

NASHVILLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE

**AND IN THIS CORNER:
CASSIUS CLAY**

Support for *And In This Corner:
Cassius Clay* provided by



By Idris Goodwin

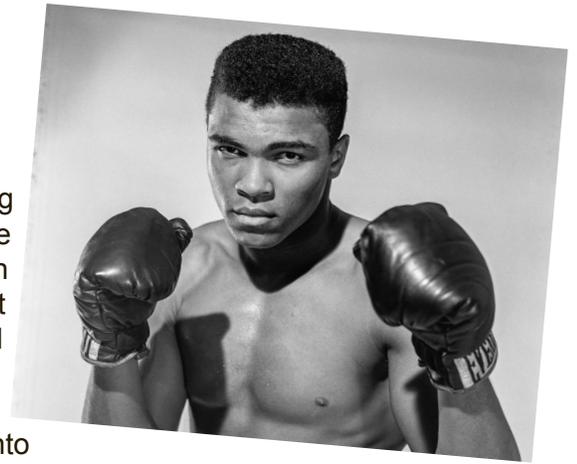
*Commissioned and originally performed by
StageOne Family Theatre, Louisville, KY.
Premiered January 19, 2015.*

FEBRUARY 25 - MARCH 13

ABOUT THE PLAY

About the Play:

And In This Corner: Cassius Clay provides a glimpse into young Cassius Clay's life during his childhood in Louisville, Kentucky - before he renames himself and becomes the legendary Muhammad Ali. When he is twelve years old, Cassius' bicycle is stolen. He reports the theft to a police officer named Joe Martin, and angrily insists that he will "whup" whoever stole the bike. In turn, Joe invites him to visit his gym because if fighting is what he wants to do, first he must learn how to fight. Joe recognizes Cassius' talent and passion, which he redirects into boxing, and Cassius begins spending all of his time at the gym. His hard work and dedication pay off and, after graduating high school, he travels with Joe to the 1960 Rome Olympics, where he defeats the Polish boxer, Zbigniew Pietrzowski, winning the Olympic Gold medal.



The play also serves as a lens through which the audience can understand the laws ruling the South at the time. Cassius' best friend, Eddie, is politically-minded and challenges the restrictions imposed on African American citizens throughout the play but it is not until Cassius returns from the Olympics with his gold medal and is refused service in a white diner that Cassius is motivated to also take action.

About the Playwright

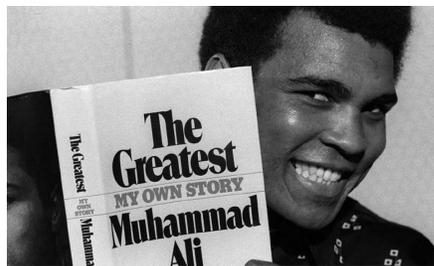


Idris Goodwin is a playwright, poet, rapper, and essayist. His plays include: *How We Go On*, *This is Modern Art*, and *Blackademics*. In addition to writing, he teaches spoken word, performance writing, and hip hop aesthetics at Colorado College. He has long considered Muhammad Ali to be a personal hero and when he was approached by Stage One Theatre from Kentucky to write Cassius Clay's coming-of-age story, he was eager to learn more about his childhood. He considered several story lines before settling on one: "A young man suffers an injustice and learns how to fight". Although the injustice in question is that his bicycle is stolen, the play also explores the greater injustice of racial inequality and oppression, and the moment he decides to fight back against society.

Safe Space: It's Important

When embarking on group improvisation, fostering community dialogue, or celebrating individual accomplishments or goals, it is important to create a safe environment in which students feel comfortable in front of each other. This will encourage creativity and honesty. For the activities laid out in this curriculum guide, students are challenged to think introspectively about the language they use, current events, societal tensions and sensitive issues. Before introducing sensitive subject matter, know your audience and their comfort level with one another.

