

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



Photo courtesy of Florida Archives

Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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.
