

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #625
Muhammad Ali | “What’s My Name?”
7th Aug, 2026

Transcript	3
Key vocabulary	26
Language spotlight	35
Quiz	38
Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions	38
True or False	40
Fill in the Blank	40
Vocabulary Practice	41
Answers	44

Transcript

[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about Muhammad Ali.

[00:00:28] It's a story about a boxing champion, obviously, but it's also one of identity, civil rights, religion, courage, and the cost of greatness.

[00:00:40] We have a lot to get through today, so let's get right into it.

[00:00:47] If someone told you their name was Cassius Marcellus, your first thought might be that their parents were unusually passionate about Ancient Rome.

[00:00:59] But Cassius Marcellus Clay, the boy born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1942, was not given this name because of any passion for the Romans; he had the name because his father was given it before him, after a 19th century Kentucky politician of the same name.

[00:01:20] And perhaps that politician's parents really were fans of Ancient Rome, given that they named another son Brutus Junius.

[00:01:30] Now, this original Cassius Marcellus Clay was an interesting character [in his own right](#)¹; he came from a wealthy and powerful [slave-owning](#)² family before becoming an [anti-slavery activist](#)³.

[00:01:43] But today we are talking about the other Cassius Marcellus Clay, Cassius Marcellus Clay Junior, the man more commonly known by the name Muhammad Ali.

[00:01:59] At the start of our story, of course, he was still Cassius.

[00:02:04] His mother, Odessa, was a [domestic worker](#)⁴, serving a white family. And his father, Cassius Senior, painted signs for a living. It was, [by all accounts](#)⁵, an ordinary childhood: church on Sundays, a [modest](#)⁶ house, and parents who worked hard to provide for their children.

[00:02:27] But this was America of the 1940s and 1950s, an America that was still deeply divided.

¹ because of his own achievements, not someone else's

² having slaves

³ a person who worked to end slavery

⁴ a person who worked in someone's home doing jobs such as cleaning or cooking

⁵ according to everyone who knew about it

⁶ simple and not expensive or grand

[00:02:36] Black people could live, work, and move with some freedom in certain parts of a city; in others, they were not welcome at all, and they were constantly reminded that they were [second-class citizens](#)⁷.

[00:02:51] Now, the story of how Cassius Clay found boxing has become part of boxing [folklore](#)⁸, and it goes like this.

[00:03:01] He was twelve years old. He had gone to a fair with some friends, and left his bike outside.

[00:03:10] When he returned, he found the bike was gone. Someone had stolen it.

[00:03:17] He was [distraught](#)⁹; it was his [pride and joy](#)¹⁰, his parents had saved up to buy it for him, and someone had [snatched](#)¹¹ it away from him.

[00:03:29] He asked around, and was directed to a local police officer called Joe Martin. Martin patiently listened as the young boy threatened to "[whup](#)¹²" the thief when he found him.

⁷ people who were treated as less important than others

⁸ traditional stories that many people know and tell

⁹ very upset and unhappy

¹⁰ something he loved very much and was very proud of

¹¹ took quickly

¹² beat in a fight

[00:03:45] At this time, Cassius Clay was a **scrawny**¹³ little twelve-year-old, so Martin, the police officer, decided he needed to give him some advice, advice that has become legend: "well, you'd better learn how to fight first".

[00:04:02] Now, Cassius Clay never got his bike back, and never managed to "whup" the thief.

[00:04:10] But the meeting, and this advice, would change his life.

[00:04:16] See, Joe Martin, the police officer, also ran a boxing gym, and suggested the young boy come and do some training.

[00:04:27] He did, and by all accounts, he was instantly **hooked**¹⁴. He was there before school the following morning, and the morning after that, and the morning after that.

[00:04:41] Cassius was never the biggest boy in the gym, nor was he the strongest. What he had was speed and a **dedication**¹⁵ that Martin had not seen before in someone so young.

¹³ very thin and weak-looking

¹⁴ very interested in it and wanting to keep doing it

¹⁵ hard work and strong commitment

[00:04:54] Six days a week, every week, he was there before [dawn](#)¹⁶. He ran. He [skipped](#) [rope](#)¹⁷. He worked the bags. He [sparring](#)¹⁸. Most boys his age would come down and hit a few bags, but nobody took it anywhere near as seriously as young Cassius Clay.

[00:05:16] And there was something else that struck Martin: the boy's fearless, [unshakable](#)¹⁹ confidence in his own ability.

