

Frida Kahlo



In this lesson, you will read a short biography about a Mexican painter who specialized in self-portraits. You'll learn some new vocabulary and share your own definition of beauty.

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. Have you ever heard of Frida Kahlo? If so, what do you know about her?
2. Have you heard of the famous artist, Diego Rivera?
3. What kind of art do you like? Do you have a favourite artist?
4. Do you know anyone who has had polio? What effects can this disease have?
5. Do you know any artists who have painted self-portraits?

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match the words on the left with the correct meanings on the right.

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| ___ 1. limp | a) a strong kind of cloth used by artists to paint on |
| ___ 2. tomboy | b) a large painting done on a wall |
| ___ 3. recovery | c) a frame of poles and cloth used to carry a sick person |
| ___ 4. portrait | d) a position or money given by a university to a student |
| ___ 5. record | e) a girl who likes to play rough and noisy boys' games |
| ___ 6. mural | f) not graceful or well-designed |
| ___ 7. charming | g) getting better after being sick |
| ___ 8. revealing | h) a person who gives opinions about music, art, etc. |
| ___ 9. canvas | i) the inability to walk properly, an uneven walk |
| ___ 10. fellowship | j) made to look beautiful |
| ___ 11. inspiration | k) a painting of a person |
| ___ 12. clumsy | l) showing, making known |
| ___ 13. decorated | m) attractive, very pleasant |
| ___ 14. stretcher | n) to write down, to tell, or to save for the future on tape, film, in art, etc. |
| ___ 15. critic | o) a person or thing that gives exciting or creative thoughts/feelings to others |

Reading

1. Frida Kahlo, one of Mexico's greatest artists, was born in July 1907.
2. Frida's life was filled with physical challenges, starting with polio when she was six that left her with a **limp**. She was a fearless **tomboy** and her father's favourite. In 1922, she entered the Preparatoria, one of the top schools in Mexico. There were 2,000 students, and only 35 were girls.
3. At the age of 18, Kahlo suffered serious injuries in a bus crash. During her **recovery**, she painted a self-portrait, the first of many that would **record** events in her life and her emotional reactions to them.
4. While at school, she met Diego Rivera, who had been asked to paint a **mural** at the Preparatoria. They met again in 1928 and married in 1929.
5. Rivera's art became well known in the United States. Kahlo was thought of only as his **charming** wife, but this soon changed. In 1932, after suffering a miscarriage, Kahlo painted *Miscarriage in Detroit*, the first of her **revealing** self-portraits. No woman had ever before painted such agony on **canvas**.
6. Now Kahlo's art began to be recognized. She took part in important shows in the US and Europe. In 1946, she received a Mexican government **fellowship** and began teaching at a new art school. In spite of her unusual style, she was an **inspiration** to students.
7. In 1944, Kahlo had the first of many operations on her back and foot. In 1950, she spent the whole year in hospital. Her paintings became **clumsy** and confused because of pain, drugs, and alcohol. Even so, in 1954, she had her first solo show in Mexico. Kahlo was almost too ill to attend, but she sent a **decorated** bed ahead, arrived by ambulance, and entered the gallery on a **stretcher**. The show was a huge success. A local **critic** wrote that it was impossible to separate her life and her work because her paintings were her life story.
8. Since her death in 1954, Kahlo's art has been featured in many international exhibits. Her life was the subject of a 2002 film called *Frida*.

*"At the end of the day,
we can endure much
more than we think
we can."*

—Frida Kahlo

Comprehension

A. True or False?

Read the statements below.

If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence.

If it is false, write F and correct the information.

- _____ 1. Frida Kahlo had an easy life.
- _____ 2. Frida Kahlo's husband was a famous artist.
- _____ 3. As a child, Frida liked to play boys' games.
- _____ 4. Frida's art reflected the difficulties of her life.
- _____ 5. Frida Kahlo's art was unknown outside of Mexico.

B. Ask and Answer

Practise asking and answering the following questions with your partner.

Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

1. What kind of physical difficulties did Frida Kahlo experience?
2. Where did Frida Kahlo meet her future husband?
3. What was the significance of her self-portrait, *Miscarriage in Detroit*?
4. How did Kahlo become known outside of her own country?
5. How did the physical suffering from her operations affect her paintings?
6. When did her first solo show take place in Mexico, and what was so unusual about it?
7. What did a local critic write about her at that time?

Vocabulary Review

Choose the word or phrase with the closest meaning to the underlined word or phrase in the following sentences.

1. Frida's life was filled with physical challenges.
 - a) changes
 - b) doctors and surgeons
 - c) difficult situations
2. In 1932, Kahlo suffered a miscarriage.
 - a) a fall from a carriage or wagon
 - b) death of a fetus (baby) before it is born
 - c) a mistake
3. In 1954, Frida had her first solo show.
 - a) a show featuring only one person
 - b) a lonely show
 - c) a show with music
4. No woman had ever painted such agony on canvas.
 - a) bright colours
 - b) great pain or suffering
 - c) a self-portrait
5. Since her death, Frida's art has been featured in many international exhibits.
 - a) shown
 - b) been the favourite
 - c) failed

Discussion

1. People handle personal pain and suffering in many different ways. Frida became a famous artist, in a large part, because of her suffering. Can you think of other examples of famous people who have turned their suffering into successes or who have become inspirations to others?
2. Why do you think many artists and other creative people have very difficult personal lives? Can you give some examples?
3. Do you go to art galleries or art exhibits very often? What kind of art do you like?
4. What factors do you think determine whether an artist becomes famous or not?
5. Explain the expression, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder."