

Elementary School Winner: **Kit Evens**
Old Greenwich Elementary School, Greenwich
Hispanic Heritage Month Essay Contest Submission

Spanish Heritage Month and The Queen of Salsa

When I grow up I want to be a singer. Celia Cruz is a Cuban- American singer. I love the way her strong melodies wrap around the lyrics. Most good melodies are like swirls of hopes, dreams, and feelings, are exposed raw and beautiful, glistening like dew settling on a rose until it crystallizes to frost only to be prettier than before.

But Celia Cruz has stronger melodies that are made of bold sounds, the roar of the trumpets, the thumping of the drums, and her voice. The best sound of all. Her lyrics are fireworks in my mind. She sings as loudly as an opera singer but in her chest voice, which is harder to hit high notes in. Celia Cruz is just that good. I do have trouble understanding most of the lyrics because I can only understand some Spanish, and she amazingly sings them so quickly I can't always catch her lyrics.

Some artists like Olivia Rodrigo have made their songs be more delicate, making you feel as if you dared to repeat them they might shatter. These songs are harder to dance to, their sadder meaning makes you want to sit and listen. But Celia Cruz is truly the "Queen of Salsa" and when I first listened to her songs I was unfortunately in the car, or else I would have started dancing. Too bad I don't know how to salsa.

Apparently I am fashionable kid, but NOBODY can beat Celia Cruz's bright and colorful costumes. Her multicolored wigs were as essential as her sparkly dresses. She would also wear extraordinary long high heels, and still would dance!

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No one outside of Celia's family thought that she was an amazing salsa singer. Celia had a very large family including her siblings, and cousins, and in a family that big, everyone has to help. Celia sung lullabies to help the younger children to help them fall asleep. According to Celia's Mother, Celia started singing around 9 or 10 months old! Some say Celia sang for a tourist, and the tourist bought her a pair of shoes as a thank-you gift.

Celia Cruz's Father had wanted Celia to become a literature teacher, and she even attended the Normal School for Teachers in Havana. Until she won a talent show and ended up dropping out to become a full-time music artist at the National Conservatory of Music. But that didn't stop her from being smart!

Celia had a catchphrase: "Azúcar!" which means "Sugar!" in English. The reason Celia said this was because a waiter asked Celia if she wanted sugar in her coffee, and Celia was baffled! Since strong Cuban coffee is usually served sweet, she loudly responded, "With sugar, of course!"

Then she started yelling "Azucar!" at the beginning of shows!

Speaking of shows, Celia Cruz held many concerts in her time. Some iconic concert areas include Carnegie Hall, Madison Square Garden, Central Park Summer Stage, Blue Note Jazz Club and S.O.B.S, Auditorio Nacional, Auditorium Stravinski, and Carnaval Miami. And these took place in United States, Mexico, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire), as well as European and South American nations. These were only SOME of the concerts she held! Really cool fun fact: My great-great grandfather, James Weber (my grandmother's grandfather), managed a hotel called The Condado Beach Hotel, in Puerto Rico, and Celia Cruz performed there many times! Isn't that cool?

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Úrsula Hilaria Celia de la Caridad Cruz Alfonso (Celia Cruz) was born on Wednesday, October 21, 1925 in Havana, Cuba. She died on Wednesday July 16, 2003 at age 77, and will always be missed and loved by her old fans and new fans (now including me) and never forgotten.

Celia Cruz was born with love and died with love. She was buried with a hand full of Cuban dirt and the love of any one who met her. This is my tribute to Spanish heritage month, Celia Cruz, and every amazing person with Spanish heritage. Thank you.

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