[00:05:26] Martin started to enter him in local competitions, and against all expectations, he won.

[00:05:35] He would fight against bigger, heavier, and older opponents, who [on paper](#)²⁰ should have beaten him. But he kept winning.

[00:05:45] By eighteen, he was the best amateur boxer in the United States, and people around him were [urging](#)²¹ him to turn professional and start earning.

[00:05:58] He had other plans, at least in the immediate future. The 1960 Olympic Games were around the corner, Cassius Clay wanted a gold medal, and professional boxers weren't allowed at the Olympics.

¹⁶ the time when the sun started to rise

¹⁷ jumped over a rope again and again for exercise

¹⁸ practised boxing with another boxer

¹⁹ impossible to weaken or change

²⁰ according to the facts or information available

²¹ strongly encouraging

[00:06:14] So, he stayed [amateur²²](#), at least for a while.

[00:06:19] There was another [logistical²³](#) problem too. The Olympics were in Rome, and not only had Clay never been on a plane before, but he was terrified of flying.

[00:06:33] He agreed to get on the plane on the condition that he could wear a [parachute²⁴](#). He wore it for the entire flight, and fortunately, he did not need to use it.

[00:06:45] At the Olympics, he won every fight. He won the light heavyweight gold medal.

[00:06:52] Not only this, but the Olympics showed a side to the young man that most people weren't aware of.

[00:06:59] He was charming, curious, funny, and not afraid to [speak his mind²⁵](#). He wandered through the Olympic Village asking questions and making friends with competitors from countries he had never heard of.

²² doing the sport for enjoyment, not for money

²³ connected with organising and planning things

²⁴ a device that helps a person fall safely from an aircraft

²⁵ say exactly what he thought

[00:07:15] A Soviet journalist, who was looking to [score a point](#)²⁶ about American [racial politics](#)²⁷, asked him how he felt about competing for a country where his people were treated as second-class citizens.

[00:07:30] Clay looked at him and said: "Tell your readers we've got [qualified](#)²⁸ people working on that problem, and I'm not worried about the [outcome](#)²⁹. To me, the USA is still the best country in the world, counting yours."

[00:07:45] He came home with the gold medal around his neck, and in October 1960 he turned professional.

[00:07:54] Now, we aren't going to talk too much about his boxing history, but there are some important things to mention when it came to style.

[00:08:05] Back then, there were certain expectations about what a heavyweight boxer was meant to look like, and how they were meant to fight.

[00:08:16] Heavyweight champions were supposed to be powerful and physical and [overwhelming](#)³⁰. They stood in, [absorbed](#)³¹ punishment, and delivered it in return.

²⁶ make someone else look wrong or make himself look right

²⁷ issues and arguments connected with race and society

²⁸ having the skills or knowledge needed

²⁹ result

³⁰ extremely strong or great

³¹ received or took in

That was the tradition. Two giant men landing huge blows against each other until one was declared the winner.

[00:08:38] Clay was different.

[00:08:41] He moved. He circled. He kept his hands low, which every coach told him was wrong, because it left his body exposed. You should keep your hands up to protect yourself and make it easier to punch back.

[00:08:57] No, Clay said. His [reflexes](#)³² were fast enough that he could move his head and duck out of the way before the punch arrived.

[00:09:08] And this strategy, well, it worked. If you've watched many of his fights, you'll know what I mean. He almost dances around the ring with his arms by his side, his opponent tries to land a [knockout blow](#)³³, only for Clay to duck out of the way and land a [jab](#)³⁴ before his opponent has the time to [steady himself](#)³⁵.

³² quick physical reactions

³³ a punch that would make him unable to continue fighting

³⁴ a quick straight punch

³⁵ make himself balanced and in control again

[00:09:32] Still, many boxing commentators watching his early fights were [unconvinced](#)

³⁶. This "dancing" style tired him out and left his body exposed. He would be [found out](#)

³⁷ eventually by someone fast enough and smart enough to take advantage.

[00:09:51] In his early career, at least, that person never came.

[00:09:58] And around the same time, he added another [string to his bow](#)³⁸.

[00:10:04] When he was nineteen, he met a man named George Wagner, who was better known by his stage name, Gorgeous George.

[00:10:15] Now, Gorgeous George was a professional wrestler, and while he was not the most [technically gifted](#)³⁹ athlete, he had become incredibly famous for creating an [outrageous](#)⁴⁰, [over-the-top](#)⁴¹ [persona](#)⁴².

