

Who was Chuck Baird?

Name _____

Class · period _____

Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Chuck Baird (1947–2012) won a national art award at 13 and spent his life painting. He joined other Deaf artists to create De’VIA, a label for art that shows Deaf life in a hearing world, and worked for years as a set designer and actor with the National Theatre of the Deaf.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Kansas City, a teacher who entered his painting, and a degree in studio painting

01 CHILDHOOD AND FIRST AWARDS

- 01 Baird was born Deaf in Kansas City, Missouri to a mother who was an antiques dealer and a jack-of-all-trades father.

He was the youngest of five children, and attended the Kansas City School for the Deaf from 1951 to 1967.

- 02 During his time at the Kansas City School for the Deaf, Chuck had an exceptional art teacher who entered one of his oil paintings into the *Scholastic Magazine Art Contest* at age 13. The piece went on to win the national award.

- 03 Chuck continued to win art awards beyond oil painting throughout his education, including recognition for drawing and watercolor.

02 COLLEGE AND THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF THE DEAF

- 01 Chuck attended Gallaudet for two years, but ended up leaving to continue his education at the Rochester Institute of Technology’s National Technical Institute for the Deaf (RIT-NTID), where he earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Studio Painting in 1974.

He did play football at RIT, but art eventually won, as did the Drama Club.

- 02 Before he went to college, Chuck worked on scene design for the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) in his senior year of high school.

Chuck ended up coming back to NTD to work on painting sets for five years. In 1989, he returned to NTD as a set designer and actor. He had a hand in every NTD production for years, and commented that acting made him a better painter.

A LIFE IN ART

Seven states, a stint in Rome, and a label for Deaf art

03 ALWAYS ON THE MOVE

- 01 Chuck was not the kind of person to stay in one place. Throughout his life, Chuck lived in Kansas, New York, Delaware, Texas, California, Arizona and even taught in Rome, Italy for a short period of time.

Throughout his entire life, however, his main focus was art. When he wasn't creating his own pieces, he could be found running workshops, completing commissions or promoting artistic ventures, particularly for the Deaf.

- 02 At one point, Chuck was part of *Spectrum*, an organization that focused on Deaf artists, as a full-time photographer and coordinator of the Visual Arts Program. He eventually had to leave when it disbanded due to funding cuts.

04 DE'VIA AND ASL IN HIS WORK

- 01 Chuck created a label called De'VIA, which represented Deaf Visual Arts. He joined with other Deaf artists to create the label, and described it as:

a type of painting depicting the life of a deaf individual in a hearing world.

CHUCK BAIRD

- 02 Baird incorporated ASL into many of his pieces, helping to bridge the gap between the Hearing and Deaf worlds.

HIS LEGACY

A lifetime of experimenting, and what he wanted viewers to see

05 THE END OF HIS LIFE

- 01 Throughout his life, Baird experimented with styles and techniques, which ended at age 64 after a battle with cancer. Chuck had remained single and did not have any kids, but he is said to have commented that he was married to his craft.

I don't have much of anything to be angry about or deny. I simply accepted the way the world is around me... I want to paint about it. I let the viewer see and celebrate with me.

CHUCK BAIRD

06 NAMES AND TERMS TO KNOW

NAME OR TERM	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
Kansas City School for the Deaf	Where Baird studied from 1951 to 1967, and where the art teacher who entered his painting taught.
Scholastic Magazine Art Contest	The contest Baird won a national award in at age 13, for an oil painting.
RIT-NTID	Where Baird earned his Bachelor's Degree in Studio Painting in 1974.
National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD)	The company Baird designed and painted sets for, and later acted with; he said acting made him a better painter.
Spectrum	The Deaf artists' organization where Baird worked until funding cuts disbanded it.
De'VIA	The label Baird created with other Deaf artists for painting that depicts Deaf life in a hearing world.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

07 WRITTEN RESPONSE

01 How did Baird's art first get national attention, and how old was he?

02 What did Baird study at RIT-NTID, and what else competed for his time there?

03 Describe two different jobs Baird held with the National Theatre of the Deaf.

04 Baird said acting made him a better painter. What do you think he meant?

05 What is De'VIA, and how did Baird describe it?

06 Baird said he wanted viewers to see and celebrate with him. Using what you read about his work, explain what he wanted them to celebrate.
