



Lesson Plan:
Autobiography through Objects

Grade Level
3-4 (with adaptations for K-2)

Objective

Analyze images and objects relating to **Celia Cruz**. Understand how artifacts can help us understand people in the past.

National History Standards

Historical Thinking Standards, K-4

- Standard 1: Chronological Thinking
- Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

Content Standards, K-4

- Topic One: *Living and Working Together in Families and Communities, Now and Long Ago*
 - Standard 1: Family life now and in the recent past; family life in various places long ago

Time

Two class sessions, and individual homework time out of class to gather and prepare materials for exhibition.

Background

Over the course of a career that spanned six decades and took her from humble beginnings in Havana, Cuba, to acclaim as a world-renowned artist, **Celia Cruz** became the undisputed Queen of Latin Music. Combining a piercing and powerful voice with a larger-than-life personality and stage costumes, she was one of the few women to succeed in the male-dominated world of *salsa* music. ***¡Azúcar! The Life and Music of Celia Cruz*** highlights important moments in Cruz's life and career through photographs, personal documents, costumes, videos, and music.

You can learn a lot about Celia Cruz by looking at the objects displayed in the exhibition ***¡Azúcar! The Life and Music of Celia Cruz***. Each object was selected to tell the viewer something about her. Museums collect, study, and display objects, documents, and photographs because they can give us information about life in the past. In this lesson, students explore what can be

learned from objects, and how to create an exhibition about themselves using personal artifacts.

Materials

- *¡Azúcar!: The Life and Music of Celia Cruz* exhibition website, or printouts of selected images from the website, americanhistory.si.edu/celiacruz
- Handout 1: Image of **Celia Cruz** (attached)
- Handout 2: **Celia Cruz** and Pedro Knight's marriage license (attached)
- Handout 3: Image of **Celia Cruz's** shoes (attached)

Lesson

Warm-up

If possible, prepare students by taking them to see a museum exhibition, or have students explore a museum exhibition online. (National Museum of American History online exhibitions are at americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/) Explain that museums use objects to tell stories about people. Point out how objects are displayed: alone or in groups, with a label that explains what the object is, why it is important, and who it belongs to.

Discuss with students the many ways of telling the story of someone's life. One way is to show a series of objects that tell something about the person. Show students the attached photograph of **Celia Cruz**. Ask them to tell you what they can find out about her by looking at the photograph. What is she doing? What kind of clothes is she wearing? Where does it look like she might be? If possible, play a sample of a **Celia Cruz** song (available at americanhistory.si.edu/celiacruz).

Tell students that **Celia Cruz** was born in Cuba in 1925. She became a singer, and moved to the United States in 1961. She had a long and productive career as a *salsa* musician and was loved by people around the world for her powerful voice, energetic performances, and unique style.

Explain to students that photographs, documents, and objects help us put together the story of people from past times. Ask students how we can find out about someone who lived in the past. Show them the photograph of Celia's marriage license, and explain that documents like marriage licenses and birth certificates can give us information about someone's life. Have the students examine the license—what kind of information can they find by looking at it? Do they see any dates or names of places?

Show a photograph of a pair of Celia's shoes. Ask the students what we can learn about her from these shoes. What do they look like? Are they fancy or plain? Would you wear them? Why or why not? Where would you wear them? Do they look comfortable?

Student Activity

Explain to students that they will be telling their own story using objects. Have them bring in three to five meaningful items to display, such as special photographs, clothes, shoes, papers, and other mementos. Have them think of objects that show different stages in their life—from when they were very young, as well as more recent items. Remind the students to think about what each object says about them—which ones tell a story? Do they have an object from a favorite trip? Do they have a photograph of themselves participating in their favorite hobby?

Have each student create a mini-exhibition about his or her life by displaying the objects in chronological order along with explanatory labels. The labels can be written on 3 x 5 index cards, and should include the name of the object, a description of its importance, the date if known, and the owner's name. Have students circulate around the room and visit each other's exhibitions.

