



Pupil Sermon for Black History Month

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Do you remember where you were at 8pm on the 11th of July 2021. Many of you will, understandably be confused as to what this date represents, but to add a bit more context, this is when the final of the rearranged 2020 European football Championship between England and Italy took place.

Whether you like football or not, this day captured the interest and emotions of a nation, as the most promising English football side in years brought their country to the brink of sporting glory, for the first time since 1966.

Euphoria gripped the country as England took a lead within 2 minutes, but Italy bounced back 20 minutes into the second half to level the game. What felt like hours of end-to-end play culminated in a penalty shootout to decide the European champions, and after 9 penalties, a 19-year-old Bukayo Saka stepped up to keep his country in the final.

He shot right, the Italian keeper dived the same way and with one kick of the football, a collective English failure was pinned onto one teenager, and his praises throughout the tournament were substituted for horrific racial abuse.

“By telling our own stories, we honour the past, redefine the present, and shape the future, ensuring our voices are centred and celebrated.”

“Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.”

“I’m so fast that I can turn off the light and be in bed before the room gets dark.”

“I am the greatest.”

These aren’t just words—they’re Muhammad Ali in his purest form. Bold. Unstoppable. Confident. Ali wasn’t just a boxer; he was a force of nature. He had a presence that lit up every room, an aura that pulled people in. When Ali spoke, you listened—whether you loved him or hated him. He didn’t just win in the ring, he won hearts, minds, and attention.

But behind the quick wit and the faster fists was a man who fought battles far more important than any match.

When Ali was born Cassius Clay, that wasn’t his choice. It was a name inherited from generations of slavery, a reminder of his family’s painful past. But in 1964, after becoming the heavyweight champion of the world, Ali made a bold and deeply personal decision: he changed his name to Muhammad Ali. In that moment, he wasn’t just changing his name. He was stating to the entire world, “I define who I am, not the history forced upon me.”

Then, in 1967, when Ali was called to serve in the Vietnam War, he refused. Ali explained that his conscience wouldn’t allow him to fight in a war that conflicted with his beliefs. He questioned why he should go and fight abroad when, at home,

his own people were still struggling for equality and justice. Ali stood alone in that decision. The boxing world turned its back on him. The government took away his title, his ability to fight, and almost his freedom. He was willing to lose it all. Why? Because, to him, speaking his truth and standing for justice mattered more than fame or fortune.

I would like you all to close your eyes for a second whilst I give you a scenario. Imagine you're walking into a house for the first time, parents either side of you guiding you to the entrance of your house where you'll be warmly welcomed by the staff and other pupils. Now let's change this scene. You're walking to your house, but instead of parents, there's police either side of you, escorting you inside for your own safety, whilst you have parents and pupils around you, giving you dirty looks and hurling insults and profanities in your direction.

You've just imagined what Ruby Bridges experienced in September 1957 as the first black student to enrol to a formerly white only school due to the Supreme Court ruling, three years earlier, which abolished segregation of public schools. The people only saw her as black instead of a little girl who just wanted a fair education. Because they were blinded by their own ignorant and uneducated narratives, they failed to recognise that Ruby Bridges was simply a young girl who deserved an equal chance at education. By reclaiming our stories and reshaping these narratives, we honour the strength of those like Ruby who bravely stood for justice and equality with an act as simple as just going to school.

The theme of this year's Black History Month is 'reclaiming narratives,' and the stories we've used this morning prove how false narratives, and revisions of history have been affecting the black experience for decades.

'Reclaiming narratives' encourages us to take control of our stories and ensure that black voices are heard and valued. It's a call to reclaim and celebrate our heritage, challenge stereotypes, and acknowledge the diverse contributions that have shaped our shared history.

Ali taught us that you don't have to be a politician or a civil rights leader to make a difference. You can be anyone—a boxer, a student, a teacher—and still have the power to change the world by standing firm in your beliefs, even when society is pushing its own false narrative onto you.

Muhammad Ali was a fighter, yes. But his greatest fight wasn't for glory or money—it was for freedom. It was for justice. It was for all of us.

To have a narrative imposed on you simply because of characteristics you can't control can feel suffocating. Our duty now is to take control of these narratives and be representatives of our own stories, our own experiences, and our own truths. By reclaiming our narratives, we shift the lens from imposed stereotypes to one of empowerment and authenticity. By telling our own stories, we honour the past, redefine the present, and shape the future, ensuring our voices are centred and celebrated.

Thank you in advance for your participation and enthusiasm in making Black History Month a meaningful experience for all.