

Tools for Teachers: *My Name is Celia, The Life of Celia Cruz*
Written by Monica Brown
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Curriculum Connections:
Individuality
Multicultural Studies
Music/Singers
History
Biographies
Geography

Sugar! My voice is strong, smooth and sweet. I am the Queen of Salsa, and I invite you to dance with me.

Book Connection: Celia Cruz grew in Cuba, in the city of Havana. She moved to Mexico, then to New York City, NY, and Miami, Florida. She is known as the Queen of Salsa.

Activity #1 Think, Research and Discuss!

Locate Havana, Cuba on a world map.

Locate Mexico on a world map.

Locate the United States on a world map, and find New York and Florida.

Determine the distance between Havana, Cuba and New York, New York.

Research the people and cultures of Cuba, where Celia was born and raised.

Even though she traveled and lived in many different places, what influenced Celia's music the most?

Activity #2 People come from many different places. Where are your roots? Book connection: Celia's heritage is Cuban. Her roots trace back to Cuba, where her family life and culture nourished her love of music.

Where are your roots? Discuss your roots with a family member who can help complete the following sentences:

I was born in the city of _____

I was born in the country of _____

My mother was born in the city of _____, in the country of _____

My father was born in the city of _____, in the country of _____

My father's parents were born in the cities of _____, in the country of _____.
My mother's parents were born in the cities of _____ in the country of _____.

Share your family's roots with your classmates.

Book Connection: Music is a universal language that can cross all languages and borders.

Activity #3 Salsa!

Look up Salsa music in the encyclopedia. Research its origins.

Listen to Salsa music, a blend of rock, rumba, mambo and jazz. Discuss the meaning of rhythm. Practice keeping time; clap the rhythm heard in different songs. What instruments dominate salsa music?

Using recycled containers (butter tubs, paper towel tubes, beans, pebbles and rice, wax paper, paper, tape and rubber bands), create instruments and practice making rhythmic music.

Activity #4 Poetry!

Book Connection: Celia’s music came from memories of family and the communities where she lived. Her home and her memories played an important part in shaping the music she created. She would call out “Azucar!” the Spanish word for *sugar*, at the start of her performances.

A synonym is a word that has a similar meaning to another word.

What was *sugar* a synonym for to Celia? What did the word *sugar* mean to Celia?

Sugar, to Celia, meant:

Create your own poem using synonyms for what your home represents to you. Think about memories your home makes for you. Think of the sights, sounds, smells and tastes that remind you of your home.

Home To Me

To me, my home is (sight, something you see inside or outside) _____

To me, my home is (smells) _____

To me, my home is (tastes) _____

To me, my home is (sounds) _____

These things are home to me.

Activity #5 Bring History to Life ~ A Student Timeline!

Book Connection: *Celia, The Life of Celia Cruz*, is a biography. It tells about Celia’s life. Biographies bring history to life.

Students can create stories about their lives and history using a timeline as a template.

Encourage students to bring in photos from home. Using glue, paper, scissors, photos and magazine pictures, encourage students to create timelines of their lives from birth to present day. Format each timeline in a sequence of 5 memorable events using individual pieces of construction paper, or long strips of paper folded into fifths.

Activity #6 Individuality Collage!

Trace and/or cut a large letter representing the first initial of each student's name. Using markers, magazines, scissors and glue, allow students to decorate their initial with facts and pictures that represent themselves.

Activity #7 Graphing!

Book Connection: Celia Cruz had a gift and talent for music. Each of us has gifts and special talents. All people are alike in many ways, yet all people are unique.

Create a classroom graph that will chart the similarities and differences found among classmates. Some types of graphs to consider:

- Our Favorite Foods
- Our Favorite Things to do After School
- Our Favorite Types of Books to Read
- Our Favorite Types of Music

Analyze each graph, noting common themes

Activity #8 We are Unique!

Book Connection: Celia discovered that sometimes she was not allowed to perform because of the color of her skin. However, she did not let that stop her from trying. It's important to be true to who you are. Everyone is unique!

Discuss and share pictures of the 3 general types of fingerprints that all people have: arch, loop and whorl. Even though there are three general types of prints, every fingerprint is unique, just like the individual it belongs to.

Allow students to place their thumbprint on a 3 x 5 card, along with their name.

Graph the thumbprints according to the type: arch, loop, whorl.

Analyzing and compare the graph:

- which type of print is there the most of?
- which type of print is there the least of?
- how many more loop fingerprints are there than whorl fingerprints?

Return the 3 x 5 card to each student and allow students to design their print into something by adding/drawing details to it.

Activity #9 Getting to Know You!

Allow students to work in pairs and conduct interviews.

All About (student name), as interviewed by (student name)

Age: _____

Favorite color: _____

Favorite food: _____

Pets? _____ If yes, what type? _____

Special talents: (list any likes or interests interviewee may have)

-
-
-

Brothers or sisters? _____
Where were you born? _____
What you're best at: _____
Something you don't like doing at all: _____
What do you hope to do someday? _____

Activity #10 Follow the Beat!

Salsa music is rhythmic. Allow students to practice keeping the beat to a rhythm established in a conga line, in follow the leader format!

Assign a leader. The leader will establish a patterned beat, such as hop, hop, hop, kick, hop, hop, hop, kick. Those in the line must join in and keep the beat.

Further Activities:

1. The author, Monica Brown, keeps a website: <http://www.monicabrown.net> Visit the author's website to learn more about her life and history!

2. Additional curriculum activities can be found for *My Name is Celia, The Life of Celia Cruz*, by Monica Brown and illustrated by Rafael Lopez, at the author's website: <http://www.monicabrown.net/forteachers.htm>

Here, the author has links to:

- General background information on Salsa music
- Cubans, their history and life
- Celia Cruz, the Official Website
- Curriculum activities created by Linda Kreft, who judged the Americas Award for Children's Literature, of which *My Name is Celia, The Life of Celia Cruz* is a recipient.

3. Beans and Rice! Beans and rice are a staple in Cuba. Create the flavors of Cuba in the classroom by creating a center where students can experience Cuban cuisine. Other fun recipes include plantains, fried sliced bananas.

4. Celia Cruz wore ornamental costumes when she performed, adorned with lots of ruffles and sparkles, beads and feathers. Study pictures of her costumes. Discuss other types of costumes that students might be familiar with, ranging from other cultures to their very own. What role do these costumes play?