



Frida: ¡Viva La Vida! Long Live Life!

Carmen T. Bernier-Grand

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"Wearing the white huipil with the lavender tassel,
hiding my amputated leg in red-leather boots,
I wheel the wheelchair to the Blue House studio
that Diego so lovingly built for me.

I dip the brush in blood-red paint
and, embracing life with all its light,
I print on a watermelon cut open—like I am—
¡Viva la vida!—
a hymn to nature and life."

Frida Kahlo, a native of Mexico, is described here in biographical poems accompanied by her own artwork. Both text and images reveal the anguish and joy of her two marriages to muralist Diego Rivera, her life-long suffering from a crippling bus accident, and her thirst for life, even as she tasted death. Her favorite motto was: ¡Viva la vida! (Long live life!)

Back matter includes excerpts from Frida's diary and letters, a prose biography, a chronology of the artist's life, a glossary of Spanish words, sources, and notes.

Frida: ¡Viva La Vida! Long Live Life! Details

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Author : Carmen T. Bernier-Grand

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From Reader Review Frida: ¡Viva La Vida! Long Live Life! for online ebook

Philip says

Our library often has these displays up - maybe you've seen them: PULITZER WINNING AUTHORS! DIVERSITY MONTH! INTERNATIONAL SPEAK LIKE A PIRATE DAY!

They'll put out topical books, or award-winning books, or whatever whim the librarian has that week - banner up: display made.

They always include a sign: "Yes you may select books from the display. Please do!" I've occasionally selected a book from a display, but I rarely actually read it. (Apologies to all the librarians out there... I mean to, it's just... I'm generally checking out like ...well... way too many books...)

Anyway, this was on one of those displays. I think it was "Art Appreciation Month" or something like that.

Frida Kahlo has always interested me. Well, always since learning about her in high school. Say what you want about public education, I don't think it failed me. My Spanish teacher was great. She taught the language, but also delved into the cultures of Spanish-speaking countries as we learned the language. I got some exposure to the tragic (cliched, sorry) life of Frida Kahlo, but this short biography - told in poetry gave a much fuller picture.

I knew about her accident. I knew about her polio and her leg. I knew she married Diego Rivera.

I didn't know she married Diego Rivera twice. I didn't know he cheated on her with her sister. I didn't know she got revenge by having an affair with Leon Trotsky. (Yes, THE Leon Trotsky.)

I knew she was Communist. I didn't know she left the Communist Party after Diego got kicked out.

I didn't know she referred to America as "Gringolandia." But I like that, even if it's slightly ethnocentric... she's an artist. She can get away with it.

The poetry mixed with the pictures makes for a beautiful read of a life that found beauty where other artists would not look.

It's interesting. There are people who create art, and there are artists. I've always thought her art was mediocre, but what set her apart is that she had something to say that was worth listening to. And her art's mediocrity was a style that became uniquely her own. Frida's life was art, and it was a moving piece - which is why it will endure.

Terrie says

I am not very knowledgeable about art or artists and I found this book to be very enlightening. This was a wonderful book of first-person poetry based on the life of Frida Kahlo accompanied by many of her paintings. It was interesting to see how autobiographical her artwork was and how the paintings themselves

so obviously expressed her pain, her feelings about America and Mexico and her marriage and divorce from Diego Rivera. The paintings were captioned with a small explanation of the biographical background. It was interesting to learn that she was born with polio and later was in a bus accident that left her with many broken bones. She began painting during her recovery. There was a 2 page biography at the end of the book and a timeline of Frida's life, and also a Spanish/English dictionary of some of the words in the poems. The poetry so closely mirrored the paintings that it seemed it could have been written by Frida herself (it wasn't.) I am very anxious now to see the movie that came out a few years ago.

Casey McNally says

Bernier-Grand, Carmen. (2008). Frida: ¡Viva la vida! Long Live Life!. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

This book contains a beautiful display of poems about the life of Frida Kahlo. I recall learning a lot about Frida Kahlo in my middle school art classes, as we studied her works, but I felt like I learned so much about her entire life from this one book. I always appreciate stories written in verse, because I feel they can tell a story better and evoke more emotion than any other format. In so few words, an author can present and imply so much. I think this book is beautiful and should be read to students when learning about art, painting, or Frida Kahlo. I would especially recommend for 3rd graders.