THE BOY WHO BECAME "THE GREATEST"

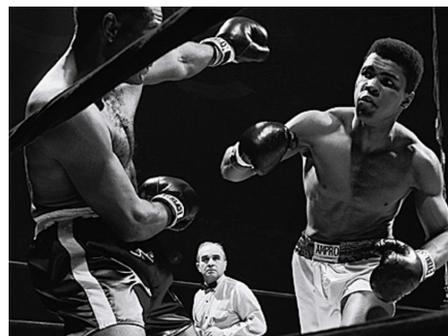


"I am the greatest. I said that even before I knew I was. I figured that if I said it enough, I would convince the world that I was really the greatest."

– Muhammad Ali

Born Cassius Clay: The Famous Muhammad Ali

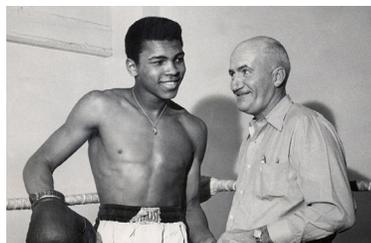
He was born Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr. on January 17, 1942. When he was twelve years old, his red Schwinn bicycle was stolen. He was told to find a police officer who worked in a gym named Joe Martin, who told him that he should learn how to fight before threatening to "whup" the thief. He trained throughout his adolescence, dedicating all of his spare time to perfecting his technique. In 1954, he won his first amateur boxing match against Ronnie O'Keefe. He won a Light Heavyweight gold medal at the 1960 Rome Olympics but, according to him, he threw the medal in the Ohio River after was denied service at a white-only diner. He made his professional debut in 1960 and, over the course of his career, he amassed a record of 56 wins, 5 losses, and 37 knockouts. He retired from boxing in 1981.



He was known for his lightning speed punches and quickness on his feet, the "Ali Shuffle" (which consists of fast, scissor-like footwork and a constant bobbing motion), and his "rope-a-dope" tactic in which the boxer puts their weight into the boxing ring's ropes, allowing the punches to be absorbed by the elastic. He was also famous for his poetic taunts, including the famous statement, "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. You can't hit what you can't see." He often got under the skin of his opponent's this way, but also was able to frequently predict in which round they would fall – further setting them on edge.

Although he has been referred to as a "Sportsman of the Century", his career and life were not without their controversies. In 1964, after defeating Sonny Liston to become the heavyweight champion, he announced that he was rejecting his "slave name", changed his name to Muhammad Ali, and converted to Islam. He was initially a follower of Nation of Islam before converting to Sunni Islam in 1975. In 1966, he was drafted for the Vietnam War but refused to serve, citing his Islamic beliefs, moral principles, and his right to be a conscientious objector. As a result, he was stripped of all boxing titles, banned from the sport for three years, and sentenced to five years of prison. He was defeated in his first fight post-suspension by Joe Frazier. For years, he was a polarizing celebrity. Despite being remembered as "The Greatest", he was at one time vilified in the newspapers for his religious beliefs and for avoiding military service.

He was married four times and had nine children, including Laila Ali, who is a famous professional boxer in her own right. He was an outspoken advocate for civil rights, such as religious freedom and racial justice. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in 1984, but continued to serve as an advocate for others. In 2005, the same year he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, he opened the Muhammad Ali Center in Lexington, KY. The Center features interactive exhibits which promote the six most important values in his life - respect, confidence, dedication, spirituality, and giving. He died on June 3, 2016.



His Coach: Joe Martin

Joe Martin coached at Columbia Gym, the only interracial gym in Louisville, Kentucky. His gym broadcast a weekly television program called Tomorrow's Champions, which featured amateur boxing matches. He trained Cassius, and was his Olympics coach, while he was still an amateur, but they remained life-long friends. He was inducted into the Amateur Boxing Hall of Fame in 1977. *Pictured Left: Joe Martin with a young Muhammad Ali, then Cassius Clay.*

THE BOY WHO BECAME "THE GREATEST"



The Original Cassius M. Clay

Although Cassius was named after his father, Cassius Clay Sr. was named for the white abolitionist and politician, Cassius Marcellus Clay (1810-1903). He served in the Kentucky House of Representatives, was appointed by Abraham Lincoln as Minister to Russia, and was a prominent anti-slavery crusader.

