

Beyond the Page: Float Like a Butterfly

Subject: Language Arts, Social Studies

Running time: 18 minutes

Objectives

The student will:

- gain a better understanding of the book *Float Like a Butterfly*, written by Ntozake Shange and illustrated by Edel Rodriguez;
- be motivated to read more books and find out more about the author, illustrator, and subject matter; and
- learn more about children who overcome obstacles.

Synopsis of the Book

Muhammad Ali, born Cassius Clay, grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, in the segregated South. Brimming with confidence, he told his mother he would be a “colored superman.” Over time, he developed his lightning-quick boxing style—and rhyming skills—and won the gold medal at the 1960 Olympics. After adopting Islam as his religion, he called himself Muhammad Ali. He became a spokesman for equal rights for all people. He believed in excellence and perseverance, overcoming odds to regain the title Heavyweight Champion of the World.

Synopsis of the Video

At the Beyond the Page Café, Today’s Special is *Float Like a Butterfly*, written by Ntozake Shange and illustrated by Edel Rodriguez. Host Shelley reads the story aloud to the Café’s guests, and we view an animation of Rodriguez’s illustrations. The illustrator used an unusual combination of pastel, woodblock ink, and spray paint to bring Ali’s story to life. After reading the story, the children have an online chat with Ntozake Shange, who explain which parts of Ali’s life she chose to use, and with the illustrator, Edel Rodriguez, who talks about his illustration techniques. Next the kids watch a video about kids who share Ali’s spirit.

Preview Questions/Discussions

1. What do you know about Muhammad Ali or the Olympics? What do you want to find out?
2. Why might a boxer need perseverance, or the ability to keep going despite obstacles?
3. Do you have a sports hero? What do you admire about him or her?

Post-Viewing Questions

1. What are three words that you feel best describe Muhammad Ali?
2. What problems did Muhammad Ali face in his childhood? What did he do as a result?
3. Why is Muhammad Ali a hero today?
4. Which illustration in the book is your favorite? How does it make you feel?

Related Activities

1. Have students look at the posters in the book. Instruct them to make a poster illustrating a class talent show. Suggest they include catchy words that will make people want to see the show.
2. Remind students that Muhammad Ali loved to rhyme. Have them make up a rhyme that praises one of their heroes—either someone famous or someone they know personally. Then have them recite the rhyme to the class.
3. Ask students to brainstorm questions they still have about Muhammad Ali. Then help them use nonfiction books or the Internet to find answers to their questions. Suggest they use what they learned about Ali to make a comic book, write a brief story, or role-play an interview with Ali.
4. Have students recall the online chat with Ntozake Shange, the author, and Edel Rodriguez, the illustrator of *Float Like a Butterfly*. Invite students to jot down their own questions for the author and illustrator. Help them send their questions and comments to Shange and Rodriguez at the following address:

Ntozake Shange and Edel Rodriguez
c/o Hyperion Books for Children
114 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10011-5690

Resources

Disney Educational Productions

www.Edustation.Disney.com

Additional information, including books, videos, and Web links.

Breaking the Barriers: A Houston Chronicle Special Section Show-stopper: Muhammed Ali

<http://www.chron.com/content/chronicle/sports/special/barriers/ali.html>

A kid-friendly biography of Muhammad Ali, highlighting his boxing successes and his current battle with Parkinson’s disease.

National Education Technology Standards Project

www.cnets.iste.org/index2.html

(Scroll to Search Lessons. Pull down Awesome Authors.)

Gordon, Randy, *Muhammad Ali* (Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers, 2001).

Sanders, Nancy I., *A Kid’s Guide to African American History: More than 70 Activities*; illustrated by Fran Lee (Chicago Review Press, 2000).