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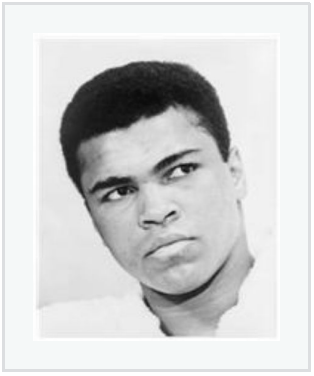
Famous African Americans – Muhammad Ali: The Greatest

By ReadWorks



In 1942, Cassius Clay, Jr., was born in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1960, during the Summer Olympics, Clay won a gold medal in boxing. Four years later, in 1964, he won his first world heavyweight boxing title. The same year, he changed his name to Muhammad Ali. He later converted to Islam.

Muhammad Ali was the greatest boxer of his time—and he knew it. In fact, he called himself "The Greatest." By the time he retired in 1981, he had a career record of 56 wins, five losses, and 37 knockouts.

In 1984, Muhammad Ali found out that he had Parkinson's disease. It is a disease that affects the brain. The disease made it difficult for him to speak or use his body. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, he put these difficulties aside. Ali addressed the United States. He talked about his faith. He urged America not to look down on Muslim people because of the attacks. He thought it was important to speak out. Many people admired his courage. In 2005, Ali was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his role in working for equality and civil rights.

In 2016, Muhammad Ali died at the age of 74. He was known not just for his faith and his boxing. His courage, his way of speaking, and his desire to help others also made him famous.

SummerReads: Swimming – Different Swimming Strokes

By Andrew Funk

This text is provided courtesy of Elfrieda H. Hiebert and TextProject.

A young swimmer practices the dog paddle in a pool near San Diego, California, April 2010.

Whether they are young or old, new swimmers usually start out with the same swimming stroke that dogs use when they swim. This stroke is called the dog paddle. It's easy to learn to dog paddle but dog paddling isn't very fast.

Most swimmers learn the breaststroke next. The breaststroke begins by lying in the water with your front side down. You move both arms in a circle. You raise your head out of the water to breathe once during each stroke. You also need to kick your legs in a circular motion like a frog's kick. The fastest swimmers use a stroke called the front crawl. To do this stroke, you lie face down in the water. You move your arms like a windmill. At the same time, you move your legs up and down like scissors. Since your face is in the water, you have to turn you head to the side every two or three strokes to breathe.

There are other swimming strokes. An example of another stroke is the backstroke or back crawl. As you can tell from the name, this stroke is like the front crawl except that you lie on your back. A good thing about a backstroke is that your face is out of the water. That means that breathing is not a problem. But there's another problem. You can't see where you are going! Choose your strokes with care!

SummerReads: Swimming – Swimwear

By Andrew Funk

A young girl wears goggles while learning the backstroke near Tai Po, Hong Kong, May 2006.

The clothes worn by swimmers have changed a great deal over time. About 200 years ago, women wore dresses made of wool to swim. Wool absorbs water. That meant that the dresses got heavy in the water, making it hard for women to swim and not sink.

Today, a swimming suit is made to fit the body snugly. A snug fit allows a swimmer to glide through the water. The suit is made of cloth that does not absorb water. Because the suit doesn't absorb water, the swimmer is carrying less weight and can move faster.

Another big change in swimwear is the wetsuit. A wetsuit covers almost the entire body with a close-fitting layer of special rubber. The rubber has very small bubbles of gas that make the suit lighter and better at keeping the body warm. A thin layer of water gets trapped between a person's skin and the inside of the suit. The body warms this small amount of water. Since the water can't get out, it helps to keep the body warm. A wetsuit makes it possible to swim and surf even in places where the water is cold. Goggles are another addition to swimwear. Salt from ocean water or chemicals in swimming pools can hurt your eyes. By wearing goggles, swimmers can keep the salt and chemicals out of their eyes. Swimmers who want to keep salt and chemicals away from their noses can wear masks.

SummerReads: Swimming – Swimming Underwater

By Andrew Funk

Taken by Dr. Louis M. Herman. Released into the public domain by NOAA.

Humpback whales (Megaptera novaeangliae) near Maui, Hawaii.

Humans can swim under water but only for short periods of time. After about two minutes, a human needs to return to the surface to get oxygen from the air.

There are animals that, like humans, use lungs for breathing. Some of these animals are much better underwater swimmers than humans. Whales can stay underwater for up to two hours without coming to the surface for air. Birds also have lungs and many can stay underwater much longer than humans.

