



(((BIOGRAPHICAL PLAY)))



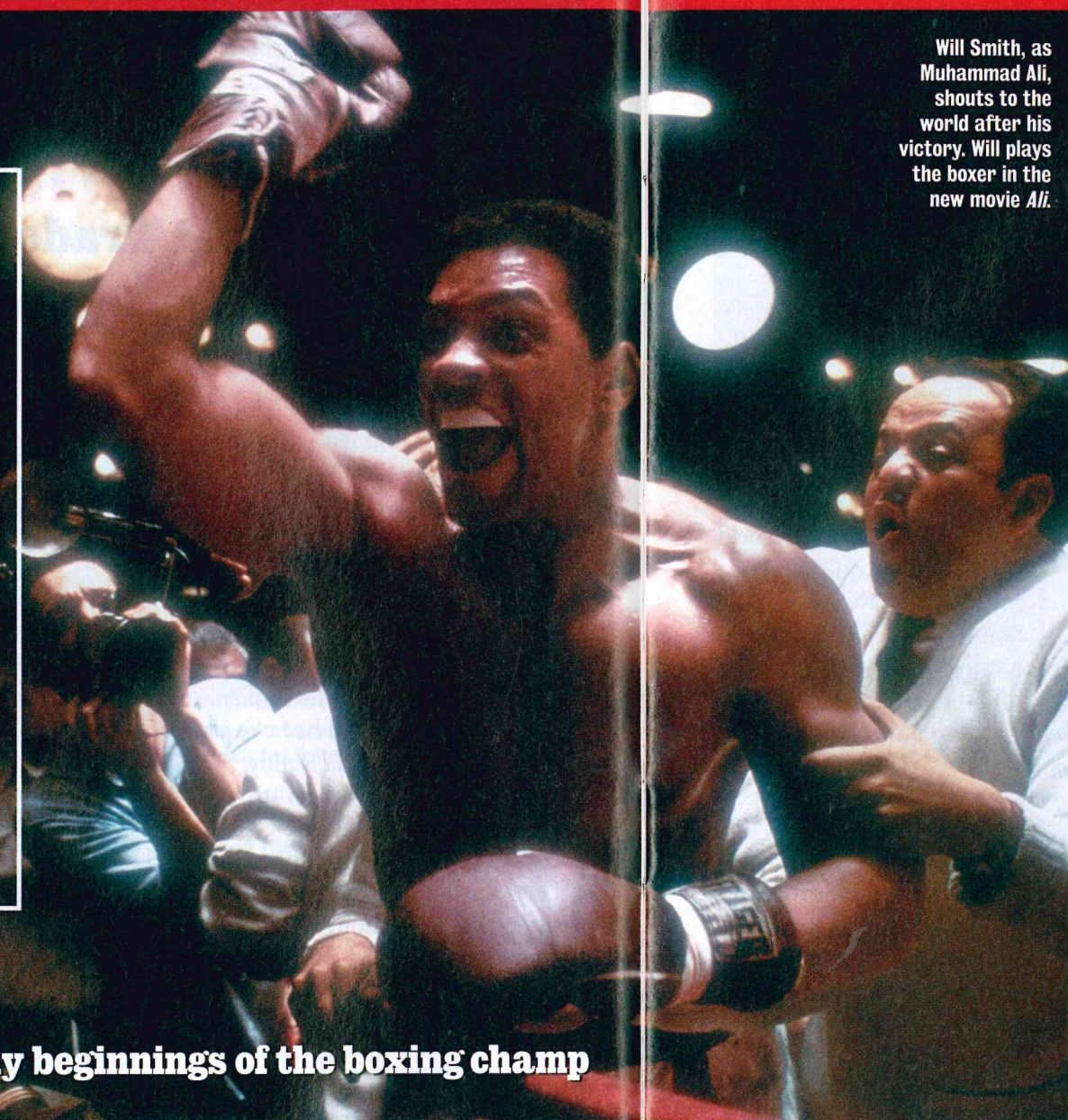
MUHAMMAD ALI

FREE TO BE WHAT I WANT



Read this true story about the early beginnings of the boxing champ

—An original play by Adam Grant



Will Smith, as Muhammad Ali, shouts to the world after his victory. Will plays the boxer in the new movie *Ali*.

