

Name _____

Date _____

Who Was Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz?



Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was a 17th century writer, poet, and philosopher. She was born on November 12, 1651 in Nepantla, Mexico. At that time, Mexico was colonized, or ruled, by Spain. It was not common for girls to go to school during this time, but Sor Juana showed an interest in learning at an early age.

Sor Juana was self-taught. She did not attend school. Instead, at the age of three, she learned on her own how to read and write in Latin (an ancient language no longer in use). By the age of five, she knew complex math, and at the age of eight, she was writing poetry. She also learned to write in Nahuatl, an Aztec language, that is still spoken in some parts of Mexico.

As a child, Sor Juana begged her mother to disguise her as a boy so that she could attend school. Her mother didn't allow her to do this, but she realized how smart her daughter was, and hired a tutor to teach her. At the age of 17, Sor Juana became a lady in waiting in the Viceregal Court, where the viceroy and his wife realized how unusually intelligent she was. (A *viceroy* is a ruler who represents the king or queen in a colony, which Mexico was at the time.) Impressed by her knowledge of science, mathematics, philosophy, and literature, the Court funded her continued studies. Sor Juana's brilliance became famous in the region.

When she became an adult, Sor Juana joined a convent and became a nun so that she could focus on studying. As a nun, she had the time and space to read, write, and gain more knowledge. Soon, her room became a library full of books, as well as musical instruments and medical tools. She received some offers of marriage, but turned them all down because she wanted to focus her time on learning.

She wrote many incredible poems, plays, and stories. A lot of her writing emphasized the importance of knowledge, and specifically how important it was for women to have access to knowledge. Some people criticized Sor Juana for writing about this topic because it was not considered proper behavior for a woman to write this way. They wanted her to focus on religious texts instead of women's rights. She responded that women should absolutely have the right to learn and study. For this reason, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is considered one of the first feminist writers. *Feminism* is the movement for women to have equal rights.

In 1695, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz died of the plague, an illness that was highly contagious. Sor Juana is honored as one of Latin America's greatest writers. She is considered an icon of Mexican national identity. Her face appears on Mexican coins and paper currency.

Who Was Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz?

Directions: Answer the questions below. Use text evidence to support your answers.

1. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was born when _____ **Mexico** _____ was ruled by _____ **Spain** _____.

2. Find evidence from the text to support the following statement: "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was an exceptionally smart person who learned in untraditional ways."

"Sor Juana was self-taught. She did not attend school."

"By the age of five she knew complex math, and at the age of eight, she was writing poetry. She also learned to write in Nahuatl, an Aztec language, that is still spoken in some parts of Mexico."

3. What was one struggle that Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz faced, and how did she respond or solve the problem?

She wasn't allowed to go to school, so she taught herself, and her mother helped her by hiring a tutor.

People didn't like that she wrote about the right for women to learn and gain knowledge. She responded by saying that women absolutely should be able to learn as much as they want.

4. Why is Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz considered one of the greatest writers, poets, and feminists of her time?

She is considered one of the greatest writers, poets, and feminists because she wrote incredible plays and poems on the topic of women's right to gain knowledge.

5. If you could ask Sor Juana one question, what would you ask? Why?

Student answers will vary.