Text-dependent questions:

1. Why did Frida divorce Diego? And why did they get remarried?
 2. How does Frida deal with her pain, and overcome her disabilities?
 3. What is the painting "The Little Deer" about? What do the arrows represent?
-

stillme says

Great biography of Kahlo, told in poems. Reproductions of her artwork included, with brief captions offering interpretations. Substantial chronology and specific details (dates, etc) at the end.

Biography book talk

Cassidy Wheeler says

Frida by Carmen T. Bernier-Grand is a picture book collection of poems that serve as a biography for Frida Kahlo. The book showcases pictures of Frida's paintings and poems that coincide with the topic. This book would be best suited for 5-8 because there's a lot of Spanish words included because it's from Frida's point of view. This was really well written and produced.

Q_michelene Haggard says

Biography of Frida Kahlo written in free verse poetry. Same format as Bernier-Grand's book on Diego Rivera. Includes useful Glossary, "Frida Kahlo 1907-1954 and Beyond," Chronology, Sources, Notes and "From the Letters and Diary of Frida Kahlo" at the end of the book. But I gave this one a 5 because it listed in the Sources section books, movies/documentaries and websites, which is excellent for lesson planning. I also gave this one a 5 because the illustrations for each poem are Kahlo's paintings, which gives fuller insight to the artist. Best for high school. Good to show students that picture books are not only for small children. Quick-read format for a biography. Also good for differentiation - for a lower level reader, the poetry with illustrations might be a more accessible biography format than a traditional novel biography.

Although pain was part of Kahlo's life since the bus accident, she said she never felt disappointed in life and that she was glad to be alive. This shows her spirit of gratitude and incredible strength despite adversity.

Emily says

A biography of Frida Kahlo, narrated in first-person poems.

The trouble I generally have with nonfiction-in-poetry is that it's often not that good as poetry. I'll make an exception for Marilyn Carver's book on Emmett Till, but that's it. The poems here are just good enough: never bad, never mawkish or hagiographical or cliched, but they rarely sing like poetry. Except - the book *does* include lots of color prints of Kahlo's paintings, and her most symbolic and surrealistic paintings are accompanied by poems that give them context and background. Do "San Francisco," "The Two Fridas," "My Diego My Child" explain too much? Well - they explain enough, and I'm able to understand the paintings in a way I otherwise might not have been able to.

I do feel some small discomfort for the author putting words in Kahlo's mouth, but a lot of the phrases are actually taken from diaries and correspondence and other biographical sources, which is pretty neat!

Worth reading just for the artwork, good poetry or no.

L13F_Jana Wilkening says

From the 2007-2008 commended list...

This may be my favorite book that I have read so far on the America's list. The book moves chronologically with each page containing a biographical poem about Frida Kahlo's life, along with a supporting photograph or piece of her art. What an interesting way to read someone's biography! This book had me obsessed with learning more about Frida. Once again, it had me thinking about what a great resource it would make for gaining student interest in nonfiction, biography, and research. This book would be a great model for students to research and write biographical poems about someone along with a supporting illustration. I would use this book with grades 7-12. I loved it!

Sara Jensen says

This remarkable book of poems uses poetry and art to inform the reader of Frida Kahlo, one of the most famous painters to come out of Mexico. The poems paint the tragic tale of Frida's life, full of struggle and heartache. Despite her challenges, however, Frida was resilient and kept a positive outlook on her life. She eventually discovered a talent for art and was soon world-famous, much to her surprise.

I really enjoyed the use of poetry in a biographical piece. It made the information much more interesting and felt like an adventure rather than a text book. The artwork also helped to tell the story almost as much as the poems did and the two seemed to blend together wonderfully. Though the poetry wasn't particularly complex, I applaud the author for daring to apply poetry to this genre and making something new and different.

Content Warnings:

-death

Donna says

I LOVED, LOVED, LOVED this book. The life of Frida Kahlo is told through poetry and how lovely this story is told. I could really feel the pain of Frida's childhood as she battled polio. I could feel her pain as she endured numerous surgeries as a result of an accident that left her severely injured. I could feel her pain when she discovered that her husband Diego had an affair with her sister. I saw a talented woman who wanted to be loved but who was also confused about herself. After reading the poems, I went back and studied the paintings of Frida Kahlo. She really had a way of putting her emotions on a canvas. Some of them were disturbing. Her self portrait with Braids(1941) has a masculine tone to it...very short hair, heavy bushy eyebrows. Frida did at one time have relationships with women while she was divorced from Diego the first time. This book would be OK to use for high school students. The content of this book would be inappropriate for children under the age of 16.

