

Name _____

Date _____

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez was born on or around November 12, 1651, in San Miguel Nepantla, Tepetlixpa, Mexico. (The exact date is disputed; some experts believe she was born in 1648.) At the time, Mexico was still a Spanish territory. Juana learned to read at age three and often hid in the chapel of her grandfather's hacienda to read books from his library.

When she was about 8 years old, Juana moved to Mexico City to live with relatives. She continued to read voraciously and had an insatiable appetite for knowledge. At the time, girls had very little access to formal education. Juana wanted to disguise herself as a boy in order to go to college, but her family refused. Instead, she studied on her own and with a tutor. She was extremely dedicated to her studies, learning math, logic, Greek, Latin, and Nahuatl, an Aztec language spoken in Central Mexico.

Which of these best describes the young Juana Ramírez?

- A. Lazy and unwilling to study
- B. Educated in languages but not other subjects
- C. Eager to learn as much as she could
- D. Enrolled at a prestigious girls' school
2. Juana gained a reputation for her remarkable intelligence. When she was 16, the Viceroy and Vicereine Marqués de Mancera invited her to be part of their court as a lady-in-waiting. Juana's family thought the court would be a perfect place for her to find a suitable husband. The following year, a panel of about 40 noted scholars assembled to test her intelligence and knowledge of literature, history, and mythology. Juana impressed the scholars so much that she became publicly known throughout Mexico. It was said that she performed "like a royal galleon defending itself against a few rowing boats."

Juana's beauty and intelligence led to many marriage proposals, but she was not interested in getting married. She wanted to devote her life to studying and learning. But in 17th-century Mexico, it was considered socially unacceptable to be an unmarried woman, so she decided to become a nun. At age 21, she entered the Convent of the Order of San Jerónimo, where she would remain for the rest of her life.

Why did Juana choose to become a nun instead of getting married?

- A. She wanted to continue her studies.
- B. Nobody asked her to marry them.
- C. She was considered too ugly to be married.
- D. Her parents wanted her to study religion.

3. At the convent, Sor Juana had her own apartment with a library, which she filled with over 4,000 books. She also kept many maps, musical instruments, and scientific tools. She was highly productive, writing poetry, plays, mathematical treatises, social manifestos, and musical compositions. Sor Juana's work was widely respected by scholars and philosophers. However, religious leaders criticized her for writing about art, love, politics, women's rights, and other scholarly topics they deemed inappropriate for a nun. They thought she should focus on religion only.

Sor Juana was good friends with the Viceroy Marqués de la Laguna and his wife María Luisa, who were appointed by the Spanish king to govern New Spain. In fact, she dedicated love poems to María Luisa, and the two were rumored to have had an affair. This friendship protected Sor Juana from much of her religious criticism. But when the viceroy and vicereine left Mexico, she lost that protection.

With which of these statements would Sor Juana most likely agree?

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| A. All writing should be in service to the church. | B. Women have the right to write about scholarly topics. |
| C. It is a bad idea to be friends with people in authority. | D. The advice of authority figures must be followed at all times. |

4. In 1690, the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de la Cruz, published a private letter Sor Juana had written that criticized a well known priest's sermon. Using the pseudonym "Sor Filotea de la Cruz," the bishop also denounced Sor Juana for writing about non-religious topics. Sor Juana responded with "Respuesta a Sor Filotea" ("Reply to Sor Filotea"), a letter that became one of her most famous writings and is now considered the first feminist manifesto. In it, she advocated for women to have access to education and defended women's intellectual rights.

Sor Juana's response led to even more criticism from religious leaders. The Archbishop eventually censored her, forbidding her from publishing her writing. She was forced to sell all her books, instruments, and scientific equipment. She also wrote a letter renouncing all secular learning, which she signed in her own blood: "Me, the worst of them all." She did not publish anything else after that.

Which of these does NOT describe "Respuesta a Sor Filotea"?

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| A. Sor Juana's response to a letter criticizing her for writing about non-religious subjects | B. The first published feminist manifesto |
| C. A defense of women's intellectual rights | D. A letter renouncing all secular learning in favor of religious studies |

5. In 1695, a plague came to Mexico City. Sor Juana nursed her fellow nuns until she herself contracted the virus. She died on April 17, around the age of 44.

Sor Juana's legacy is one of intelligence, a love of learning, and fearless advocacy of education for women. She was the New World's first feminist writer, forging her own destiny instead of accepting the life that was assigned to her as a woman of her time. Sor Juana is now considered a Mexican national icon. Her face appeared on the 200-peso bill for decades, and her convent became an important center of higher education.

Which of these best describes how Sor Juana is remembered in Mexico?

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| A. She is extremely unpopular, especially among women. | B. She has been honored by the nation and her convent. |
| C. She has been largely forgotten, and it is hard to find information about her. | D. She is praised for her commitment to traditional ways. |