

Post-visit Project 1: AIDS Awareness

Objective:

To further explore HIV/AIDS awareness and AIDS education

In 1987 Keith Haring wrote in his journal:

“I am quite aware of the chance that I have or will have AIDS. The odds are very great and, in fact, the symptoms already exist. My friends are dropping like flies and I know in my heart it is only *divine intervention* that has kept me alive this long. I don’t know if I have five months or five years, but I know my days are numbered. This is why my activities and projects are so important now. *To do as much as possible as quickly as possible.* I’m sure that what will live on after I die is important enough to make sacrifices of my personal luxury and leisure time now. *Work is all I have and art is more important than life.*”

-Keith Haring, journal entry, March 20, 1987

When Keith Haring learned that he was HIV-positive, rather than give in to his illness, he increased his schedule of paintings and public projects in the United States and abroad. He used his art to express his own struggle with AIDS, and to contribute to AIDS activism. He created posters, stickers, and public service messages for gay community groups, including Ignorance = Fear/Silence = Death for ACT UP, and a mural with the words “Together We Can Stop AIDS”.

“AIDS has changed everything. AIDS has made it even harder for people to accept, because homosexuality has been made to be synonymous with death. It’s a justifiable fright with people that are just totally uninformed and therefore ignorant. That’s why it is so important for people to know what AIDS is and what it isn’t.”

-Keith Haring, David Sheff, *Just Say Know* (see Bibliography)

Suggested Discussion with Students:

Read Keith Haring’s statements with your students.

How did you feel when you first learned about HIV/AIDS?

Have your attitudes about AIDS changed since you first heard of the disease?

In what ways?

How did Keith Haring feel about the possibility of having AIDS?

What was Keith Haring’s attitude toward AIDS?

What was most important to him?

When you think of someone who is HIV-positive or who has AIDS, what face do you see?

Where do you see images about AIDS? What kinds of images?

Has the media (television, movies, newspapers, magazines, subway ads) affected your attitude toward AIDS? How?

Write down five myths and five facts about AIDS.

Suggested Project:

Ask your students to divide into groups of 4-6

Ask students to collaborate on making AIDS-awareness posters, incorporating their personal concerns as well as public concerns about AIDS.

Who would you want to see your posters?

Where would you put them?

Supplies: Large pieces of paper, markers, ink, or paint

Discussion questions and project adapted from Simon Leung, "AIDS and Its Representation", in Susan Cahan & Zoya Kocur, Editors, *Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education*, New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art/Routledge, 1996, pp. 282-306