New York-based artist Jim Hodges creates works of art using a variety of materials, such as flowers, lights, and mirrors. This sculpture, which sits atop the Jones Center building, was made using reflective steel and a shiny, rainbow-like surface treatment. Although Hodges’s sculptures and paintings often look simple, they express deeper meanings and experiences. Here, Hodges uses a phrase from the Pledge of Allegiance to start a conversation about what these weighty words mean to different people.

LIBERTY is the right to act and speak freely.
Talk about a situation in which you weren’t able to do or say what you wanted. What was keeping you from doing it? How did that feel? Go around your group—are everyone’s answers the same? How are they different?

JUSTICE means fair and equal treatment.
Have you ever been in a situation where you felt judged unfairly? What made you feel that way? What did you do? What will you do if it happens again, to you or someone else?

FOR ALL
Think about all the people who will see this message. Are they similar to you? How are they different? How might this message mean different things to different people?

This program is made possible in part by a grant from Humanities Texas, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
Contemporary artists like Hodges sometimes make art that invites us to consider big topics like time, loss, and identity, as well as socially charged issues and current events. Using art as a conversation starter can provide children with vocabulary and insights that help bring these hefty topics from the abstract to the visible.

Use the other side of this guide to discuss Hodges’s sculpture, or apply the steps on this page to other works of art, issues, ethics, social history—anything your child is interested in learning about!

Start the Conversation

1. Find out what they know using open-ended questions (how, what, why): “What do you think about...?” “How do you know?”


3. Listen and acknowledge: Identify and recognize your child’s feelings and reactions. This helps them feel secure and encourages more conversation.

4. Explain simply: Give kids the info they need in a way that makes sense. Sometimes less is more. Don’t know the answer? No problem! Write down your questions and make a plan to find the answer together.

Want to try it? Here’s a sample script that digs into the title of Hodges’s sculpture:

Conversation Starter: The full title of this work of art is With Liberty and Justice for All (A Work in Progress). The second part of this title suggests that some kind of work is not complete.

“What work do you think the artist is talking about? Why isn’t it finished?”

“Who is supposed to do that work? Why do you think that?”

“I hear you saying __________. Tell me more about that.”

“When I hear the phrase A Work in Progress, it makes me think of __________. What have you heard about that issue? Let’s investigate together and see how we can apply other ideas to this work of art.”

Keep Talking:
- Why does everyone deserve fair treatment?
- Why are liberty and justice important?
- Are we meeting the standards we talk about in the Pledge of Allegiance?