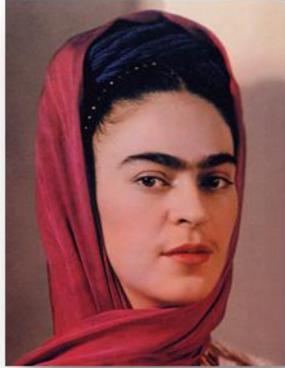


# FRIDA KAHLO

## Bisexual Mexican Artist

(1907-1954)



As a child Frida Kahlo was deeply affected by the turbulence and armed struggles she witnessed on the streets of Mexico City; so much so that later in her life she would claim 1910 – the official start of the Mexican Revolution – as the year of her birth. Kahlo contracted polio at age six and suffered from spina bifida. Plagued with health problems throughout her life, she sustained horrifying injuries when a bus she was riding in collided with a trolley car. After the accident confined her to a full-body cast, Kahlo began to paint. Her work – characterized by its stark portrayal of both psychological and physical pain – incorporated 19<sup>th</sup>-century Mexican portraiture, elements of Mexican pop culture and pre-Columbian primitivism, and was often done on sheet metal rather than canvas. Nearly one-third of her paintings are self-portraits for, as Kahlo once said, “I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best.” Against her mother’s wishes, in 1929 Kahlo began a tempestuous marriage to Mexican painter, Diego Rivera, who recognized her talent early on, though for much of her career she would remain in his shadow. Defying convention, she flaunted numerous extramarital affairs with both men and women, relationships complicated by Rivera’s own friendships with some her paramours, most notably Leon Trotsky and Josephine Baker, and artists Isamu Noguchi and Georgia O’Keeffe. By the 1950s her health issues became nearly all-consuming. After having her right leg amputated in 1953, she was hospitalized with bronchial pneumonia and died a week after her 47<sup>th</sup> birthday from a pulmonary embolism. Kahlo’s idiosyncratic work was not widely recognized until decades after her death as part of the *Neomexicanismo* artistic movement. Her ancestral home, Casa Azul (“Blue House”) in Coyoacán, Mexico City, is now a popular museum and tourist destination. Decades after her death, Frida Kahlo remains one of the most intriguing and beloved artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On June 21, 2001, she became the first Hispanic woman to be honored with a U.S. postage stamp.

### Lesson Plan

#### Level 1: Contributions Approach

1. Activate prior experience: Where have you seen Kahlo?
2. Read the biographical information.
3. Group Discussion: How would you describe Kahlo?
4. Extend knowledge: Read the selection entitled *Honestly Frida* at <http://www.pbs.org/weta/fridakahlo/life/index.html>

#### Level 2: Additive Approach

1. Examine the artwork of Kahlo in <http://www.pbs.org/teachers/connect/resources/2997/preview/>
2. How does her artwork reveal her own development as a person and artist?
3. Website Investigation: Examine an artist, who is the inductee in The Legacy Project <http://www.legacyprojectchicago.org/Artists.html>. Describe any similarities or differences between Kahlo and another artist.

#### Level 3: Transformational Approach

1. Examine the physical challenges that Kahlo faced. How did she approach these changes in her early life?
2. Anna Haynes describes Kahlo as “An Artist ‘In Between’” in the following link: [http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_41183\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41183_en.pdf)
3. Describe how Kahlo crossed boundaries as an artist and lover of both men and women. [http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_41183\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41183_en.pdf)
4. <http://suite101.com/article/sex-and-lesbianism-in-the-art-of-frida-kahlo-a230648>

#### Level 4: Social Action Approach

1. Kahlo pushed boundaries in both her professional and personal life. Examine the article ‘Sex and Lesbianism in the Art of Frida Kahlo’ found in <http://suite101.com/article/sex-and-lesbianism-in-the-art-of-frida-kahlo-a230648>
2. Who do you know (whether famous or not) who pushes boundaries today?