³⁶ not believing that it was the right way

³⁷ shown to be weaker or worse than people thought

³⁸ useful skill or ability

³⁹ very skilled at the technical parts

⁴⁰ very shocking or unusual

⁴¹ too extreme or exaggerated

⁴² the character or image he showed to others

[00:10:30] He dyed his hair [peroxide blonde](#)⁴³, he would be carried to the ring on a velvet cushion, he would spray perfume into the air, and declare himself "the greatest wrestler who ever lived."

[00:10:44] It was this complete [self-confidence](#)⁴⁴ and [flamboyance](#)⁴⁵ that brought in the crowds, and he [spelled this out](#)⁴⁶ to Cassius Clay.

[00:10:55] "A lot of people will pay to see someone shut your mouth," George reportedly told him. "So give them a reason to want to."

[00:11:05] In other words, be so [arrogant](#)⁴⁷ and confident that people come in the hope of watching you lose.

[00:11:13] Now, Clay already had the talent to compete, but with Gorgeous George, he had a [template](#)⁴⁸ for how to attract attention.

[00:11:23] He began to talk about himself constantly, telling people that he was the greatest boxer ever to live, years before he became a world champion.

⁴³ very light blonde hair made with chemicals

⁴⁴ belief in his own abilities

⁴⁵ a very colourful and attention-seeking style

⁴⁶ explained this clearly

⁴⁷ believing you are better than other people

⁴⁸ an example that could be copied

[00:11:34] And in February of 1964, the twenty-two-year-old Clay had the biggest fight of his career so far.

[00:11:43] His opponent was Sonny Liston, the heavyweight champion.

[00:11:49] Liston was one of the most feared men in boxing. He was a former criminal with enormous fists and a reputation for ending fights very quickly and very unpleasantly.

[00:12:03] The [bookmakers](#)⁴⁹ made Liston an [overwhelming favourite](#)⁵⁰, and most commentators expected the fight to be over within a few rounds.

[00:12:13] Before the fight, Clay was his usual [antagonistic](#)⁵¹ self, [proclaiming](#)⁵²:

[00:12:19] "Clay comes out to meet Liston, and Liston starts to [retreat](#)⁵³."

[00:12:23] If Liston goes back any further, he'll end up in a [ringside seat](#)⁵⁴."

[00:12:29] The fight ended as Clay had predicted, and Cassius Clay became the heavyweight champion of the world.

⁴⁹ people or companies that took bets on sports

⁵⁰ the person expected to win very easily

⁵¹ unfriendly and likely to argue or cause conflict

⁵² saying publicly and confidently

⁵³ move backwards

⁵⁴ a seat very close to the boxing ring

[00:12:38] He ran around the ring shouting: "I shook up the world. I am the greatest thing that ever lived."

[00:12:45] But soon after the fight, the attention shifted away from his performance in the ring. Clay publicly confirmed what many people suspected: he had joined an organisation called the Nation of Islam.

[00:13:04] As part of this, he rejected the name Cassius Clay, briefly became Cassius X, and was then given the name the world would come to know him by: Muhammad Ali.

[00:13:18] Now, the Nation of Islam was not a [mainstream](#)⁵⁵ religious organisation.

[00:13:25] It taught that Black Americans were the original people of the earth and had been [subjected to](#)⁵⁶ centuries of deliberate [oppression](#)⁵⁷.

[00:13:35] It [preached](#)⁵⁸ Black pride, Black [separatism](#)⁵⁹, and economic [self-sufficiency](#)⁶⁰. It demanded discipline from its members: no alcohol, no tobacco, no dependence on white institutions.

⁵⁵ accepted or followed by most people

⁵⁶ forced to experience

⁵⁷ unfair and cruel treatment by people with power

⁵⁸ publicly taught or strongly supported the idea

⁵⁹ the belief that they should live separately from others

⁶⁰ the ability to provide what they needed without help

[00:13:50] Its leader, at that time at least, was a man named Elijah Muhammad, but its most [prominent](#)⁶¹ public voice was Malcolm X. In fact, we have a full episode on Malcolm X, episode 294, so that's one to listen to if you haven't done so already.

[00:14:08] But back to Cassius Clay, or to give him his new name, Muhammad Ali.