S Main idea & supporting details

Characters: Sign your name below the character you're going to read.

*Starred characters are major roles.

*Narrator 1

Bundini, Cassius's friend

*Narrator 2

Ferdie Pacheco [FUR-dee pub-CHEH-ko], his corner man

*Cassius [CASH-us] Clay, later Muhammad Ali

Angelo Dundee, his trainer

Mom, Cassius's mother, Odessa Clay

Sonny Liston, the world heavy-weight champion

Steve, his friend

Laila [LAY-la] Ali, Ali's daughter

Rudy, his younger brother

Reporter

*Joe Martin, a police officer and boxing coach

Sportswriter 1

Fred Stoner, a boxing coach

Sportswriter 2

Diner Owner

★ SCENE 1 ★

Narrator 1: Louisville, Kentucky, 1954. Twelve-year-old Cassius Clay is talking with his mom in their living room. He is waiting for his best friend, Steve, so they can go bike riding.

Cassius: Mom, I like riding my bike with Steve. We have a lot of fun, but sometimes I get bored. I have all of this energy, and I don't know how to get rid of it.

Mom: Just enjoy yourself in

life, son. I'm sure you will figure out what you want to do with all of that energy. You have plenty of time. More importantly, you're a leader and you're confident. I know you will be great at whatever you decide to do. I believe in you.

Narrator 2: Cassius thanks his mom. When Steve arrives, they ride their bikes to a downtown fair where they eat free popcorn and candy all day. After the fair, Cassius finds an empty

space where his bike used to be.

Cassius: Somebody stole my brand new bike! I'm gonna find him and kill him! I mean it!

Steve: Calm down, Cassius. There's a gym around the corner that's run by a cop. Let's go talk to him.

Narrator 1: The boys go around the corner to Columbia Gym. The owner, Joe Martin, is a policeman. He listens patiently to young Cassius.

Cassius: I'll kill whoever stole

my bike! Just let me at him!

He'll wish he was never born!

Joe Martin: Young man, have you ever even *been* in a fight?

Cassius: No, but I could still whip him. You'll see. Are you going to help me or not?

Narrator 2: Martin looks at young Cassius. He's nothing but skin and bones—and attitude. But there's something special in his eyes. Martin can't help but like him.

Joe: Kid, I'm a police officer, but I also teach boxing. I'll

look for the guy who stole your bike, but in the meantime, let me teach you something about boxing. You're going to need some skills to back up that mouth.

Narrator 1: Soon, Cassius is so into his boxing lessons, he forgets all about his bike. He is an incredibly fast learner, and he has amazing confidence.

Narrator 2: Just six weeks later, Cassius fights his first bout.

Joe: Your opponent is Ronnie

O'Keefe. You know him?

Cassius: No, but I'll beat him anyway.

Joe: You're pretty evenly matched. He's eighty-nine pounds, just like you. Just remember what I taught you, and you'll be OK.

Narrator 1: The two young men enter the ring. Neither fighter looks like anything special as a boxer. After the three-round fight, Cassius is called the winner by a slight margin.

FRANK CONNOR/COLUMBIA PICTURES





Narrator 2: He turns to the few people standing around the ring.

Cassius: Tell your friends—I'm going to be the greatest of all time!

★ SCENE 2 ★

Narrator 1: Young Cassius starts to devote all of his time to boxing. The more he works on it, the more he improves. Some of his training methods are a little strange, though. His brother Rudy sometimes questions them.

Rudy: What's that stuff you're always drinking?

Cassius: It's water with garlic in it. It's good for the blood pressure.

Rudy: That's nasty!

Cassius: It's good for me and I have to protect my body. I'm going to be a world champ. That's why I never smoke and never drink. Even soda pop is deadly. It's as bad as cigarettes.

Narrator 2: Cassius starts his training at five o'clock every morning. Joe Martin and his other coach, Fred Stoner, are amazed by his progress.

