

ME and MUHAMMAD ALI

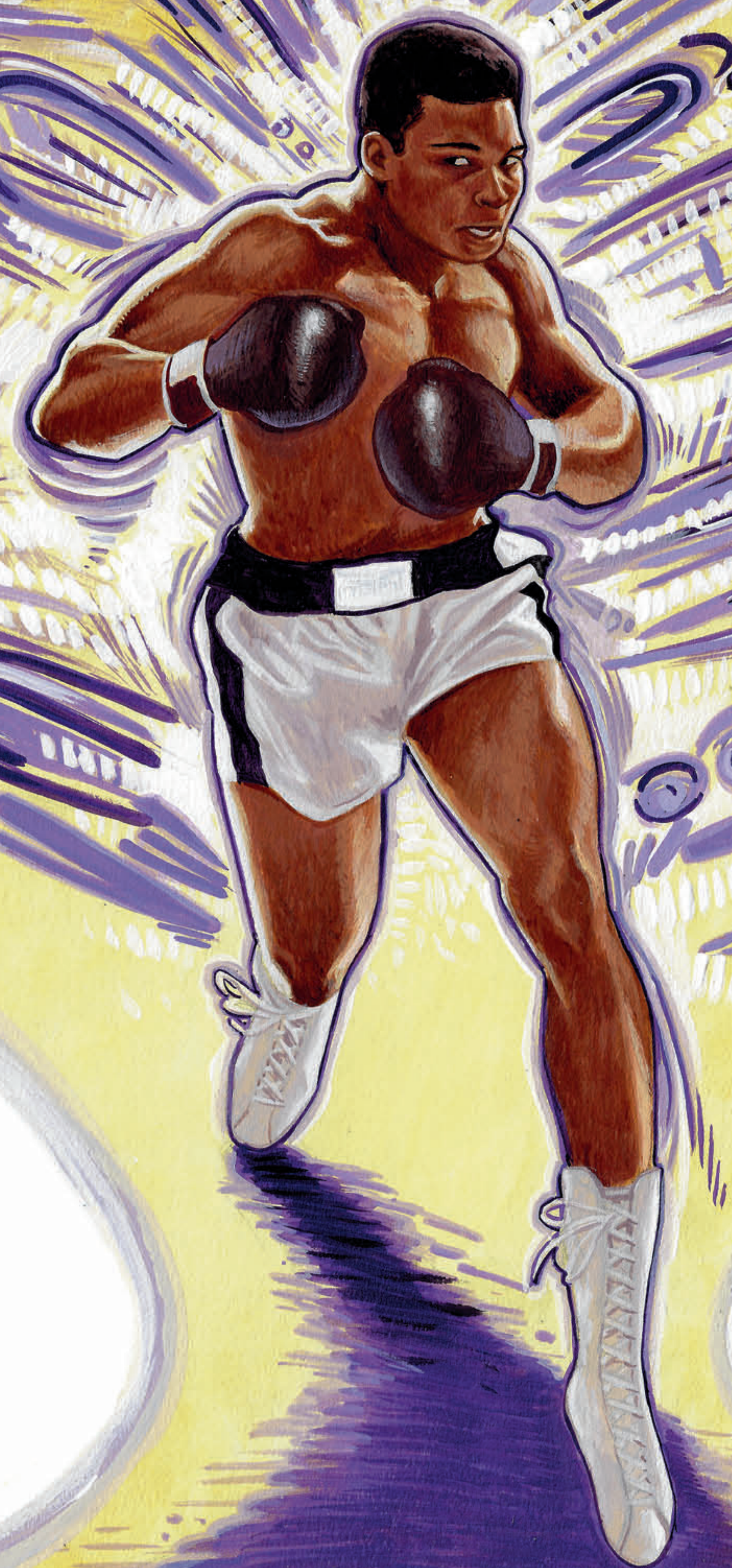


JABARI ASIM *illustrated by* **AG FORD**

Langston noticed something different in his neighborhood—a new flyer announcing that the great boxing champion Muhammad Ali was coming to town!



Like most folks, Langston looked up to the champ because of his strength, speed, and confidence. But Langston loved him just as much for his poetry. He was thrilled when Ali promised to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee.



At recess, the kids were inspired to make up their own rhymes as they gathered on the playground. Langston called up all the confidence he had and belted out his rhyme:



On the wall was a picture of Mr. Sutton receiving a gold medal. He stood on a box with a garland of leaves around his head, near portraits of Jersey Joe Walcott, Henry Armstrong, and other champions Mr. Sutton had known and admired.

"Ali combines the best of all of them," Mr. Sutton told Langston. "I was there when he took the crown from Sonny Liston in '64. Fastest hands I've ever seen." Everyone laughed as Mr. Sutton and Langston pretended to trade punches.





Langston felt joyous and proud,
like Ali strutting in the ring.

The next morning, Langston could still feel the champ's energy wrapping him in its warm glow. His hero's face beamed at him as he walked by the Wall of Respect.

He was already thinking of recess, when he would tell everyone about meeting the champ. Then he would chant some rhymes loud enough for the whole playground to hear.

*I'm quick and I'm strong.
I'm Black and I'm free.
I'm brave and I'm bold,
like **MUHAMMAD ALI!***

