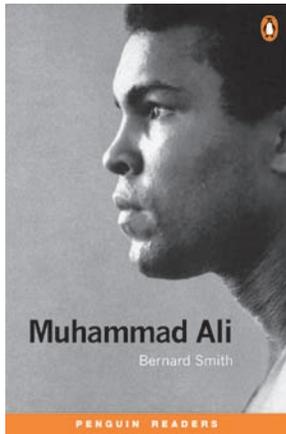




# Muhammad Ali

Bernard Smith



## Summary

Muhammad Ali, Cassius Clay's adopted name, is a famous world champion boxer who fought not only in a ring, but also for peace in the world. When he was twelve years old, he met Joe Martin by chance and started learning how to box. Boxing soon became the only important thing for Cassius. Out of the 108 fights he had before the age of eighteen, he won 100! In 1960, Cassius Clay participated in the Olympic Games and won a medal for the United States. He became very famous, but because he was black, segregation meant that he could not go everywhere he wished to go. He was determined to become a world champion. Clay fought Sonny Liston, the world champion in 1964.

Clay gave up the name of his white family name and changed his name to Muhammad Ali. He also became a Muslim. His family was not happy with this. He refused to join the army in Vietnam so he was not allowed to box for two years. He campaigned for peace in schools. Joe Frazier was the new champion and his next opponent. In 1971, Ali fought well but lost. In 1974, they fought again and Ali won with difficulty. To be world champion, he had to fight George Foreman, who was strong and younger than Ali. After a clever fight, Ali was champion again. He was world champion three times in fourteen years. In the 1980s he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and stopped boxing. He lives with his family and works for peace in the world.

## Background

**Boxing:** a sport in which two opponents wearing padded gloves fight 10, 12, or 15 rounds until one is knocked out or the judges declare a winner by points.

**Segregation:** the policy of separating Black Americans from the rest of the community. They were forced to have

their own schools, restaurants, cinemas, etc. This ended in the 1960s when civil rights movement laws were passed but racial discrimination went on.

**War in Vietnam:** Vietnam was a French colony. The United States opposed its independence movement under the suspicion that communists were behind it. In the 1960s American soldiers were sent to South Vietnam. In 1975, the country was taken over by the Vietcong (communist) forces. This war divided American society: many people, especially students, demonstrated against it.

## Discussion activities

### Pages 1–7

#### Before reading

**1 Discuss:** Have students look at the cover:

- Ask students to identify the title, author, publisher and ISBN and write a file card for the book.
- Ask students to describe the photo. *What do you know about black Americans in the 60s? Was life easy for them? Why/Why not?*

#### While reading

- Discuss:** Have students read 'The young boy is unhappy and very angry' on page 1 and answer: *Why did he talk to Joe Martin?*
- Discuss:** 'Whites only' (page 4). Ask students to work in pairs and imagine why this makes Cassius Clay angry. What does he promise to do?

#### After reading

- Role-play:** Have students role play the conversation between Cassius and his family when he tells them how he met Joe Martin and what his plans are.

### Pages 7–14

#### Before reading

- Predict:** Have students look at the title on page 7 and guess what problems Clay will have. You can offer options:
  - Clay can't box because he is sick.*
  - He has a lot of money and this is a problem.*
  - He has problems with the government.*

#### While reading

- Discuss:** Have students look at the picture on page 10 and say whether it is the first or the second fight with Joe Frazier.

#### After reading

- Write:** Have students write an entry in Ali's diary the day he changed his name.  
*December 5. Today I have a new name: Muhammad Ali.*

## Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to [www.penguinreaders.com](http://www.penguinreaders.com).