Fred: It's the kid's speed that amazes me. Nobody can catch up to him.

Joe: It's the *mouth* that amazes me. The kid never stops bragging!

Narrator 1: As hard as Cassius trains for his fights, he also works to attract attention to them by making a **spectacle** of himself.

Narrator 2: He finds opponents in their dressing rooms and taunts them.

Cassius: You better be ready for a whipping. You can't possibly beat me!

Joe: Are you crazy, kid? That guy's 21 years old. You're 12. Are you sure you want to make him angry?



Before he was Ali, he was Cassius Clay—a teen who loved to box.

Cassius: Aw, man. He's nothing! I'm going to be the greatest of all time! He can't touch me!

Narrator 1: More often than not, Cassius is right. By the time he is 18, he has won every American **amateur** boxing title there is. Before long, he's on his way to the Olympics.

★ SCENE 3 ★

Narrator 2: At the 1960 Olympics in Rome, the world finds out what Louisville, Kentucky, already knows. Cassius Clay is for real. He returns to his hometown with a gold medal.

Narrator 1: As Cassius has grown, he has learned to use his words as well as his fists in his battles—in and out of the ring.

Narrator 2: Hundreds of people meet him at the airport, where he recites a poem he has written for the occasion.

Cassius: *To make America the greatest is my goal.*

So I beat the Russian and I beat the Pole.

And for the U.S.A. won the medal of gold.

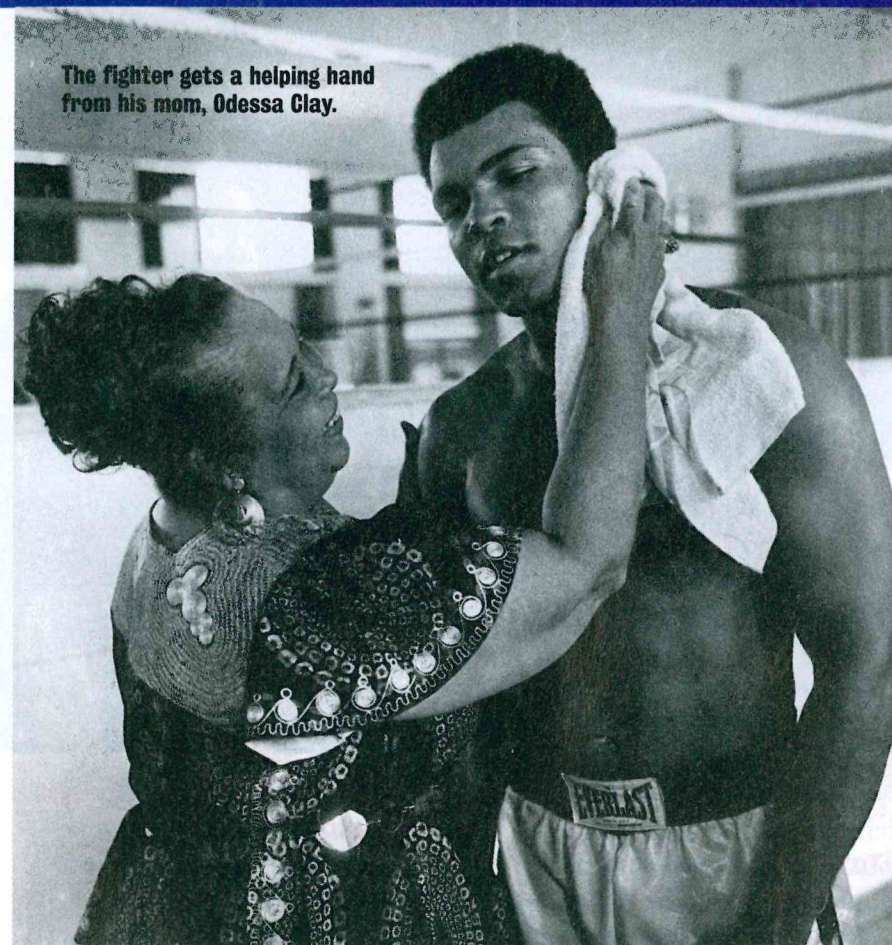
Italians said, "You're greater than the Cassius of old..."