Adaptation for K-2 Students

Instead of creating an exhibition with labels, have students bring in one object that they think could tell their classmates something about themselves. Pair students up, and have them talk about their object with their partner. Have each student present the partner's object to the class, to share what was learned about the partner from looking at the object.

Follow-up Activity

Tell students that they will be reporters writing an article about a classmate. Have them visit the exhibition of another student and write a one-page article about that student based on the objects they see. What do they know about the person by looking at the objects? What information don't they have from the objects that would require additional research?



Courtesy of Omer Pardillo-Cid

Celia Cruz performing in Havana, Cuba in the 1950s.

MARRIAGE LICENSE: TOWN OF GREENWICH

1. GROOM'S NAME GERONIMO PEDRO KNIGHT			11. BRIDE'S NAME CELIA CRUZ ALFONSO		
2. (a) DATE OF BIRTH 9-30-1921	(b) AGE 40	3. RACE Negro	12. (a) DATE OF BIRTH 10-21-1925	(b) AGE 36	13. RACE Negro
4. OCCUPATION Musician			14. OCCUPATION Housework		
5. BIRTHPLACE: (TOWN) Matanzas		(STATE OR COUNTRY) Cuba	15. BIRTHPLACE: (TOWN) Havana		(STATE OR COUNTRY) Cuba
6. RESIDENCE New York City			16. RESIDENCE New York City		
7. PREVIOUS NEVER LAST MARRIAGE ENDED BY: (b) NUMBER OF (a) MARITAL Married Death Divorce Annulment THIS 2nd STATUS <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> MARRIAGE			17. PREVIOUS NEVER LAST MARRIAGE ENDED BY: (b) NUMBER OF (a) MARITAL Married Death Divorce Annulment THIS 1st STATUS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> MARRIAGE		
8. FATHER'S NAME Pedro Knight			18. FATHER'S NAME Simon Cruz		
9. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME Amelia Caraballo			19. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME Catalina Alfonso		
10. SUPERVISION OR CONTROL OF GUARDIAN OR CONSERVATOR			20. SUPERVISION OR CONTROL OF GUARDIAN OR CONSERVATOR		

We Geronimo Pedro Knight AND Celia Cruz Alfonso THE PERSONS NAMED IN THIS MARRIAGE LICENSE, DO SOLEMNLY SWEAR THAT THE STATEMENTS THEREIN MADE ARE TRUE.

SWORN TO BEFORE ME THIS 10th DAY OF July, 1962 SIGNED Mary C. Sullivan REGISTRAR
 SWORN TO BEFORE ME THIS 10th DAY OF July, 1962 SIGNED Mary C. Sullivan REGISTRAR

THIS CERTIFIES THAT THE ABOVE-NAMED PARTIES HAVE COMPLIED WITH THE LAWS OF CONNECTICUT RELATING TO A MARRIAGE LICENSE, AND ANY PERSON AUTHORIZED TO CELEBRATE MARRIAGE MAY JOIN THE ABOVE-NAMED IN MARRIAGE WITHIN THE TOWN OF GREENWICH

THIS LICENSE MUST BE USED ON OR BEFORE September 12th, 1962, NOT GOOD AFTER THAT DATE.
 DATE ISSUED July 14th, 1962 ATTEST Mary C. Sullivan REGISTRAR

MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT Mr. Geronimo Pedro Knight AND

Mrs. Celia Cruz Alfonso THE ABOVE NAMED PARTIES, WERE

LEGALLY JOINED IN MARRIAGE BY ME AT GREENWICH TOWN THIS 14th

DAY OF July, 1962 SIGNED William Hammon

ADDRESS Greenwich Conn OFFICIAL CAPACITY Justice of the Peace

THIS CERTIFICATE RECEIVED FOR RECORD ON AUG 1 1962 BY Mary C. Sullivan REGISTRAR

Celia Cruz and Pedro Knight's Marriage license from Connecticut, 1962.



Courtesy of The Celia Cruz Foundation

Shoes worn by **Celia Cruz** while performing.