

*¡Azucar!*

The Life of Celia Cruz

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| **Introduction** | |
| Celia Cruz is an influential and legendary international musical figure—the Queen of Salsa. As Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen shared with fellow members of the United States House of Representatives after Cruz’s death in 2003:  “Celia Cruz was a musical icon that made Cuban music known beyond our national borders while touching different generations. Lovers of Latin music worldwide embraced her style and boundless energy on the stage as they enjoyed her contagious music and rhythms. For the Cuban American exile community, she was the link between young Cuban Americans and their parents' generation, making Cuba a reality to the younger generation by providing them with the music that entertained their parents and their grandparents.”  Her life story is the focus of this lesson. | |
| **Indiana Standards Connections:**    6.1.20: Analyze cause-and-effect relationships, keeping in mind multiples causation, including the importance of individuals, ideas, human interests, beliefs and chance in history.  7.1.16: Analyze cause and effect relationships, bearing in mind multiple causation in the rile of individuals, beliefs and chance in history.  8.1.28: Recognize historical perspective and evaluate alternative course of action by describing the historical context in which events unfolded. | **Compelling Question(s):**  How has the Cuban diaspora influenced popular culture? |
| **Lesson Objectives:**  Students will:   * Analyze the visual symbolism, aesthetics, and semiotics of a music video. * Discuss possible interpretations of visual artistic representations. * Establish biographical timeline of a major historical figure in the international Afro-Latino community. * Create biography-based poetry. | |
| **Materials** | |
| * Class Projection Device * Copies of “Music Video Analysis Graphic Organizer” * Copies of “Celia Cruz, 1925-2003” * Copies of “Vertical Timeline” * Copies of “In Her Own Words” | |
| **Learning Plan** | |
| **Activities**   1. To introduce Celia Cruz, provide students with copies of the Music Video Visual Analysis Graphic Organizer, and assign students one of the four elements of the organizer **Symbols;** **Social & Cultural Issues**; **Artist Intent;** and **Interpretation** to analyze while you screen “Rio y Llora” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83S-KtvGM2M>), a music video that contains many images of Cruz’s life. Create discussion groups that have representatives from each of the four analysis elements. Within these groups ask students to share their answers with each other and write down classmates’ answers in the incomplete boxes on their own worksheets, and then engage in a group discussion based on the questions at the end of the graphic organizer. 2. After the group discussion, debrief with the whole class their answers to the music video visual analysis exercise, and ask students what questions does the music video for “Rio y Llora” bring to mind. 3. Afterward, provide students with the article from Black Past, “Celia Cruz, 1925-2003” and also have students log on to the Indiana University Digital Toolbox ([www.d-toolbox.org](http://www.d-toolbox.org)) and find the Cuban Popular Music-Celia Cruz items. The toolbox features images and recordings of Celia Cruz’s life. In dyads, have students construct a timeline of the life of Celia Cruz. 4. Once the timeline is complete, provide students with a copy of “In Her Own Words” a collection of quotes by Celia Cruz (<https://celiacruzfoundation.com/2012/05/01/celia-cruz-in-her-own-words/>). Have students closely read her quotes and add pertinent information to their timelines. 5. Based on the information constructed on the timeline and the other sources in this lesson, have students construct a bio-poem (<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/biopoem-identity-poetry>) which includes information about Cruz such as adjectives to describe her; the nature of her relationships; things she loved, accomplishments, hopes or wishes, and memories of home. | |
| **Assessment Suggestions**  Direct students to *¡Azucar! The Life and Music of Celia Cruz*, a digital exhibit by The Smithsonian Museum of American History (<https://amhistory.si.edu/celiacruz/>). Cruz’s biography in the exhibit is divided into five sections: *Mother Cuba*, *The Sonora Mantacera*, *Her Exile*, *Salsa and Azucar*, and *I Will Survive*. Assign students one of the five sections and have students work collaboratively in groups to create a multimodal gallery (e.g., photographs, text, audio, video). Arrange these five sections in the classroom to conduct a gallery walk (<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/gallery-walk>) based on the life of Celia Cruz. | |
| **Extensions**  Students can research the lives of other Cuban exiles that have impacted the Latin music community such as Gloria Estefan, Tito Puente, and Willy Chirino. | |

**Music Video Visual Analysis Graphic Organizer**

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| **Symbols**   * What symbols do you see in this video? What do they represent? * Why do you think that the artist used these symbols? * What culture do these symbols resonate with? Would they symbolize the same thing in another culture? Do they resonate with you? | **Social & Cultural Issues**   * What does this video assume about its audience? * Is the artist for or against anything? * To what age group does this video appeal? * Does the video use any historical video/film clips? How does it use the clips? |
| **Artist Intent**   * Do you see any works of art in this video? Do you believe the artist was influenced by someone else? * Can we always know an artist’s intent? Is an artist’s intent, when available, always relevant to the meaning of the video? * Can an artist mean to express one thing, but then express more than that, or something different from that? * Should the artist’s stated intent be the final arbiter when determining the accuracy of an interpretation? | **Interpretation**   * What does this video say to you? * What does it say about the artist? * Is there anything of which this video reminds you? Is there anything in the video that reminds you of something you have studied in school? * Do you think your interpretation of this video is what the artist intended? Does it matter? |

**Group Discussion Question**

* What are the most effective parts or aspects of this work of art?
* How would you persuade others to appreciate this work of art?
* What does this video mean to you? What did you see in the video that made you come to this conclusion?