[00:14:16] This announcement was a powerful message. This was the new heavyweight boxing champion of the world publicly coming out in support of a group that was considered [radical](#)⁶² by the authorities, and treated with some suspicion by most of mainstream America.

[00:14:34] And to clarify, this wasn't him simply changing faith, switching from Baptist Christianity to Islam; it wasn't a private religious choice. It was a rejection of his past, and a public act of [self-definition](#)⁶³.

[00:14:52] He rejected “Cassius Clay” as what he called his [slave name](#)⁶⁴, a name that connected him to a history he had not chosen. The message was clear: I am not the [compliant](#)⁶⁵ champion you expected.

⁶¹ important and well known

⁶² very different from what most people accepted, extreme

⁶³ deciding and declaring who he was

⁶⁴ a name linked to slavery

⁶⁵ willing to do what others want

[00:15:10] Still, many journalists and commentators refused to use this name, instead [insisting on](#)⁶⁶ referring to him as Cassius Clay.

[00:15:20] Some opponents did too. Ernie Terrell, a heavyweight champion who fought Ali in February 1967, refused to call him by his name throughout the entire [build-up](#)⁶⁷ to the fight.

[00:15:35] Ali made it very clear that this was [unacceptable](#)⁶⁸.

[00:15:40] When the fight came, Ali won it comfortably.

[00:15:43] But he did not try to end it quickly. He punished Terrell round after round, and between punches he leaned in close and asked the same question, again and again: "What's my name? What's my name?"

[00:15:59] Eventually, people stopped calling him Cassius Clay.

[00:16:05] Now, from the mid-1960s, Ali was the [undisputed](#)⁶⁹ world heavyweight champion. But he was also a young man in an America at war with Vietnam.

⁶⁶ persisting, keeping on doing it

⁶⁷ the period before the event

⁶⁸ not allowed or not suitable

⁶⁹ accepted by everyone

[00:16:20] The [military draft](#)⁷⁰ was reaching young men across the country, and in 1967, Ali was ordered to report for the US army.

[00:16:31] He refused to go, claiming [conscientious objector](#)⁷¹ status on the grounds of his Muslim faith. Ali's position was specific: his faith held that he could not kill people with whom he had no quarrel, and he had no [quarrel](#)⁷² with the Vietnamese people.

[00:16:54] Or, as he famously put it: "I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Cong. No Viet Cong ever called me nigger."

[00:17:03] The [draft board](#)⁷³ rejected the claim, deciding that his objection was political rather than religious.

[00:17:12] And this rejection had immediate [ramifications](#)⁷⁴. He was [stripped of](#)⁷⁵ his heavyweight title and his [boxing licence](#)⁷⁶ was [suspended](#)⁷⁷. He was convicted of [draft](#)

⁷⁰ a system that forced people to join the armed forces

⁷¹ a person who refused military service because of his beliefs

⁷² disagreement or conflict

⁷³ the group that decided who had to join the military

⁷⁴ results or effects, especially serious ones

⁷⁵ had it taken away

⁷⁶ official permission to box professionally

⁷⁷ temporarily stopped

[evasion](#)⁷⁸ and [sentenced](#)⁷⁹ to five years in prison, but he was released on [bail](#)⁸⁰ while the case was [appealed](#)⁸¹.

[00:17:35] He was twenty-five years old, at the [peak](#)⁸² of his physical powers, and not only could he not box, but he had this lengthy prison sentence [hanging over his head](#)⁸³.

[00:17:49] He did not go to prison in the end. In 1971, the Supreme Court [overturned](#)⁸⁴ his conviction, [unanimously](#)⁸⁵, ruling that the draft board had not given [adequate](#)⁸⁶ reasons for rejecting his religious claim.

[00:18:05] But the three and a half years he had lost were gone.

[00:18:11] Ali did not disappear, though.

⁷⁸ avoiding required military service

⁷⁹ officially given a punishment by a court

⁸⁰ money or an agreement that allowed him to stay out of prison before trial

⁸¹ waiting for a final decision from a higher court

⁸² highest or best point

⁸³ causing worry because it could happen

⁸⁴ officially cancelled or changed

⁸⁵ with everyone in agreement

⁸⁶ good enough

[00:18:13] **Barred**⁸⁷ from boxing, he spent those years travelling across America, speaking at universities and to anyone who would listen. Many of the students he spoke to were themselves **wrestling with**⁸⁸ the draft, the Vietnam War, and the growing tensions inside American society.