*Pictured Left: Cassius Marcellus Clay.
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

Activity: A Variety of Opinions (ELA, Career Guidance)

To prepare for this activity, place signs on opposite sides of the classroom that say "Agree" and "Disagree" (or, as a variation, "Like Most" and "Like Least"). Ask students to imagine that there is a line that extends from one sign to the other. Explain that you are going to make statements or ask questions about situations and social issues and that they will stand somewhere on the line in a spot that best represents their feelings on the subject matter. They may have varying levels of agreement or disagreement with each statement. Students standing in the middle of the line may be undecided or may feel like they can go either way, depending on the situation. Why did they choose to stand where they did? What do they notice about the group as a whole? Does everyone tend to agree or are differences in opinion emerging during the activity?

Example Statements:

Everyone has a right to protest.

It is possible to have a healthy conversation with someone who holds different beliefs than I do.

Everyone, no matter their skin color or religion, deserves respect and kindness.

Change starts with one person.

Discussion: (ELA, Career Guidance, Health)

For a period of time, Ali was intensely disliked for his attitudes, choices, and dialogue. Today, however, his unwavering conviction in what he believed in is one of the reasons he is admired. As a class, discuss the questions from the previous activity and brainstorm a list of individuals your class considers to be role models who have stood up for their beliefs in a public way.

- Why (or why not) do you look up to or admire Muhammad Ali?
- Why do you think we, as a culture, regard sports figures and celebrities as role models?
- Are there any other celebrities who have taken a public stance for their beliefs and received backlash for them? For example, during the 2016-17 football season, NFL player Colin Kaepernick knelt during the National Anthem to protest race relations in the United States. Do you approve of his choice?



Activity: My Champion (ELA, CG)

Muhammad Ali is a hero for many, in large part due to his personal conviction to stand up for what he believed was right, no matter the consequences. Who is your hero? Perhaps it is someone of national acclaim, or maybe it is a family member. Identify the reasons you look up to them and research their life. What did they accomplish, and how? Did they have to work hard for what they achieved?

Muhammad Ali is pictured being escorted from the Armed Forces Examining and Entrance Station in Houston, Texas, April 28, 1967, by Lt. Col. J. Edwin McKee, commandant of the station, after Ali refused Army induction. (Associated Press)



THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

In *And In This Corner: Cassius Clay*, Cassius Clay uses the “n-word” once in conversation with his best friend, Eddie. Cassius recalls a memory of a time when he was called the “n-word” by white men after Eddie encourages Cassius to join him for a sit-in in a “white-only” diner. Cassius declines his invitation, citing the treatment he received from white people the last time he was in a similar diner.

We understand that you (or parents) may have questions about why you are hearing the word at Nashville Children’s Theatre. It’s a painful word, not easy to hear or to talk about. However, we have not censored the “n-word” in the play because sometimes it is important to hear painful language. The experience Cassius has is deeply personal and affects his view of himself and the world around him. To censor the word would be to limit the play’s ability to accurately represent the character of Cassius and the time period he grew up in. As theatre artists, we want the stage to help give voice to important issues and events, and to censor the language here would be to gloss over the racist treatment of Black Americans. In this case, both the director of the play and NCT’s education staff feel it’s important to include this single use of the word.

Other books from the 20th century, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, also feature the word uncensored. For the purposes of this curriculum guide, we have abstained from printing the word and we encourage your classroom conversation to not use the word unnecessarily. We want to be sensitive to the pain this word can inflict, particularly to your students of color. However, during the time frame in which the play is set, the word (while derogatory) was not avoided and we believe that it accurately shows the reality of segregated America.