# *CELIA CRUZ (1925-2003)*

A person in a white dress

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Celia Cruz, 1962

Courtesy U.S. Library of Congress (97504385)

Celia Cruz, the “Queen of Salsa,” was one of the most notable 20th Century ambassadors of [Cuban](https://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/cuba) culture. Cruz was born “Ursula Hilaria Celia Caridad Cruz Alfonso” to working-class parents in Havana, Cuba. Her father, Simon Cruz, was a railroad stoker, and her mother, Catalina Alfonza, cared for their extended family of 14.

Growing up in the eclectic and visionary [music](https://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/musicians-composer-performer) climate of 1930s Cuba, Cruz was exposed to a variety of musical genres.  She began singing professionally on Radio Garcia-Serra’s popular daily [radio](https://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/media-radio-tv-print) broadcast, a major avenue for promoting new talent.

Cruz’s first musical breakthrough happened in 1950, when she became the lead singer of the Cuban orchestra, Sonora Matancera.

There, she met her husband, fellow musician Pedro Knight, whom she married in 1962. She became famous throughout Cuba for her trademark battle cry, “Azucar!” or “Sugar!”  With this single shout she began most of her performances, allowing her to link her music to the history of the Cuban sugar economy, the violence of slavery, and the vibrant cultural diversity that resulted.

By the 1950s, Cuban music had become popular worldwide but especially in the U.S. The Tropicana, a world-famous Havana nightclub, epitomized the spectacle and glamour of Cuban musical cabaret. It was here that Cruz showcased her talent. She performed in a variety of musicals, which allowed her to launch her career as a solo entertainer.

When Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in 1959, Cruz and her husband, alongside many other musicians, left the country. They rejoined Sonora Matancera, which worked in Mexico City for the next year. During her time in [Mexico](https://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/mexico), Cruz made several appearances on Mexican [television](https://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/media-radio-tv-print) and films. Her stay contributed to her growing international reputation.

In 1961, she and her husband moved to New York City, [New York](https://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/new-york) where they joined other Cubans, [Puerto Ricans](https://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/puerto-rico-0), [Dominicans](https://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/dominican-republic), and [Spanish](https://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/spain)-speaking North Americans to create the sound that became known as “Salsa.” This music came to exemplify the Latino counterculture of the 1970s.

Cruz left Sonora Matancera permanently in 1965 and began a musical relationship with the famous orchestra leader, Tito Puente. Their professional partnership lasted until 1973. Together, they made eight albums for Tico Records. In 1974, she joined the Fania label, becoming part of an ensemble of salsa musicians known as the “Fania All-Stars.”

Cruz was a rare woman in the male-dominated world of Afro-Latin salsa music. For more than half a century, the “Queen of Salsa’s” powerful voice and electrifying rhythm garnered more than 100 worldwide recognitions, multiple platinum and gold records, three Grammy awards, four Latin Grammy awards, and a star on Hollywood’s Walk of Fame.

Celia Cruz died of brain cancer at her home in New Jersey on July 16, 2003, with her husband, Pedro Knight, by her side.

BlackPast.com, Celia Cruz, 1925-2003, <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/cruz-celia-1925-2003/>



# CELIA CRUZ- IN HER OWN WORDS

*by*[Omer Pardillo](https://celiacruzfoundation.com/author/omerpardillo/)

A person holding a sign posing for the camera

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**About Tito Puente:** “For me, he was a gentleman on stage. His friendship, his love, and his treatment towards me is something I will always cherish.”

**On “Azúcar” (her most famous phrase):** “It started when we were dinning with friends in a restaurant and the waiter asked if I wanted coffee with or without sugar … and I answered: “azúuuuucar”, because it was obvious I couldn’t drink Cuban coffee without it. That night during the show, I told the story and the audience died laughing. Later, the public started requesting that I tell them the story about the sugar… Until I grew tired of it, and before they asked I came out screaming: “Azúcar” … I never told the story again, but kept repeating the word.

**About the awards**. “All awards have left their mark in my memory. But I have to tell you that the one I had to wait for the longest was the Star in the Hollywood Walk of Fame. From President Ronald Reagan to hundreds of illegal aliens wrote letters requesting it. That’s why I’ve always said that it isn’t Celia’s star, it’s the star of my fans.”

**On her husband, Pedro Knight:** “He has many qualities, but I’ve always been captivated by the gentleman in him. He still opens the car door for me, every morning the prepares my coffee … If he doesn’t do it, I won’t have breakfast, because I like it when he spoils me.”

**Her take on fame:** “It is a great satisfaction to be recognized, because we get to know important people, such as presidents and artists … Marlon Brando, Bill Cosby, Quincy Jones, Gloria and Emilio Estefan … And just as easily, continue to be part of the people: to share with them, to receive their love, and to offer ours.”

**One dream:** “To return to Cuba …”

**Her hobbies:** “I like to listen to all types of music. Every time I visit a country I purchase the local music. I also like to collect gold coins and gold bracelets … ”

**On Celia Cruz:** “I am a very happy lady that tries to be a good friend. I enjoy what I do, and have always liked it. That’s why I’m so happy, and why I want to pass on to others my smile and my happiness. In fact, when somebody asks me how I want to be remembered, I always respond the same way: I want to be thought of as someone who’s always happy.”

**On retirement:** “It is absolute death, and I’m not talking about artists, because some performers change the focus of their career… I believe inactivity is a cancer in the soul … I’ve always thought that I’ll retire when God takes away my abilities … like Miguelito Valdez, I want to bid farewell to life, while on stage.”

The Celia Cruz Foundation, In Her Own Words, <https://celiacruzfoundation.com/2012/05/01/celia-cruz-in-her-own-words/>