[00:18:34] The underlying argument in all of these lectures was serious and entirely consistent. The United States was asking Black Americans to fight overseas for freedoms they did not have at home. The war was **unjust**⁸⁹. He would not go.

[00:18:55] As the years passed, public opinion about Vietnam shifted. By 1971, the war was deeply unpopular. Ali, who had been **denounced**⁹⁰ as a **traitor**⁹¹ in 1967, was increasingly seen as someone who had been right all along.

[00:19:14] The cost of that decision had been paid in full: three and a half years of his **prime**⁹², the loss of his title, and a criminal **conviction**⁹³.

[00:19:26] Ali was allowed to return to the ring in 1970, but he returned a different man.

⁸⁷ not allowed to do it

⁸⁸ struggling to deal with

⁸⁹ unfair

⁹⁰ publicly criticised strongly

⁹¹ a person who was seen as betraying his country

⁹² best and strongest period of his life

⁹³ an official decision that he was guilty of a crime

[00:19:34] He was older and heavier. His legs were slower. He could not move the way he once had, and he absorbed punches that the earlier version of himself would have [slipped](#)⁹⁴.

[00:19:48] He fought Joe Frazier three times, and the fights are among the most [celebrated](#)⁹⁵ in boxing history, and the most complicated.

[00:19:59] Both men were Black, both came from working-class backgrounds, and both were remarkable fighters.

[00:20:07] But the politics and the press turned them into symbols of something larger: Ali the [activist](#)⁹⁶, the Muslim, the man who had stood up to [authority](#)⁹⁷; Frazier [cast](#)⁹⁸, [somewhat unfairly](#)⁹⁹, as the [establishment](#)¹⁰⁰ choice.

[00:20:27] Ali lost the first fight, in March 1971, on points. It was his first professional defeat.

⁹⁴ avoided by moving quickly out of the way

⁹⁵ greatly admired and praised

⁹⁶ a person who worked to bring about change

⁹⁷ people or organisations with power

⁹⁸ presented or described as

⁹⁹ a little unfairly

¹⁰⁰ the people and groups that held power in society

[00:20:36] Then came the Rumble in the Jungle. October 1974, Kinshasa, Zaire, the modern-day Democratic Republic of Congo.

[00:20:47] His opponent was George Foreman: enormous and [devastating¹⁰¹](#), regarded at that point as one of the most dangerous [punchers¹⁰²](#) in the history of the sport.

Foreman had destroyed Frazier, who, remember, was the man who had given Ali his first professional defeat.

[00:21:09] The fight looked close to impossible.

[00:21:13] The strategy Ali's team had agreed on was the one he had always used: movement, speed, [jabs¹⁰³](#). In the early rounds, he tried it. But Foreman was too young, too powerful. Those jabs barely troubled him.

[00:21:33] So Ali did something nobody in his corner was expecting. He went to the [ropes¹⁰⁴](#).

[00:21:42] His trainer shouted at him between rounds to get off them. Ali ignored him. He had worked something out that he hadn't shared with anyone: if he leaned back

¹⁰¹ extremely powerful and damaging

¹⁰² boxers known for hitting very hard

¹⁰³ quick straight punches

¹⁰⁴ the ropes around a boxing ring

and let Foreman throw punches, Foreman would eventually grow tired. All Ali had to do was cover up¹⁰⁵ and wait.

[00:22:05] Round after round, Foreman threw enormous blows. Ali absorbed them and waited. By the eighth round, Foreman's arms were heavy. Ali came off the ropes and knocked him out.

[00:22:23] It was perhaps the greatest single tactical¹⁰⁶ performance in boxing history. By a man who was thirty-two years old, who had spent three and a half years outside his sport, and whose best days looked like they were behind him.

[00:22:42] The third Frazier fight, the Thrilla in Manila in October 1975, was something else entirely. Both men were so damaged by the fourteenth round that Frazier's trainer stopped the fight rather than send him out for the fifteenth. Ali later said it was the closest thing to death he had ever experienced.

[00:23:08] Now, Muhammad Ali fought on longer than he should have.

[00:23:12] He lost the title, won it back, lost it again.

[00:23:17] By his final years in the ring, the fights were increasingly hard to watch.