Discussion



You will hear an actor use the “n-word” within the context of the play, during a period of time when the word was not yet considered politically incorrect or inappropriate. We still hear it to this day, though it is not always used in a derogatory manner. For example, you may have heard it used deliberately in rap music – yet it inspires anger and resentment when used outside of the black community. Is there ever an appropriate time to use the word? Who is allowed to use the word?

Activity: Choose Your Words Carefully



Our word choice can dramatically alter the message we are trying to convey. In addition, it is important to also consider tone, imagery, and connotation when both speaking and writing. Write a sentence about something you do everyday. Make the sentence positive or negative by altering your word choice.

Example: I walked home from school. I rushed home from school. I walked slowly home from school.

Activity: No Name Calling



We understand that offensive name-calling is inappropriate and unkind, but it is also important to understand how other labels and stereotypes can be perceived by others – even if we do not intent the word choice to be hurtful. Our speaking tone can affect the attitude we are trying to convey (for example, we may sound sarcastic if we were intending to be sincere). Brainstorm, as a group, stereotypes and labels that we hear at school that may be positive or negative, depending on how is it used. For example, “nerd” may be used in a complimentary way or a teasing way. Ask the group to respect the differences in opinion that come up in conversation, and respect the thoughts and feelings of everyone in the class.

Extension: There will be times that we will be the target of name-calling, but we may have also been the perpetrator. Ask for students to make a list of feelings they experienced when on the receiving end of name-calling and keep the list displayed as a reminder to not engage in name-calling. What are reasons they engaged in name-calling? Brainstorm a list of ways that they could avoid the impulse the resort to unkind words.

REACH FOR YOUR DREAMS

“And the one thing in common, between every and all, no matter how big they got, they started out small.” – Cassius Clay, *And In This Corner: Cassius Clay*

Activity: A Bag of Dreams (ELA)

Have students write their one of their dreams or wishes – the sky is the limit, as long as it is a true ambition or goal - on a piece of paper. These will be read aloud to the class. They should not write their name on the piece of paper. Collect them in a bag. Pass the bag around the room and ask for everyone to take one slip of paper. If it their own, put it back in the bag and draw another. Taking turns, have each student read the dream aloud as if it were their own and add a way that they can ensure it will happen. Ask for other strategies from the class.

Discussion: How did the student whose dream was read aloud feel hearing it confirmed aloud by someone else? Did they think the ideas shared were helpful?

Example: Dream: I want to be an NBA player.

Announcement: I want to be an NBA player so I'll try out for the basketball team.

Additional Strategies: I'll keep my grades up. I'll research college programs. I'll practice. I'll get advice from other people with the same dream.

Extension: Create an action plan for your dream, setting goals for yourself, identifying mentors, as well as potential hurdles or challenges and how you will face them.

Extension: Create a dream board in your room, displaying the dreams students came up with or keep a stack of post-its next to it, encouraging students to keep writing ambitions or goals.

Activity: Superhero! (ELA, VA)

Despite Eddie telling Cassius at the beginning of the play that there “ain't no negro superheros”, Cassius adamantly refers to himself as a superhero. Imagine you are a superhero. What would your powers be, and how would you use them to defeat your nemesis. What if you didn't battle a person, but an issue? What would that issue be? Draw the cover of a comic book – featuring you!

Activity: Be Brave (ELA, Career Guidance)

When he was in the ring, he was fearless. However, before he gets on the airplane for Rome, he tells Joe he's not comfortable flying. As we all know, Cassius overcame his nerves, competed in the Rome Olympics, and came home with a gold medal. He also had Joe in his corner, ready to support him and reassure him. Brainstorm one thing that you are afraid of or apprehensive of and share it with a partner. Your partner will now repeat your fear back to you and you will take on the role of a friend, parent, or coach and reassure your partner of why there is no need to be afraid.

Activity: Who Is The Greatest? I Am! (ELA, Career Guidance)

Put yourself in the shoes of a ringside announcer, except instead of introducing the next boxer to enter the ring ... you're introducing yourself! Introduce yourself as you would a champion, using only positive words and phrases. What are you exceptionally good at? What are your talents? Why do others consider you a good friend? Use “she”, “he” or “they” pronouns to give yourself distance.

