

## FROM ATHLETE TO ARTIST

Students will read about Micah Johnson, who traded his baseball bat for a paintbrush after a career in Major League Baseball. Students will then create an art project merging their past with their imagined future.



## Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.1

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RI.7

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

## Materials

Class set of "From Athlete to Artist"; access to Kahoot! quiz; TIME "Into the Metaverse" cover; color copier or scanner, digital drawing program or art supplies

## INTRODUCTION

Show students the TIME cover illustrated by Micah Johnson at [ti.me/Micahcover](https://ti.me/Micahcover). Have them analyze it and discuss what they see. Point out the text “the next digital era will change everything,” and ask students to talk with a partner about what this means, and how digital technology is affecting people. Then tell students that they’ll be reading about how the creator of this cover pivoted from professional sports to the world of art. Before reading, you can use the Kahoot! quiz at [ti.me/NFTKahoot](https://ti.me/NFTKahoot) to introduce the topic of NFT art.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why did Micah Johnson start painting?
- Who is Aku?
- What advice does Johnson have for kids?
- What do you think about digital art? How might it impact artists?

## CLOSING

Ask students to bring in a picture of themselves. Make copies of these photos. Then provide students with supplies for making art in different media. Have them paint or draw on the copy of their photo to show themselves living in a future of their dreams. For example, they can depict themselves dressed for a future career, or in a place where they want to live. Or you can scan the photos onto the computer and have students use a program such as Google Drawings to create their art.



# FROM ATHLETE TO ARTIST

**Micah Johnson used to play professional baseball.  
Then he traded his baseball bat for a paintbrush.**

My name is Micah Johnson. I'm from Indianapolis, Indiana. For 24 years, I played baseball every day. I reached the highest of levels of the sport, playing for major-league teams. Once I got there, I was like, "Okay, I did it." I don't care if it takes 100 years: If it's something that somebody says I can't do, I'm going to try everything I can to do it. And when I do it, I think, "Okay, what's the next thing I'm going to do?"

I started painting in 2016, when I was with the Los Angeles Dodgers. You come home from a game and you're all amped up. You're not just going to bed. So that's when I would paint. And then I would take canvases on the road. I was just so obsessed with painting that I couldn't put it down.

In 2018, my time was done in Major League Baseball. I'd fallen in love with art and creativity. I tapped into that. So I figured it was time to give that a shot. I started painting young Black kids as astronauts after I heard a young Black kid ask if astronauts could be Black. Painting these pictures was incredibly **fulfilling**. I knew this was something special.

## REACH FOR THE STARS

I wanted to reach a broader audience with my message. So I created this 3D character named Aku. He's a Black character who's very brave and very confident. He wears an oversize vintage space helmet. The helmet allows him to travel

through these digital realms. Last year, Aku was on the cover of TIME. Later, I made him into an NFT.

NFTs are unique, digital artworks that are bought and sold online. With NFTs, there are no **gatekeepers**. I can upload something and people can buy it and have ownership of it. Let's say you own an Aku. You can sell it, you can trade it, you can take it across platforms in the future.

I traded my baseball bat for a paintbrush and found my passion. Kids can find a path that's meaningful to them by showing up every day, exploring, and then just going

deeper into the things they care about.

In 2021, an NFT of Aku orbited Earth on board the International Space Station. That's something you can't even dream of! If you just keep working toward something that you're passionate about, opportunities are going to present themselves that you can't even imagine.

—By Micah Johnson,  
as told to TIME for Kids

### Power Words

**fulfilling** *adjective*: providing happiness or satisfaction

**gatekeeper** *noun*: a person who controls access to something



**your job**  
— FIND YOUR FUTURE —

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**MUSICIAN  
PHOTOGRAPHER  
WRITER**

THIS TEXT HAS BEEN EDITED FOR LENGTH AND CLARITY.



**ARTIST'S WAY** Artist Micah Johnson poses with a statue of Aku in New York City.

COURTESY MICAH JOHNSON