¹⁰⁵ protect himself by keeping his arms and gloves in front of him

¹⁰⁶ relating to a carefully planned way of doing it

[00:23:23] There was one fight in 1980, when Ali was 38, that was particularly painful. It was against a man named Larry Holmes, who had grown up in complete admiration of Ali.

[00:23:38] Although it went to the tenth round, it was so [one-sided](#)¹⁰⁷ it was almost embarrassing. Holmes reportedly wept in his dressing room afterwards, saying he felt like he had been hitting a ghost.

[00:23:54] Ali retired in 1981 with fifty-six wins and five losses.

[00:24:02] And in 1984, he was diagnosed with [Parkinson's syndrome](#)¹⁰⁸, the [neurological](#)¹⁰⁹ condition that affects movement and speech.

[00:24:13] He never publicly confirmed that it had been caused by the blows he had taken over thirty years of boxing. But many doctors believed it had.

[00:24:23] He had taken far more damage than was good for him, more than his trainers and managers should have allowed.

¹⁰⁷ strongly favouring one side

¹⁰⁸ a disease that makes movement and speaking more difficult

¹⁰⁹ relating to the brain and nerves

[00:24:31] You might have seen some interviews with him in his later years. His voice, that quick and [irreverent](#)¹¹⁰ voice, became quieter and harder to understand. His hands started to [tremble](#)¹¹¹.

[00:24:47] At the opening ceremony of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Ali was chosen to light the [cauldron](#)¹¹². He walked out with the torch, his hand trembling visibly, and there was almost a collective [intake of breath](#)¹¹³ as this great champion stood there, a [shadow](#)¹¹⁴ of the man he once was.

[00:25:10] He died on 3 June 2016, at the age of seventy-four.

[00:25:17] He had refused to fight in a war at twenty-five. He had been stripped of his title and his [livelihood](#)¹¹⁵.

[00:25:24] He had come back and produced one of the greatest [second acts](#)¹¹⁶ in sporting history. He had stood before the legal system of the most powerful country on earth and said no.

¹¹⁰ showing little respect for things people usually respect

¹¹¹ shake slightly

¹¹² a large metal container; at the Olympics, the large bowl that holds the flame

¹¹³ a sudden breath caused by surprise or emotion

¹¹⁴ a weaker version

¹¹⁵ the way he earned money to live

¹¹⁶ successful new periods after an earlier success

[00:25:38] He had chosen his own name, and made the world use it.

[00:25:43] He referred to himself as "The Greatest". There are only a few people who could say that [with a straight face¹¹⁷](#) and have much of the world agree with them.

[00:25:53] Muhammad Ali was certainly one of them.

[00:25:58] OK, then, that is it for today's episode on Muhammad Ali.

[00:26:03] I hope it's been an interesting one and that you've learnt something new.

[00:26:07] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:26:11] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

¹¹⁷ without showing any shock or facial reaction

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
In his own right	because of his own achievements, not someone else's
Slave-owning	having slaves
Anti-slavery activist	a person who worked to end slavery
Domestic worker	a person who worked in someone's home doing jobs such as cleaning or cooking
By all accounts	according to everyone who knew about it
Modest	simple and not expensive or grand
Second-class citizens	people who were treated as less important than others
Folklore	traditional stories that many people know and tell
Distraught	very upset and unhappy
Pride and joy	something he loved very much and was very proud of
Snatched	took quickly

Whup	beat in a fight
Scrawny	very thin and weak-looking
Hooked	very interested in it and wanting to keep doing it
Dedication	hard work and strong commitment
Dawn	the time when the sun started to rise
Skipped rope	jumped over a rope again and again for exercise
Sparred	practised boxing with another boxer
Unshakeable	impossible to weaken or change
On paper	according to the facts or information available
Urging	strongly encouraging
Amateur	doing the sport for enjoyment, not for money
Logistical	connected with organising and planning things
Parachute	a device that helps a person fall safely from an aircraft
Speak his mind	say exactly what he thought
Score a point	make someone else look wrong or make himself look right

Racial politics	issues and arguments connected with race and society
Qualified	having the skills or knowledge needed
Outcome	result
Overwhelming	extremely strong or great
Absorbed	received or took in
Reflexes	quick physical reactions
Knockout blow	a punch that would make him unable to continue fighting
Jab	a quick straight punch
Steady himself	make himself balanced and in control again
Unconvinced	not believing that it was the right way
Found out	shown to be weaker or worse than people thought
String to his bow	useful skill or ability
Technically gifted	very skilled at the technical parts
Outrageous	very shocking or unusual
Over-the-top	too extreme or exaggerated