Narrator 1: But he is not a hero everywhere in Louisville. One day, Cassius and Rudy walk into a diner. Cassius is wearing his Olympic gold medal.

Diner Owner: You can't eat here. We don't serve you coloreds.

Rudy: But he's the Olympic

The fighter gets a helping hand from his mom, Odessa Clay.



champ! He won the gold!

Diner Owner: I don't care *who* he is. Get out of here!

★ SCENE 4 ★

Narrator 2: A few months later, Cassius announces that he is becoming a professional boxer. After a few fights, he signs to fight former champion Archie Moore. The press knows that Cassius is a big talker. They flock to him for interviews.

Reporter: Give us a preview of the fight, Cassius.

Cassius: Here's a preview: I'm gonna knock that old mongoose out!

Reporter: Any predictions as to what round you'll do it in?

Cassius: *When you come to the fight, don't block the door.*

You will all go home after

round four!

Narrator 1: Sure enough, Cassius wins by a knockout in the fourth round.

Narrator 2: In 1964, after fighting professionally for almost four years, Cassius finally gets a chance to fight Sonny Liston for the world heavyweight championship.

Narrator 1: Liston is a big, scary fighter. He learned to box in prison. He is strong, fast, and mean. Nobody in the press thinks Cassius has any chance of beating him.

Sportswriter 1: Clay is nothing but a loudmouth kid. He's not big enough or strong enough to beat a bone crusher like Liston.

Sportswriter 2: Finally, this show-off from Louisville is going to get what's coming to

him. Liston is just the man to teach him a lesson.

Sportswriter 1: The question is not whether Clay can win the fight but whether Clay can *survive* the fight.

Narrator 2: The truth is, these statements in the press feed perfectly into Cassius's game plan—a plan he tells only his best friend, Bundini.

Cassius: I've studied Liston inside the ring and out. I can beat his body but only if I beat his mind first.

Bundini: What are you talking about?

Cassius: The press says I'm a clown. That's just what I want Liston to think—that I'm nothing but a loudmouth, crazy clown.

Bundini: Why do you want him thinking that?

Cassius: That way, he'll think I'm nothing to worry about. I'll mess up his mind. He won't take me seriously. I want all of them—Liston, the press, everyone—to think I'm nothing to worry about. Then, I'll get in that ring and give them the shock of their lives.

★ SCENE 5 ★

Narrator 1: Cassius works out hard in training camp. The day of the fight arrives. At the pre-fight weigh-in, Cassius stuns reporters by appearing to go crazy in front of Liston.

Cassius: This will be the easiest fight of my life! I'm the champ! I'm gonna whip you so bad you won't know what hit you!

Narrator 2: Later, Cassius and his corner man, Ferdie Pacheco, are alone together





in the dressing room.

Ferdie: Why did you act so nutty in front of all those people at your weigh-in?

Cassius: Because now Liston thinks I'm a nut. He's not scared of any man. But he *is* scared of a nut. Now he doesn't know what I'm going to do.

Narrator 1: Pacheco talks to Cassius's trainer, Angelo Dundee.

Ferdie: Either that kid's a genius or he's scared to death. Do you really think he can win?

Angelo: Of course he can. He's quick, he's young, and he's strong.

Ferdie: Have you seen Liston punch? One good whack and he could take Cassius's head off. Just to be safe, I've mapped out the fastest route from the arena to the hospital. Cassius Clay's not gonna die on my watch.