(NS) Panagiota Angelos says

Carmen T. Bernier-Grand's writes a biography of twentieth century Mexican painter Frida Kahlo in the book entitled, *Frida Long Live Life!* The story of Frida Kahlo is heart wrenching yet inspirational. What makes this book unique is that the author uses poetry to write the story and uses Frida's own paintings to accompany her writings. I tend to shy away from poetry books, but I was in awe at how easy it was to read and how much I loved it. Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderon was born in 1907 in Coyoacan, Mexico. Frida's life changed forever when she was in a bus accident as a young girl. This accident resulted in over 30 major surgeries throughout her life. While recovering from her accident, she discovered painting. This led her to find the love of her life Diego Rivera a famous Mexican artist. Her story continues with the pain of the aftermath, a devastating affair, and remarriage. The book is simply a must for grades 8-12. I highly recommend this book to show students how poetry does not have to be "scary." Teachers can use this book to study poetry, art, biographies, Mexican Revolution, and Mexican culture and history.

Lesley says

life of this artist told in poems and her art work. enjoyed!

Mikayla says

A great intro to her paintings.

HBalikov says

This is an ambitious, though fairly brief, homage to Frida Kahlo by Bernier-Grand. She has selected, and juxtaposed, Kahlo's writings (mostly poetic) and art (mostly Kahlo's) to give the reader a sense of the arc of this artist's life and the challenges she faced.

Though not definitive, it is very effective.

Katelyn Bognatz says

Title: Frida

Author: Carmen T. Bernier-Grand

Illustrator:

Genre: 3-5 biography

Theme(s): painters, women, poetry,

Opening line/sentence: "My name is Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderon. But I often say I am Frieda, German for 'peace.'"

Brief book summary: The book is made up of biographical poems about the life and work of Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo.

Professional Recommendation/Review #1:

Amanda Wright (Kutztown University Book Review, Spring 2009)

Through 26 carefully chosen moments, Bernier-Grand paints us the life of Frida Kahlo, artist extraordinaire. This well researched author chooses the medium of poetry to illustrate this deeply lived life. Learn about Frida from this first person perspective that keeps true to the experts biographies. Enjoy the artwork that inspired millions alongside a bibliographic, poetic voyage to the heart of Frida Kahlo, Mexican painter.

Category: Biography, Poetry. 2007, Marshall Cavendish, \$18.99. Ages 12 to 18.

(PUBLISHER: Marshall Cavendish (New York:), PUBLISHED: c2007.)

Professional Recommendation/Review #2:

CCBC (Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices, 2008)

On the right, the Frida Diego loves, / the Frida wearing the Tehuana clothes he likes, / the Frida whose heart is whole, . . . (from *The Two Fridas*). Poet Carmen T. Bernier-Grand explores the life of artist Frida Kahlo in probing poems written in Frida's first-person voice. The result is an arresting, emotional portrait in words. The poems are arranged chronologically in the order of significant events in Kahlo's life, from her childhood and relationship with her parents, to the bus accident when she was a young woman that left her seriously injured and in chronic pain, to her relationship with and two marriages to painter Diego Rivera, in which she found both healing and hurt. This captivating volume includes reproductions of many of Kahlo's paintings, arranged to visually relate to images and events referenced in the poems. CCBC Category: The Arts. 2007, Marshall Cavendish, 64 pages, \$18.99. Age 11 and older.

(PUBLISHER: Marshall Cavendish (New York:), PUBLISHED: c2007.)

Response to Two Professional Reviews: Both reviews talk about the book being in first person. They also talk about how the illustrations helping us envision what is going on. Both of the reviews had nothing but positive things to say about the books, and I agree. I enjoyed this and I actually remember talking about "The Two Fridas" in one of my English classes in high school.

Evaluation of Literary Elements: Because the poems are in first person, it allows the reader to get involved in her life and see what it was like for her in those time periods. The pictures are beautifully done, letting us look right into her life.

Consideration of Instruction Application: To students put together their own "Frida" book. Let them choose different things that have happened in their lives so far and have them write a poem about it and then draw a picture to go with that. When finished, create a book and share with the class.
