

## Teaming Up with Muhammad and Lonnie Ali

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In an effort to empower students to become accomplished readers, boxing legend Muhammad Ali and his wife Lonnie have partnered with Scholastic Education in a program called Go the Distance. The Alis' goal is to provide engaging books to children who, often because of social issues beyond their control, struggle with reading and school, and feel that both have no relevancy in their lives.

The program, which launched earlier this month, entails three collections of multicultural fiction and nonfiction books aimed at students in grades 3–4, 5–6 and 7–8. Each collection also includes supplementary resources for teachers, including a CD with printable lesson plans, a guide to help tailor reading instruction to each student, book notes and a poster.



*Lonnie Ali visits PS 149 in New York City to talk about the Go the Distance program.*

Scholastic Education set out to build this library collection around what it terms "Ali's core values," among them building confidence, showing determination, finding mentors and offering and earning respect. In Lonnie Ali's words, "We're so pleased to join with Scholastic to bring Muhammad's legacy into the classroom to teach students about respect, hope and understanding, and to encourage these kids to be the very best that they can be." She traveled to Orlando last week to help the publisher introduce the new reading program at the National Association of Black School Educators conference.

According to Greg Worrell, senior v-p of Scholastic Education, the program also grew out of concerns that have developed in schools since the establishment of No Child Left Behind. "Our observation working with schools," Worrell says, "is that the notion of motivation has received less attention recently. We know that national data shows a significant gap in the reading proficiency of adolescent African-American males compared to other students. We've taken the ethic that Muhammad Ali represents and imbedded those ideas in a reading program that supports all children, but particularly focuses on relevant, engaging books that will motivate and empower boys."

The collections consist primarily of Scholastic frontlist and backlist books, though Worrell says that they will on occasion incorporate titles from other publishers. The supporting material aimed at teachers was created by in-house editors, as well as by two educators and authors: Dr. Jeffrey Wilhelm of Boise State University and Dr. Alfred Tatum of Northern Illinois University. Emphasizing the importance of Go the Distance's tools for teachers, Worrell notes, "This is much more than a box of books. This is a comprehensive instructional program that brings those books to life."