Persona	the character or image he showed to others
Peroxide blonde	very light blonde hair made with chemicals
Self-confidence	belief in his own abilities
Flamboyance	a very colourful and attention-seeking style
Spelled this out	explained this clearly
Arrogant	believing you are better than other people
Template	an example that could be copied
Bookmakers	people or companies that took bets on sports
Overwhelming favourite	the person expected to win very easily
Antagonistic	unfriendly and likely to argue or cause conflict
Proclaiming	saying publicly and confidently
Retreat	move backwards
Ringside seat	a seat very close to the boxing ring
Mainstream	accepted or followed by most people
Subjected to	forced to experience

Oppression	unfair and cruel treatment by people with power
Preached	publicly taught or strongly supported the idea
Separatism	the belief that they should live separately from others
Self-sufficiency	the ability to provide what they needed without help
Prominent	important and well known
Radical	very different from what most people accepted, extreme
Self-definition	deciding and declaring who he was
Slave name	a name linked to slavery
Compliant	willing to do what others want
Insisting on	persisting, keeping on doing it
Build-up	the period before the event
Unacceptable	not allowed or not suitable
Undisputed	accepted by everyone
Military draft	a system that forced people to join the armed forces
Conscientious objector	a person who refused military service because of his beliefs

Quarrel	disagreement or conflict
Draft board	the group that decided who had to join the military
Ramifications	results or effects, especially serious ones
Stripped of	had it taken away
Boxing licence	official permission to box professionally
Suspended	temporarily stopped
Draft evasion	avoiding required military service
Sentenced	officially given a punishment by a court
Bail	money or an agreement that allowed him to stay out of prison before trial
Appealed	waiting for a final decision from a higher court
Peak	highest or best point
Hanging over his head	causing worry because it could happen
Overtaken	officially cancelled or changed
Unanimously	with everyone in agreement

Adequate	good enough
Barred	not allowed to do it
Wrestling with	struggling to deal with
Unjust	unfair
Denounced	publicly criticised strongly
Traitor	a person who was seen as betraying his country
Prime	best and strongest period of his life
Conviction	an official decision that he was guilty of a crime
Slipped	avoided by moving quickly out of the way
Celebrated	greatly admired and praised
Activist	a person who worked to bring about change
Authority	people or organisations with power
Cast	presented or described as
Somewhat unfairly	a little unfairly
Establishment	the people and groups that held power in society

Devastating	extremely powerful and damaging
Punchers	boxers known for hitting very hard
Jabs	quick straight punches
Ropes	the ropes around a boxing ring
Cover up	protect himself by keeping his arms and gloves in front of him
Tactical	relating to a carefully planned way of doing it
One-sided	strongly favouring one side
Parkinson's syndrome	a disease that makes movement and speaking more difficult
Neurological	relating to the brain and nerves
Irreverent	showing little respect for things people usually respect
Tremble	shake slightly
Cauldron	a large metal container; at the Olympics, the large bowl that holds the flame
Intake of breath	a sudden breath caused by surprise or emotion
Shadow	a weaker version

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #625
Muhammad Ali | “What’s My Name?”

- Livelihood** the way he earned money to live
- Second acts** successful new periods after an earlier success
- With a straight face** without showing any shock or facial reaction

Language spotlight

1. Speak your mind

- **Meaning:** Say exactly what you think or feel, even if other people may not agree.
- **Synonyms:** Be honest, express your opinion, say what you think
- **Antonyms:** Keep quiet, hold your tongue, keep your opinions to yourself
- **Examples:**
 - During the meeting, Sarah wasn't afraid to **speak her mind** about the problems with the project.
 - I respect people who **speak their mind** politely instead of pretending to agree.

2. Score a point

- **Meaning:** Make yourself look right or make another person look wrong during an argument or discussion.
- **Synonyms:** Gain an advantage, win an argument, make a strong point
- **Antonyms:** Lose ground, weaken your position, make a mistake

- **Examples:**

- The politician tried to **score a point** by criticising his opponent's record.
- She wasn't trying to solve the problem; she just wanted to **score a point** in the debate.

3. Another string to your bow

- **Meaning:** An additional skill, ability, or advantage that can help you succeed.
- **Synonyms:** Extra skill, additional talent, added strength
- **Antonyms:** Weakness, limitation, lack of skills
- **Examples:**
 - Learning Spanish gave him another **string to his bow** when applying for jobs.
 - Being able to code is a useful **string to your bow** in today's job market.

