Unforgettable Muhammad Ali Quotes" at YouTube.com/ watch?v=ZfGgjyqCuvc

Think about what makes these rhymes and one-liners successful. Then try writing a rhyming poem or a one-liner to describe yourself and your strengths.

- 11. In this book the author uses a mix of formats to create a collage of information about Muhammad Ali. This mix includes fictional publications such as:
  - Articles in newspapers, magazines, and black periodicals
  - Interviews
  - Letters to the editor
  - Breaking news announcements

Using one of these formats as a model, create an additional page of information to add to the book. Do some additional research on Ali. Here are some suggestions for things to include:

- Headlines from newspaper articles
- Additional quotes
- Additional photographs and captions
- More information about his professional exile and comeback
- Information about Ali's work as a humanitarian and artist
- Interviews with your classmates about Ali's boxing career
- Letters to the editor written by your classmates
- Your own fictional newspaper article
- **12. Create an Illustrated Timeline.** Based on the information in the book and additional research, create an illustrated timeline of what you consider to be the ten most important events in Muhammad Ali's life so far. (See the Timeline Activity Sheet at the end of this guide.)

#### **INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION**

The Common Core State Standards emphasize examining two texts on the same topic to compare and contrast important points and details and to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably (**RI.4–7.9**). Looking at different accounts of the life of Muhammad Ali—both picture books and longer texts—allows us to do this. The CCSS also require us to integrate visual information such as videos and print material (**RH.6–8.7**). Viewing a video of Muhammad Ali and comparing it to a written text is a good place to start.

#### 13. Integrating Information: Reading Additional Accounts of Muhammad Ali.

How do other authors construct Ali's story? What craft ideas do they use? Make a chart listing these ideas. Here are a few books to check out and compare:

- Muhammad Ali: Champion of the World by Jonah Winter
- I Shook Up the World: The Incredible Life of Muhammad Ali by Maryum "Maymay" Ali (Ali's daughter)
- Twelve Rounds to Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali by Charles R. Smith Jr. and Bryan Collier
- The Greatest: Muhammad Ali by Walter Dean Myers
- 14. Integrating Visual Information: Watching and Discussing a Video about Muhammad Ali and Using the Collaborative Listening and Viewing Guide

Watch one of the following videos about Ali:

- Muhammad Ali—Mini Biography at Biography.com/People/Muhammad-Ali-9181165#awesm=~oGpw6ggVIYgzjL
- US Olympic Team Tribute to Muhammad Ali at Ali.com/Index.php
- Cassius Clay Changes His Name at History.com/Topics/Black-History/Muhammad-Ali/Videos/Cassius-Clay-Changes-His-Name
- The Rumble in the Jungle at History.com/Topics/Black-History/Muhammad-Ali/Videos/The-Rumble-in-the-Jungle-1974?m=528e394da93ae&s=undefined&f=1&free=false

Use the **Collaborative Listening and Viewing Guide** to take notes as you watch the video. Then share these notes with a partner. Finally, work with your partner to collaboratively construct a summary of what you learned. (See the Collaborative Listening and Viewing Activity Sheet at the end of this guide.)

#### WRITING

The Common Core State Standards emphasize writing arguments focused on discipline-specific content (**WHST.6–8.1**) and writing informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events (**WHST.6–8.2**). The activities below reflect these standards.

#### 15. Writing an Argument

Who deserves to be called a hero? Perhaps you agree with the winners of the 1974 History Teachers of America contest that the answer to this question is Muhammad Ali. Or maybe your choice is Mahatma Gandhi, Jane Goodall, Wilma Rudolph, or Helen Keller.

Select a person you believe is a hero and write about that person. Follow the steps below:

- First, make a claim expressing why you think the person is a hero.
- Second, acknowledge any reasonable opposing claims.
- Third, give evidence to support your claim.
- Finally, end with a conclusion that supports your claim.

#### 16. Write a Narrative about an Important Event in Your Life.

Using one of the formats author Barry Denenberg used to write about the life of Muhammad Ali, write about an event in your life. Choose one of these formats:

- Article in a newspaper or magazine
- An interview with you or someone who knows you
- A "breaking news" announcement about you

Consider your accomplishments in sports, hobbies, and school. Or describe how you help people in your community.

If you prefer, use these formats to write about another person living in the past or present.



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Guide written in 2014 by Myra Zarnowski, a professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Queens College, CUNY.

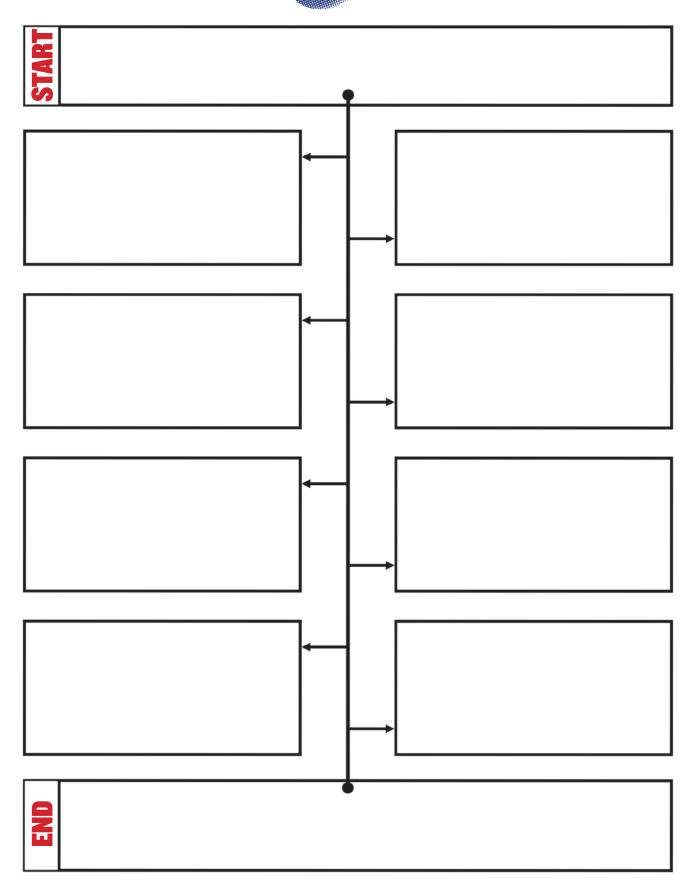
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### **Timeline Activity**

Create an illustrated timeline. Based on the information in the book and additional research, create an illustrated timeline of what you consider to be the ten most important events in Muhammad Ali's life so far.





#### Student's name:

My notes

### **Collaborative Listening & Viewing Activity**

Take notes as you watch a video. Then share these notes with a partner. Finally, work together with your partner to collaboratively construct a summary of what you learned.

#### Partner's name: Partner's notes

We learned that: \_\_\_\_\_