

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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# Frida Kahlo & Self-Expression

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. Frida Kahlo was born on July 6, 1907, in Coyoacán, Mexico City. Her family home was called La Casa Azul (“the Blue House”), and Kahlo was the third of four sisters. Her father was a photographer from Germany, and her mother was of indigenous and Spanish descent. From a young age, Kahlo had health problems. At six, she contracted polio. She had to recover in isolation at home. Her father, with whom she was always very close, encouraged her to swim and box as ways to help her regain strength. At that time, it was very uncommon for a girl to take part in these activities. Polio weakened Kahlo's foot and leg and left her with a permanent limp.

Which of these is true of Frida Kahlo's childhood?

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| A. She was the youngest of four sisters.     | B. She was only interested in art activities. |
| C. She had a serious illness at a young age. | D. She moved to Mexico City when she was six. |

2. The Mexican Revolution began when Kahlo was three and had a profound impact on her. She would later claim she was born in 1910, making her birth coincide with it. The Mexican Revolution ended the 30-year rule of Porfirio Díaz and established a republic in Mexico. After the bloody, decade-long war, a new sense of national pride emerged that celebrated Mexican heritage. Mexico City became a center for politics and art. Kahlo was one of the first female students to attend the city's prestigious National Preparatory School. She did not yet plan to be an artist. While she was there, the famous muralist Diego Rivera came to campus. He had been commissioned to paint murals that would tell the story of Mexican history. Kahlo was fascinated with him.

Which of these describes effects of the Mexican Revolution in Mexico City?

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| A. All murals in Mexico City were covered, and Diego Rivera was exiled.                   | B. Art began to celebrate Mexican heritage, and Mexico City became a cultural center.             |
| C. The new, oppressive government arrested artists and political thinkers in Mexico City. | D. Mexico City declared independence because of the city's continued allegiance to Porfirio Díaz. |



3. At the age of 19, Kahlo was in a terrible accident when the bus she was on collided with a trolley. She had multiple breaks in her spine, pelvis and leg. A metal handrail went through her abdomen. She would endure pain for the rest of her life as a result of this accident. At first, it was unlikely she would even survive. She spent a month in the hospital and many months in bed. She was alone and in great pain. During this period of isolation and recovery, her father brought her paints. There was a mirror by her bed, so she painted herself. This was her first self-portrait.

Kahlo painted her first self-portrait during a time of

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| A. tremendous physical and emotional pain. | B. high hopes and excitement for the future. |
| C. grief following her father's death.     | D. happiness in her romantic life.           |
4. Two years after the bus accident, Kahlo and Diego Rivera met again in Mexico City. Rivera was much older than Kahlo, and the two were an unlikely pair. Nonetheless, they began a relationship and were wed in 1929. When Rivera went to the US, Kahlo went with him. There she met Charlie Chaplin, the Marx brothers and other celebrities of the day. The couple traveled to many cities from San Francisco to New York. In Detroit, Kahlo learned she was pregnant and was overjoyed. But sadly, she lost the baby in a miscarriage and nearly died. Many art historians say this was when she began to develop the distinct artistic style she would become famous for. She continued painting self-portraits, now showcasing the most painful parts of what she had experienced. She drew from her cultures and innovated existing traditions, creating intimate self-portraits filled with symbolism and religious motifs.

Which of these experiences most dramatically influenced Kahlo's artistic style?

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| A. being married to a much older man        | B. visiting New York City for the first time    |
| C. the trauma of her miscarriage in Detroit | D. meeting Charlie Chaplin in the United States |



5. In the 1930s, Kahlo and Rivera's home became a hub for political and cultural exchange. Both Kahlo and Rivera were members of the Communist party. When the famous Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky came to Mexico City as a political refugee, it was Rivera who helped get him asylum. Kahlo and Trotsky developed a close relationship. At this time, much of Mexican art depicted Mexican history and heroic events from the past. But Kahlo continued painting self-portraits focused on more intimate subjects and themes. These were personal and also universal experiences, like love and suffering. She was finding an international following. When the French surrealist André Breton came to Mexico, he saw Kahlo's work as a perfect example of surrealism. Surrealists aimed to explore dreams and the unconscious to reveal deeper, symbolic meanings in everyday life. Kahlo herself never identified as a surrealist. She is quoted as having said, "I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality."

Which of these best describes how Kahlo related to surrealism?

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| A. Surrealists identified Kahlo's work as surrealist, but Kahlo did not self-identify that way. | B. Kahlo identified as a surrealist, but the founder of surrealism disagreed with her. |
| C. Kahlo did not respect the surrealists and criticized their work.                             | D. Kahlo predated the surrealist movement but influenced it.                           |

6. In 1938, Kahlo went to New York for her first solo exhibition. The famous painter Georgia O'Keeffe attended the exhibition, as did fashion editors who were taken with Kahlo's art and style. She sold many works and appeared in the press. In Paris, soon after, she found yet more success. The artist Pablo Picasso made her a pair of earrings, which she later painted herself wearing. The Louvre bought one of her paintings, which was the first contemporary Mexican painting in their collection. In Paris, she was also hospitalized with an infection. Kahlo returned to Mexico in 1939.

Her career was soaring, but her relationship was disintegrating. Kahlo and Rivera had always had a tumultuous relationship. Both were said to have had affairs. Kahlo is quoted as having said, "There have been two great accidents in my life. One was the trolley, the other was Diego. Diego was by far the worst." In 1939, their divorce was finalized. Kahlo cut her hair short, perhaps to express her emotions; Rivera had loved her long hair.

Which of these did **not** happen to Kahlo in Paris in the late 1930s?

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| A. She was hospitalized.              | B. She received a gift from Picasso. |
| C. She sold a painting to the Louvre. | D. She reconciled with her husband.  |



7. After living apart for a time, Kahlo and Rivera remarried on his 54th birthday. Throughout the 1940s, Kahlo's work was shown in galleries and museums, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. During these years, her health was in sharp decline. Her father's death in 1941 sent her into a depression, and her back and leg pain worsened. She began wearing corsets to support her weakened spine. In 1949, she had gangrene on her right foot, and in 1950, she had seven operations on her spine.

Which of these best describes Kahlo's life between 1940 and 1951?

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| A. She lost touch with her family.                         | B. Her career flourished while her health worsened.           |
| C. Her career stalled as people lost interest in her work. | D. She and her husband never reconciled, and she lived alone. |

8. In 1953, with her health failing, Kahlo had her first solo exhibition in Mexico. At the time, she was confined to bed rest. Nonetheless, she attended the opening; her bed was loaded onto a truck and Kahlo took an ambulance right behind it. She came to the exhibition and was brought inside in bed. Two months later, her leg was amputated as a result of the gangrene infection. In 1954, she contracted pneumonia. She died on July 13 of that year. Her final painting was a vivid portrait of cut watermelons. She added the words "Viva la vida" ("Long live life") in the corner. In her final diary entry, she wrote, "I hope the exit is joyful — and I hope never to return." More than 600 people came to pay their respects after her death. Diego Rivera died three years later. He had La Casa Azul turned into a museum, which still stands in Coyoacán.

Which of these happened near the end of Kahlo's life?

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| A. Diego Rivera died.                 | B. La Casa Azul became a museum.                |
| C. She sold a painting to the Louvre. | D. She had her first solo exhibition in Mexico. |