4. Hanging over your head

- **Meaning:** A problem or worry that is always present and causes stress because it may happen in the future.

- **Synonyms:** Worrying someone, causing anxiety, looming over someone
- **Antonyms:** Out of danger, free from worry, resolved
- **Examples:**
 - With the final exam **hanging over his head**, he found it difficult to relax.
 - She had a court case **hanging over her head** for nearly a year.

5. With a straight face

- **Meaning:** Without laughing or showing that something is funny, surprising, or unbelievable.
- **Synonyms:** Seriously, without smiling, expressionlessly
- **Antonyms:** Laughing, grinning, smiling broadly
- **Examples:**
 - He told me **with a straight face** that he could run faster than a cheetah.
 - I don't know how she managed to say that **with a straight face** without laughing.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. How did Cassius Clay first become interested in boxing?
 - a) His father was a professional boxer
 - b) He wanted to prepare for the Olympics
 - c) A police officer suggested he learn to fight after his bicycle was stolen
 - d) He watched a boxing match on television

2. Why did Clay delay becoming a professional boxer?
 - a) He wanted to finish university first
 - b) Professional boxers could not compete in the Olympics
 - c) He was recovering from an injury
 - d) His parents wanted him to get a regular job

3. What unusual condition did Clay have before flying to the 1960 Olympics?
 - a) He wanted to sit next to the pilot

- b) He refused to eat during the flight
- c) He wanted to wear boxing gloves
- d) He insisted on wearing a parachute

4. What lesson did Clay learn from Gorgeous George?

- a) How to improve his boxing technique
- b) How to attract attention and build a public image
- c) How to become a wrestling champion
- d) How to train more effectively

5. Why did Muhammad Ali refuse to serve in the US military?

- a) His religious beliefs prevented him from fighting people he had no quarrel with
- b) He had a serious injury
- c) He was too old to be drafted
- d) He had already completed military service

True or False

6. Cassius Clay won a gold medal at the 1960 Olympic Games. (True / False)
7. Most boxing commentators believed Clay's unusual fighting style would never cause him any problems. (True / False)
8. Muhammad Ali immediately became widely accepted after changing his name. (True / False)
9. The Supreme Court eventually overturned Ali's conviction for draft evasion. (True / False)
10. Ali defeated Joe Frazier in all three of their fights. (True / False)

Fill in the Blank

11. Now, this original Cassius Marcellus Clay was an interesting character in his own _____;
12. It was, by all _____, an ordinary childhood: church on Sundays, a modest house, and parents who worked hard to provide for their children.
13. They were constantly reminded that they were second-_____ citizens.
14. When he returned, he found the bike was gone. Someone had stolen it. He was distraught; it was his _____ and joy.

15. He had become incredibly famous for creating an outrageous, ____-the-top persona.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does "**distraught**" mean?

- a) Very upset and worried
- b) Very excited and energetic
- c) Calm and relaxed
- d) Proud and confident

17. What does "**unshakeable**" mean?

- a) Easy to change
- b) Impossible to move or weaken
- c) Very nervous
- d) Difficult to understand

18. What does "**overwhelming favourite**" mean?

- a) A competitor who is expected to lose
- b) A competitor who is new to the sport
- c) A competitor who is strongly expected to win
- d) A competitor who has many fans

19. What does "**conscientious objector**" mean?

- a) A soldier who volunteers for military service
- b) A person who refuses military service because of their beliefs
- c) A military officer who trains recruits
- d) A person who supports all wars

20. What does "**livelihood**" mean?

- a) A person's reputation
- b) A person's health
- c) A person's way of earning money to live

d) A person's family history

Answers

1. c) A police officer suggested he learn to fight after his bicycle was stolen
2. b) Professional boxers could not compete in the Olympics
3. d) He insisted on wearing a parachute
4. b) How to attract attention and build a public image
5. a) His religious beliefs prevented him from fighting people he had no quarrel with
6. True
7. False
8. False
9. True
10. False
11. right
12. accounts
13. class
14. pride
15. over
16. a) Very upset and worried
17. b) Impossible to move or weaken
18. c) A competitor who is strongly expected to win
19. b) A person who refuses military service because of their beliefs
20. c) A person's way of earning money to live