

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

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.

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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.

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2. b'

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Juana gained a reputation for her remarkable intelligence. When she was 16, the Viceroy and Vicereine Marqu\xc3\xa9s de Mancera invited her to be part of their court as a lady-in-waiting. Juana\xe2\x80\x99s 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 \xe2\x80\x9clike a royal galleon defending itself against a few rowing boats.\xe2\x80\x9d

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Juana\xe2\x80\x99s 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 J\xc3\xa9ronimo, where she would remain for the rest of her life.

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3. b'

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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\xe2\x80\x99s work was widely respected by scholars and philosophers. However, religious leaders criticized her for writing about art, love, politics, women\xe2\x80\x99s rights, and other scholarly topics they deemed inappropriate for a nun. They thought she should focus on religion only.

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Sor Juana was good friends with the Viceroy Marqu\xc3\xa9s de la Laguna and his wife Mar\xc3\xaada Luisa, who were appointed by the Spanish king to govern New Spain. In fact, she dedicated love poems to Mar\xc3\xaada 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.

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In 1690, the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fern\xc3\xa1ndez de la Cruz, published a private letter Sor Juana had written that criticized a well known priest\xe2\x80\x99s sermon. Using the pseudonym \xe2\x80\x9cSor Filotea de la Cruz,\xe2\x80\x9d the bishop also denounced Sor Juana for writing about non-religious topics. Sor Juana responded with \xe2\x80\x9cRespuesta a Sor Filotea\xe2\x80\x9d (\xe2\x80\x9cReply to Sor Filotea\xe2\x80\x9d), 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\xe2\x80\x99s intellectual rights.

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Sor Juana\xe2\x80\x99s 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: \xe2\x80\x9cMe, the worst of them all.\xe2\x80\x9d She did not publish anything else after that.

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5. b'

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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.

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Sor Juana\xe2\x80\x99s legacy is one of intelligence, a love of learning, and fearless advocacy of education for women. She was the New World\xe2\x80\x99s 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.

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