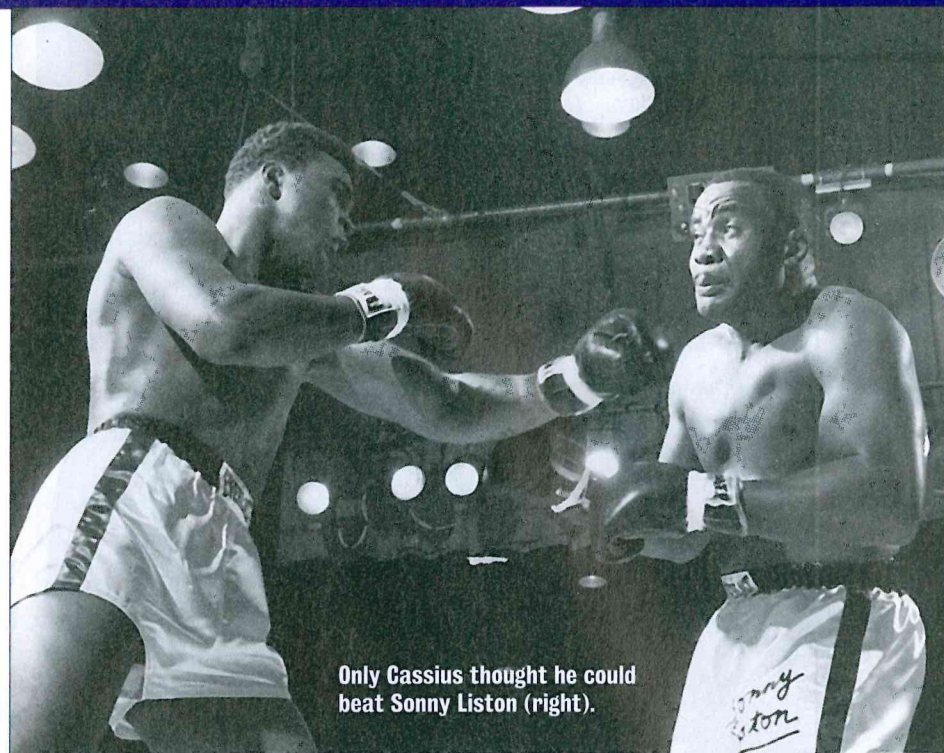
★ SCENE 6 ★

Narrator 2: At fight time, Cassius is quiet and serious. He actually looks frightened for the first time, but when the bell rings for round one, the fear disappears. Cassius is so fast on his feet, Liston can't find him, much less hit him. He can't even defend himself from the lightning-fast jabs Cassius deals him.

Narrator 1: After the sixth round, an exhausted Liston sits on his corner stool and spits out his mouthpiece, a sign that he has given up.

Liston: That's it. I'm done.

Narrator 2: From Cas-



Only Cassius thought he could beat Sonny Liston (right).

sius's corner, Angelo sees Liston.

Dundee: He just spit out his mouthpiece! The fight's over. You're the champ, kid!

Narrator 1: Cassius can't believe Liston gave up. He leaps off his stool and climbs up the ropes, shaking his gloved hands at the reporters just outside the ring.

Cassius: Eat your words! I am the king! I am the king of the world. Eat your words!

Narrator 2: Nobody in the building can believe what just happened. The reporters, who all wrote that it was impossible for Cassius Clay to beat Sonny Liston, have just seen the impossible happen.

Cassius: I am the greatest thing that ever lived! I upset Sonny Liston and I just turned 22 years old! I must be the greatest. I shook up the world! I shook up the world!

★ SCENE 7 ★

Narrator 1: The next day, Cassius *really* shakes up the world. At a press conference, a reporter asks him an unexpected question.

Reporter 1: Is it true that you're a card-carrying member of the Black Muslims?

Narrator 2: The Black Muslims are an African-American Islamic sect that most Americans have barely heard of in 1964.

Narrator 1: Some people say that the Nation of Islam, the Black Muslim's group, is a cult that hates whites. Others say that they are simply serious about gaining freedom and opportunity for all African Americans.

Narrator 2: Cassius is surprised by the question. It sounds like he's being accused of something illegal.

Cassius: "Card-carrying?" What does that mean? I believe in Allah and in peace.

I don't hate anyone. People brand us a hate group. They say we want to take over the country. That is not true. Followers of Allah want to live in peace.

Narrator 1: Cassius knows that what he says now will be the first thing most Americans will learn about his new religion.

Cassius: Islam is a religion and there are 750 million people all over the world who believe in it. I am one of them. It's true—I'm not a Christian anymore. I know where I'm going. I don't have to be what you want me to be. I am free to be what *I* want.

