Ray Charles

Pre-reading

Questions:
- What do you know about Ray Charles?

Definitions:
- Grammy award – the recording industry’s most prestigious music award
- Gig – jobs in the entertainment business
- Platinum selling album – an album that has sold one million copies

Reading

Ray Charles is a music legend. People all over the world know his name and his music. He was an accomplished singer, composer, pianist, and entertainer. He won twelve Grammy awards and was inducted into nine different halls of fame. The musical genius, as he was often called, played over ten thousand concerts in his lifetime.

Ray Charles had a unique style and sound. He blended many types of music into one new, smooth sound - soul music. He combined rhythm and blues with jazz, gospel, and country western. Ray Charles is referred to by many as the “Father of Soul”.

Ray Charles Robinson was born on September 23, 1930. His family was very poor. They lived in Georgia for a short time before moving to Florida. At the age of five he began to go blind from glaucoma. At the age of seven, his right eye was removed. He was totally blind before his eighth birthday.

Ray was a student at St. Augustine School for the Deaf and Blind. While at this school he learned to read and write music in Braille. He also learned how to play many instruments.

When Ray was fifteen, his mother died. He was orphaned and on his own. He quit school and decided to begin his music career. He shortened his name, and became Ray Charles. Ray traveled around Florida trying to get gigs. He was not very successful. He often went without food because he had so little money.

Life was tough for the struggling musician.

Ray chose to leave Florida and travel as far away from home has he could. In 1947 he moved to Seattle, Washington. The move to this new city was a major turning point for him. Folks who attended clubs where he performed liked what they heard. He became a celebrity and soon headed to Los Angeles for his first professional recording.

Despite his many successes, Ray had his share of struggles. In 1965 Ray was arrested for possession of heroin. It was this third and final arrest that forced him to quit doing drugs. He had been an addict for over fifteen years. He also had two failed marriages and many failed relationships. He was the father of twelve children by seven different women.

Ray was recording a new collection of duets when he died of acute liver disease in June of 2004. He was 73 year old. After his death, the recording of duets was released. It became a huge success, and was his first platinum selling album in over fifty years of recording.

Level 6.0
Understanding

1. What does the word unique mean? ____________________________________________________

2. Why was Ray Charles considered to be a “struggling musician” in his early career? __________

3. Why do you think Ray Charles was called a musical genius? ________________

4. When did Ray’s music career really explode? _______ ____________________________________

5. What type of music is Ray Charles best known for? How would you define it? ____________

6. Why could the end of his career be described as a great irony? __________________________

7. What does the word celebrity mean?______________________________________________

Writing

Option A: Summarize this reading in your own words.

Option B: Write about a musician you enjoy or admire.

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