

## Tutorial: Black History month and Dyslexia awareness week

*As part of Black History month, we will look at a famous figure Muhammed Ali who lived through and played a part in the civil rights movement in America. He was also a person who stood for social justice; highlighted in his refusal to join the Vietnam War. For his refusal he was imprisoned, but he publicly refused to join a war and kill people he has no problem with. We have chosen to focus on Muhammed Ali as this week is also Dyslexia Awareness week. Most people will not know that he was dyslexic.*

Muhammad Ali was known to many as a champion boxer and a man who fought for racial and social justice his entire life. He acquired Parkinson's disease at age 42 and became a role model for people with physical disabilities. What many may not know, however, is that Ali also had dyslexia.

"As a high school student, many of my teachers labelled me dumb...I knew who the real dummies were. I barely graduated...There was no way I was going to college—I never even thought about it. I could barely read my textbooks," Ali has told others.

When Ali was growing up, teachers and researchers did not know much about dyslexia or how to help children who struggle with the disability. Ali was not aware of the fact that he had dyslexia, either, which led to a lack of confidence in his ability as a student.

Having dyslexia did not mean that Ali was not intelligent; his fans certainly knew that he was extremely talented well beyond the boxing ring. It just meant that he learned differently, in a way that had to be addressed separate from his peers.

Ali carried this memory of his struggle in school, especially his hatred of reading at the time as a result of his dyslexia. He recognized that dyslexia affects children's desires to read and enjoyment of the task. So he worked with his wife, Lonnie, and book publishers, Scholastic, to create a new series of books that would help improve the literacy of young readers who struggle.

"If my mind can conceive it, and I can believe it—then I can achieve it," Ali is known for saying.

Muhammed Ali lived through the civil rights movement in America and was a contemporary of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. He embraced Islam and that was when he dropped his name Cassius Clay. Through his determination

and talent Ali became known as the greatest sportsman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He became a sporting icon and used his position to help others. When he died in 2016 his funeral was attended by 14,000 people including notables like US president, Will Smith, Whoopie Goldberg and David Beckham.

Role models such as Ali make a big difference in setting high expectations for youth with disabilities. People with disabilities of all backgrounds can be amongst the highest achievers on earth. Harriet Tubman had Epilepsy, actress Halle Berry lives with diabetes, business leader and *Shark Tank* superstar Daymond John is dyslexic and Stevie Wonder is blind. Each of them is a positive role model for success.

Questions / discussion:

1. When Ali was at school and his teachers discouraged him, how did this affect him in the short term and in the long term?
2. Was this type of negativity towards black students in America normal? Consider what ustadha Tahira talked about in assembly on Tuesday
3. Although he had dyslexia, he did not let this stop him achieving his dream. About 13-14% of the school population have dyslexia. Do you know what dyslexia is?
4. How difficult do you think it would have been for Ali to refuse to go into war? Can you think of a situation in school where you might need to stand up against what others are saying?

Answers:

1. Short term - He wanted to stop studying and lacked confidence in his academic ability. Long term - He wanted to make a difference for others and worked to produce books for dyslexic youth
2. Many black children were discouraged from trying to study further or aspire to higher professions. Malcolm X who wanted to be a lawyer was told by his teachers that as a black youth he should give up the dream.
3. Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words.
4. He jeopardized his livelihood as a boxer by refusing and was sent to jail. He was willing to lose a lot to stand up for what he believed was right.

School situation - bullying