★ SCENE 8 ★

Narrator 2: Months later, Cassius Clay changes his name to Muhammad Ali, an Islamic name. Many sportswriters refuse to call him by his new name.

Narrator 1: In 1967, Ali refuses

to fight in the Vietnam War, saying that it's against his religion. He is stripped of his world championship title and banned from boxing for more than three years while the government tries him for **evading** the draft.

Narrator 2: Many people hate Ali for speaking out against the war. But others are inspired to see a young, successful African-American man who is willing to fight for his beliefs, even if they are unpopular.

Narrator 1: Ali's **banishment** from boxing from 1967 to 1970 costs him three years of his prime as a boxer.

Narrator 2: Eventually, the government drops its case against Ali, and he is allowed to fight again. In 1974, he shocks the world once again when he defeats George Foreman to regain the world heavyweight

championship.

Narrator 1: Ali retires from boxing in 1981, but he continues fighting to help people. He becomes famous for his religion, for his poetic speeches as a boxer, and for his charity work.

★ SCENE 9 ★

Narrator 2: In 1999, Ali's daughter Laila visits him.

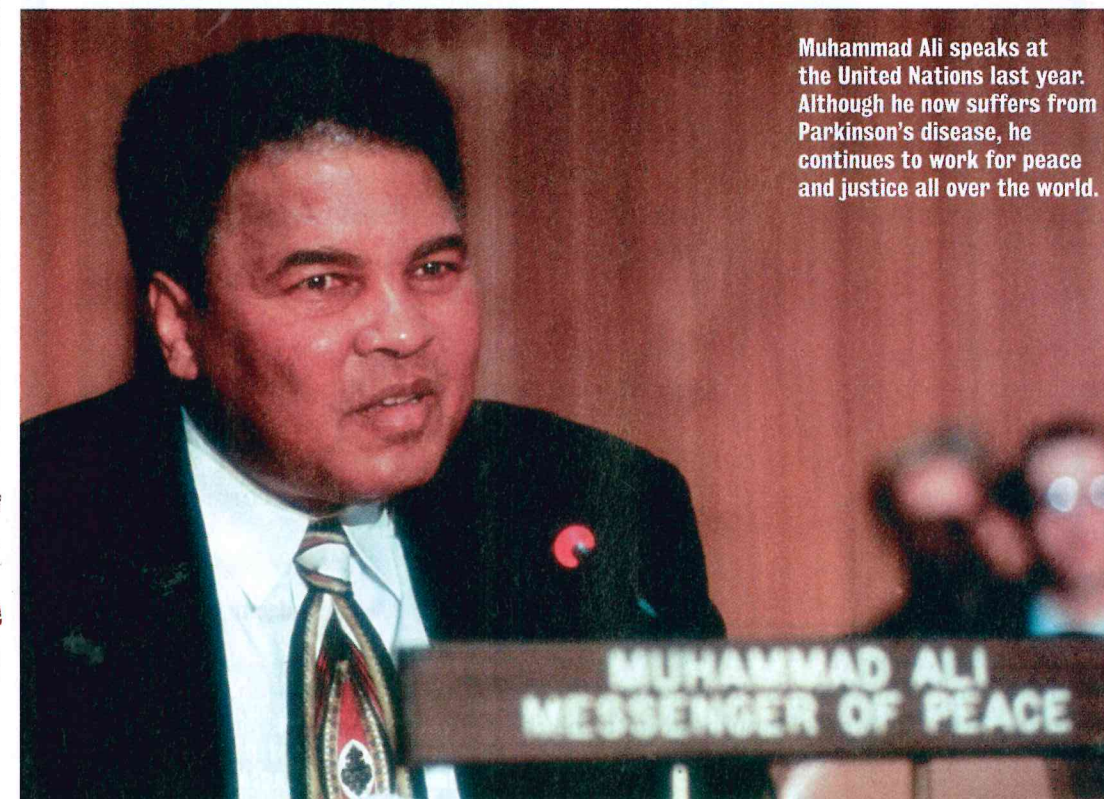
Laila: Dad, I'm going to be a professional boxer. After I saw a female boxer on TV, I knew that I could do that and become the greatest.