Activity: Louisville Lip (ELA)

Cassius once said that he thought in rhyme. He was famous for his trash-talking and, as a result, was nicknamed the “Louisville Lip” or “Cash the Brash”. During the play, his character frequently uses poetry when addressing the audience directly. Think of a slogan or motto for yourself, or something you would want to say to cheer yourself on before a test, using rhyme.



CIVIL RIGHTS AND JIM CROW LAWS

“You don’t really lose when you fight for what you believe in. You lose when you fail to fight for what you care about.”

– Muhammad Ali



Jim Crow Laws existed from 1866 until approximately 1965. The name is derived from a minstrel act called “Jump Jim Crow” that was performed in black face by an actor named Thomas Dartmouth Rice in 1838. “Jim Crow” became associated with a set of rules which were essentially part of a racial caste system in which white people were regarded as superior to black people. The rules were incredibly restrictive. While we are more familiar with the laws associated with education and transportation (as a result of *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Rosa Parks*), Jim Crow laws even dictated that white and black people could not be hospitalized in the same ward, be imprisoned together, or serve in the military together. Because the justice system (police officers, judges, etc.) were all white, African Americans were given no way to fight back. Breaking the laws could result in losing their home, their job, and even their life. Lynchings were particularly inhumane murders carried out by mobs.

The Death of Emmett Till: In the play, Eddie reads a newspaper article about Till’s death. Till, pictured right, an eighth grade student, was accused of whistling at a white woman named Carolyn Bryant. Her husband, Roy Bryant and his brother, J.W. Milam, went to his house after she identified him, dragged him from his bed, and tortured and murdered him. They sank his body in the Tallahatchie River. Till’s mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, held an open casket funeral for him so that the public could see what had happened to her son. Bryant and Milam were tried by an all-white jury and were acquitted. They bragged about the murder later but, due to double jeopardy, could not be tried again.



Activity: Break Into the Circle (TH, Career Guidance)

Have your class stand in a circle. Ask one volunteer to stand outside of the circle. Their goal is to try to “break in” to the circle; the rest of the class will attempt to keep them out. Put a one minute time-limit on the activity, or until the student successfully breaks in.

Discussion: How did it feel to be stuck outside of the circle? For the rest of the group, how did it feel to be preventing someone from entering?

Segregation in the United States

We celebrate the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement, but it only take a look at the news to realize the fight for equal rights is not over. The timeline on page 9 illustrates critical dates in progress (and setbacks) for civil rights.

Extension:

Assign students to groups of two or three students. Have them pick a year or notable moment from the timeline above and research the following:

· Who was involved? What does it mean? What caused the event, and what were the repercussions? How did it impact history? Why is it important in terms of the Civil Rights Movement?

Ask your students to present their findings to the class by creating visual aids, such as posters. Map the timeline around the walls of your classroom and add their visual displays and research to create a walking museum.

UNDERSTANDING OPPRESSION AND PRIVILEGE

Oppression:

The unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power.

Privilege:

A special right or advantage only available to a particular person or group of people.

The decision to take a stand and fight for your beliefs is a personal, individual one. At the beginning of the play, Cassius is shepherded past a white-only diner by his mother after she tells him they won't be able to get any water there. Cassius focuses his attention on boxing, but the audience gets glimpses of action happening behind-the-scenes through Eddie, who talks about participating in sit-ins and joining the Freedom Riders. The turning point for Cassius is when he returns to Louisville as a decorated gold medalist and discovers that, while he's changed, the rest of his world – in terms of segregation – has not.

Discussion: Cassius threatens to fight whoever stole his bicycle. He stands up to Corky, the neighborhood bully. Yet when Eddie is reading the newspaper article about Emmett Till, Cassius says, "He shoulda known better. Everybody know you supposed to watch your mouth around white folks." Why do you think Cassius appears to accept the unfairness of segregation? Do you believe the same unfairness exists today?

