

### **AoW 6 Directions:**

1. Annotate (write your thoughts, questions, etc.) the text (10 points)
2. Identify (circle, underline, highlight, etc.) key words in 1-4. (10 points each question)
3. Circle the BEST answers for 1-4. (10 points each question)
4. Write a well-written paragraph summary of this text. Your summary must be 5-7 sentences. (10 points)

## **Once a Top NFL Draft Pick, He Trades Helmet and Cleats for Brush and Canvas**

By Baltimore Sun, adapted by Newsela staff  
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Artist Aaron Maybin paints at his home studio in Baltimore, Maryland. He was a first-round NFL draft pick but stopped playing pro football after four years in the league. Photo: Barbara Haddock Taylor/Baltimore Sun/TNS

Aaron Maybin was a National Football League (NFL) player for

four years. Then, he put down the ball, picked up a paintbrush, and went to work in his art studio in Baltimore, Maryland.

Maybin, 27, had just been released by the Cincinnati Bengals, his third NFL team, and was heading for a series of tryouts with new coaches. It was the summer of 2013, and four years since he had been the NFL's 11th overall draft pick out of Pennsylvania State University.

The NFL draft is an annual event in which NFL teams select new players. It is an opportunity for teams to choose college players considered to be the most talented in the world.

### **Goals Turned To Family, Artwork**

Maybin was set to fly to Indianapolis, Indiana, to begin the tryouts, but at the last minute he changed his mind and chose to pursue his other talent, art, instead. "I couldn't even bring myself to pack my bags," he says.

The athlete-turned-artist says that the things he considered important had changed and his goals were no longer just about professional football. He says: "Being a father, being a provider for my family on a more hands-on basis, the community work I'm doing, the artwork and the messages I wanted to get out. I didn't want to be in a position where I always had to bend to what other people, society or people I was contractually obligated to, thought was OK."

Maybin tells his story while he sits on the arm of a leather couch in the studio of his house. His paintings are on the walls around him, and show images of people who taught, mentored and nurtured him, his inspirations, racial struggles, love, hope and disappointment.

Splashes of dry paint spatter the floor, and incense fills the air. There are 80-pound barbells on the floor, and a movie plays in the background with no sound. On the floor are jumbo boxes of diapers for his new baby, Aria, one of Maybin's three children.

### **"He's Free," Art Mentor Says**

"He's free," says longtime Baltimore artist Larry "Poncho" Brown, who has mentored Maybin since he was in grade school.

Maybin looks back on his short NFL career without regret, despite the fact that there are dozens of articles that describe him as one of the great busts in recent draft history. "It's quite possible that Maybin is the worst player in the NFL," read one newspaper article.

Maybin sees things another way, and since he earned \$14 million playing football and retired without injury, he can now chase his kids without pain, and do his favorite kind of work. "As far as I'm concerned, I'm really living the true American dream," he says. The artist wants people, especially young African-Americans, to know that the NFL fantasy is not exactly what it seems.

He grew up in Baltimore, where his father, Mike, was a longtime official with the city fire department. From an early age, Maybin expressed himself through art more easily than through words. He believes he inherited his artistic talent partially from his mother, Constance, who died in childbirth when Maybin was just 6 years old. "I was at a pivotal moment. A lot of people would use losing your mother like that as an excuse," Maybin says.

### **Stepmother Understood, Guided Him**

Less than two years later, his father remarried, and Maybin's stepmother, Violette Grant, proved to be the person who understood best the way he used art to process his emotions. Maybin had struggled to read as a young child, but he remembers how she patiently sat with him as they worked their way through a "Lion King" book. Something clicked, and he suddenly transformed into a willing reader.

Maybin also sang in the choir, played the saxophone and acted in school plays. He says these things did not exactly throw him in with the cool kids. "Art is not the typical passion for an African-American kid growing up in Baltimore, especially not for a boy. I was an awkward, outcast, goofy kid," he says.

The artist notes that as he grew and his superior athletic ability became apparent, his artistic activities suddenly became popular with the same people who had ridiculed him. The unfairness and hypocrisy of this still bothers him.

### **He Seeks Opportunities For Kids**

Maybin believes that young people are categorized too early and thus limit their horizons, a problem that he ponders when he thinks about his 2-year-old son, Arian. Maybin says: "He's kind of told what he's going to be by everybody else. He's big, so it's 'Oh, he's going to play sports. You're going to be a football player and go to the NFL.' People tell my son that all the time, and I clap back at them like nah, he's going to do whatever he wants to do."

Maybin puts his beliefs into practice with Project Mayhem, a non-profit organization titled after his nickname "Mayhem" from his football-playing days. He started the group to provide creative opportunities for students at Baltimore schools where arts programs have been cut. He wants art to serve as a form of therapy for kids as they cope with hard times.

From the time he was a young man, Maybin told people he would be an NFL player and then be a professional artist, and he has been true to his word.

- 1. The CENTRAL idea of the article is developed by:**
  - A. comparing Maybin's childhood hobbies with the career he chose as an adult
  - B. presenting the problems that Maybin faced as a child and the way that he solved them
  - C. describing how Maybin became an artist and why he chose that as his second career
  - D. telling readers about Maybin's family and the concerns he has for the limits it may put on his son
  
- 2. Which of these sentences would be MOST important to include in an objective summary of the article?**
  - a. Maybin's father was a city official with the Baltimore Fire Department.
  - b. Maybin keeps paintings of people who inspire him hanging in his studio.
  - c. Maybin played the saxophone, acted in school plays, and sang in the choir.
  - d. Maybin's stepmother best understood the way that he used art to express himself.