The best underwater swimmers are fish. Unlike humans, most fish breathe through gills that allow them to get oxygen from the water. Since they do not have to come to the surface, fish are excellent swimmers. Some fish can reach speeds of more than 40 miles per hour.

Almost all animals are born with either gills or lungs and have one or the other for their entire lives. But some animals are born with gills and then switch to lungs later in life. This means that they live in water for the first part of life and, later, breathe air and live on land. Frogs are an example of such animals. Frogs start out as eggs in the water. When the eggs hatch, tadpoles that breathe with gills come out. Later, tadpoles become frogs and the gills are gone. Frogs use lungs for breathing. Tadpoles can stay underwater but frogs can't. Frogs need to come to the water's surface to breathe.

SummerReads: Bikes & Boards – Bicycles

By Andrew Funk

Riders demonstrate old-style bicycles at Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, August 2007.

The first bicycles did not look like the bicycles of today. Their frames and wheel rims were made of wood or solid metal that made them heavy and hard to ride. One of the early bicycles had a very big wheel in front and a very small wheel in back. People in England named it the penny-farthing because it reminded them of two English coins. The penny was a big coin and the farthing a tiny coin.

The pedals on a penny-farthing were joined to the hub of the big front wheel. That meant that the rider had to sit almost on top of the front wheel to reach the pedals. A bump on the road could send a rider flying over the front of the bicycle. Many riders got hurt and even died. These bicycles were just for adults, usually men.

A little over 100 years ago, three inventions led to bicycles like those of today. First, the use of chains and gears meant that pedals could be joined to the frame rather than to the wheel. Wheels could now be the same size and riders could be seated lower and further back on the bicycle.

The second invention was a way of treating rubber. This made it possible to have air-filled rubber tires. Air-filled rubber tires made a smooth ride, unlike that on wooden or metal tires.

Third, the invention of hollow, metal frames meant that bicycles were no longer as heavy. These changes made bicycles safer and easier to ride. Now bicycles could be for everyone—men, women and children.

SummerReads: Bikes & Boards – Catch a Wave

By Andrew Funk

Father and son surf lesson at Morro Bay, California, December 2007.

Almost 250 years ago, the first Europeans who visited islands in the Pacific Ocean saw local islanders riding on waves. The riders started from shore with a wooden board. They used the board to paddle out into the ocean. When they got past the point where the waves were breaking, they turned and faced the shore. Then, they lay on the board and paddled toward shore. When a wave broke, they stopped paddling and let the board move with the wave. At this point, some riders got to their feet and stood for the rest of the ride. When the wave died away, the board stopped moving. Riders would then turn their boards, paddle back out into the ocean, and begin all over again. Because this action took place in the ocean surf, the activity became known as surfing.

People know about surfing around the world but that doesn't mean that people can surf everywhere. The waves have to be the right size. The breaking wave has to be big enough to support a surfer on a board. The wave also has to be long enough so that the surfer can ride it for some distance. Big, long waves are rare in the freshwater of most lakes. That means that almost all surfing happens in the saltwater of oceans.

The best waves for surfing also depend on the slope and shape of the ocean floor next to the beach and on wind patterns. In the United States, the best surfing places are in Hawaii, California, and Florida.

SummerReads: Bikes & Boards – Sidewalk Surfing

By Andrew Funk

Photo: A skateboard competitor performs a jump at the Sprite Urban Games in London, England, July 2006.

No one knows exactly who had the idea of putting wheels on a board and going for a ride on it. It is known that it was surfers who first rode skateboards. They called it "sidewalk surfing."

Skateboarding became popular in the 1970s. During that time, California had a serious lack of water. Many people took the water out of their swimming pools. The dry pools were deep enough so that skateboarders could do aerial tricks in them. But the steep, straight walls of the pools led to many injuries.

Skateboarders began hearing about huge water pipes that were not in use. The curved sides of the pipes made it possible to still perform aerial tricks but did not lead to as many injuries. People began to build similar shapes out of wood and called them half-pipes.

Early skateboards were flat and thick like small surfboards. They had wheels made of clay or rubber that did not grip the riding surface well. Once clay and rubber were replaced with plastic wheels, skating became very popular. Skateboards are still usually made of wood. But now the nose and tail of skateboards have small rises. By stepping quickly on one or other of the rises, a skater can control the board during jumps and tricks.

One reason for the popularity of skateboarding is that many different tricks can be performed with a skateboard. The most basic trick is called the "ollie," named after Alan "Ollie" Gelfland who first performed it. The skater kicks down on the tail of the board and jumps up at the same time. It looks like the board is flying in the air.