

Landmarks Guide for Adolescents



Michael Ray Charles

American, born 1967

(Forever Free) Ideas, Languages and Conversations

2015

Wooden crutches, steel armatures,
and steel cables

Subject: Poetry and sculpture

Activity: Write a poem inspired by
(Forever Free) Ideas, Languages and Conversations

Materials: Index cards, pencil or pen

Vocabulary: Diversity, culture, poetry

Introduction

This building houses institutions such as the African and African Diaspora Studies Department, the Center for Mexican American Studies, and the Center for Urban Policy Research and Analysis. The artist, Michael Ray Charles, created *(Forever Free) Ideas, Languages and Conversations* to address the struggles endured by minority cultures. He uses crutches to symbolize support, healing, and mobility. They represent the coming together of many parts to celebrate diversity and multiculturalism.

Questions

How would you describe this sculpture to a person who has never seen it?

Why do you think the artist chose to use crutches?

Have you ever felt like you didn't belong or that you were different from the crowd?

What can you do to make people feel included?

Activity

Take 5–10 minutes to think about the sculpture and the students who use this building. What are three words or phrases that come to mind? Write each one down on an index card and place the cards on the ground. Look at what others wrote and pick up three cards that you find inspiring. Write a short poem using your friend's words or phrases. Remember, poems don't have to rhyme!

You can do this exercise alone by using your own index cards for inspiration!

Michael Ray Charles, continued



Look Again

The title of this sculpture is *(Forever Free) Ideas, Languages and Conversations*. Each crutch represents an idea or a letter. When they come together, just in a poem, they form a language and a conversation. Why do you think the artist gave his sculpture this title?



Vocabulary

Diversity - The state of having people of different races or ethnicities in a group

Culture - A group of people that has shared beliefs, customs, and ways of living

Poetry - A type of writing in which special care is given to expressing feelings and ideas