Ali: I don't want you to get hurt, but I will support you 100 percent. Remember that it's not going to be easy.

Laila: I know, but I want to do this. I'm going to get hit and bruised, but I'm also going to win. Just wait and see, Dad.

Narrator 1: Today in the ring, Laila carries on the spirit of Muhammad Ali. She has won her first 10 fights.

Narrator 2: Outside the ring, Muhammad Ali continues to work for peace and freedom all around the world. By following his **convictions**, Ali transformed himself from a mere boxing champion into a leader. He now battles Parkinson's disease, which makes it difficult for him to speak. He is a courageous example for African Americans, and for people everywhere. ■



Muhammad Ali speaks at the United Nations last year. Although he now suffers from Parkinson's disease, he continues to work for peace and justice all over the world.





PLAY SKILLS

How well did you understand the play?
Find out with the exercises below.



NO SWEAT TEST PREP

Reading comprehension

STRATEGY: Notice which *type of question* is asked (see parentheses)—so you'll be ready to tackle all of them on the big tests!

- How does the first scene show that Cassius Clay will become a successful boxer? (*predicting*)
 - It shows that he likes to yell and look for fights.
 - It shows that he gets a lot of exercise from bike riding.
 - It shows that he has energy, confidence, and the desire to fight.
- What do you think Joe Martin's first impression of Cassius was? (*inference*)
 - This kid has a bold and tough attitude that could make him a great fighter.
 - This kid doesn't deserve a bike because he is too rude and hotheaded.
 - This kid eats too much candy.
- What religion does Cassius convert to? (*detail*)
 - Judaism
 - Islam
 - Buddhism
- How does Cassius's life change after winning his first fight? (*cause & effect*)
 - His daughter Laila decides to become a boxer.
 - His boxing skills begin to improve.
 - He becomes the world heavyweight champion.
- This story is most like _____. (*genre*)
 - biography
 - fiction
 - myth
- Which is the best expression of the theme of the play? (*main idea*)
 - Attitude, determination, and confidence will help you reach your dreams.
 - Having a police officer as a friend can help you get what you want.
 - A loud voice will help you attract attention and get in the newspapers.

VOCABULARY

Identifying word meanings

Fill in the blanks in the sentences below with vocabulary words from *Free To Be What I Want*.

- Mimi's _____ (*strong beliefs*) helped her make the decision to study instead of cheat on the history test.
- Shawn's _____ (*enforced removal*) from the team cost them the championship.
- He made a _____ (*public display of bad behavior*) of himself by climbing on the lunch table and dancing.
- Chloe has been _____ (*avoiding*) her problems at home by working extra hours.
- The _____ (*someone lacking professional skill or ease*) didn't know the correct rules of the game.

amateur convictions spectacle
banishment evading

THINK ABOUT IT!

Using own knowledge to comprehend

Use this as a starting point for a journal entry or to spark a class discussion!

In *Free To Be What I Want*, Muhammad Ali becomes a great boxer with the help of his first coach, Joe Martin. When Joe Martin realizes Ali's potential, he pushes him to be the greatest. Can you think of an adult in your life who has pushed you to excel at something? How did this person's encouragement and support make you feel? Explain your answers.



((TRUE TEEN STORY))

Reading comprehension/Cross curriculum

Being Cheyenne

One teen shares her Native American pride
BY JADE SOOKTIS AS TOLD TO MARY HARVEY



Jade Sooktis, 17, is proud to be Native American. She attends a high school in Lake Deer, Montana, where students can take courses in Indian culture.

For many years, Native Americans struggled for the freedom just to be who they are. In the 1800s, members of Indian tribes were placed on reservations all across the Western United States. For decades, they had no control over their government or education. Their children were sent to boarding schools where they were punished if they practiced their religion or even spoke their own language.

Today, Jade Sooktis, 17, is free to celebrate her heritage with enthusiasm and pride. She is one of an estimated 8,000 members of the Cheyenne [*SHY-en*] tribe. Here, Jade tells *Scope* what it means to be Cheyenne today. >>>