There is a difference between passivity, taking a stand for what you believe in, and fighting through violence. Do you see those three tactics playing out in the newspapers today? Where? In your opinion, what method is the most successful and why? If violence seems to be the answer, what can we do to redirect that energy into something positive?

Activity: Jenga Tower (PE, Career Guidance)

Materials Needed: Jenga Tower

Set up the Jenga tower (three blocks side-by-side on each row, each row alternating in direction.) Students can play in pairs or on teams. Explain the rules: One person will try to take out a single block - without knocking down the tower - and place the block on top. The pairs or teams will take turns until the tower finally falls. Before beginning the game, pass out a list of "individual" rules to one person (or team) per Jenga tower. On a single notecard or slip of paper, write down how they must take their turn. Example rules: You must use your left hand. You have to complete your turn in ten seconds or you forfeit the game. You may only move blocks on the side of the tower.

Alternate: Instead of passing out individual rules, you may choose to tell the group as a whole, "Everyone with blonde hair has to complete their turn in ten seconds or less", for example.

Following the activity, discuss the following:

- How did it feel to be restricted?
- Was it frustrating to know your partner (or opposing team) did not have any restrictions?
- How can you relate this exercise to oppression and privilege?

Activity: Props for Thought (ELA)

Pass around the following props and pose a question.

Watch: What would you like to see happening at this time ten years from now?

Calendar: How do you think we will look back on this time period? Good or bad?

Keys: What do you think is the key to ending oppression?

Padlock: What resources in the world would you like to see unlocked?

Mirror: What problem do you see in your community that is also reflected in the larger society?

(activity adapted from Sociodrama: Who's In Your Shoes)

CIVIL RIGHTS TIMELINE

- 1863 – The Emancipation Proclamation is issued by Abraham Lincoln
- 1865 – The 13 th Amendment abolishes slavery
- 1868 – 14 th Amendment and Citizenship
- 1870 – 15 th Amendment and the Right to Vote
- 1896 - Plessy v. Ferguson
- 1913 - Woodrow Wilson segregated government
- 1944 – Smith v. Allwright
- 1954 - Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, KS
- 1955 - Emmett Till was murdered
- 1955 - Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat
- 1961 - Freedom Riders rode buses
- 1963 - March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom
- 1964 - 24th Amendment - poll tax abolished
- 1964 - Civil Rights Act of 1964
- 1965 - Voting Rights Act
- 1967 - interracial marriage ban unconstitutional
- 1968 - Fair Housing Act
- 1991 - Civil Rights Act

Civil Rights Timeline for segregation discussion on page 7.

A FEW KNOCKOUT FIGHTS

February 24, 1964: Cassius Clay vs. Sonny Liston

Following this fight, he declared “I am the greatest” and soon after, announced his was changing his name to Muhammad Ali.

Feb. 6, 1967: Muhammad Ali vs. Ernie Terrell

Prior to the fight, Terrell insisted on calling Ali “Clay”. At this point, he had changed his name and did not appreciate being referred to as “Cassius Clay”. During the fight, Ali taunted and overpowered Terrell and, after each punch, shouted, “What my name?”

March 8, 1971: Joe Frazier vs. Muhammad Ali

The Fight of the Century

It was the first fight following Ali’s boxing ban, and both he and Joe Frazier were undefeated. It was the first loss of Ali’s professional career, but he eventually defeated Frazier twice.

October 30, 1974 - George Foreman vs. Muhammad Ali

Rumble in the Jungle

Ali was regarded as the underdog against George Foreman who was an undefeated world heavyweight champion at the time. The fight took place at 4:00 in the morning and Ali won the fight by knockout.

October 1, 1975 – Muhammad Ali vs. Joe Frazier

Thrilla in Manila

It set the stage for the third and final Ali vs. Frazier showdown. It was a gruesome fight that ended with Ali winning in a technical knockout (Frazier’s coaches called the fight) and was such as an exhausting battle that following the fight, Ali collapsed in the ring from exhaustion.

