

Doña Fela's Dream

The Story of Puerto Rico's First Female Mayor

By Monica Brown, Illustrated by Rosa Ibarra

TEACHING TIPS

Though she was born before women on her island were allowed to vote, Felisa Rincón de Gautier did not let that stop her from becoming the first female mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1946. Easily spotted on the streets of San Juan by her flair and the jasmine flowers braided into her hair, she radiated style and grace. Doña Fela, as she affectionately came to be called, loved her city.

Doña Fela was always ready to listen to problems and find solutions. With determination and resilience, she brought lasting change to the island. Doña Fela's inspiring story as a visionary leader is brought to life on the page through stunning paintings that evoke the vibrant colors and culture of Puerto Rico.

PRE-READING - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Locate Puerto Rico on a map. Explain that Puerto Rico is an unincorporated territory of the United States. Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States. The official languages are English and Spanish. Ask students to find the capital of Puerto Rico, San Juan, on the map. Since Puerto Rico is an island, discuss the different modes of transportation that could be used to travel to this vibrant and colorful place that was home to Doña Fela.

After reading the book title and subtitle, share that “Doña” is a term used to show respect and precedes a woman's first name. Ask students what they know about the role of a mayor. Explain that a mayor may be appointed or elected and is the highest-ranking official in a city or town.

Response activities to engage students following the reading and discussion of *Doña Fela's Dream: The Story of Puerto Rico's First Female Mayor*.

DREAMS AND ACTIONS

Before and during her time as mayor, Doña Fela observed that many Puerto Ricans did not have access to clean water or affordable housing, children were not learning how to read or write, and buildings in Old San Juan were slowly deteriorating. Create a two-column chart. At the top on the left write “Dreams” and on the right, “Actions.” Brainstorm with students to generate a list of Doña Fela's “Dreams” to help the people of San Juan and the “Actions” she took to fulfill those dreams.

FOOTPRINTS IN THE JOURNEY OF DOÑA FELA

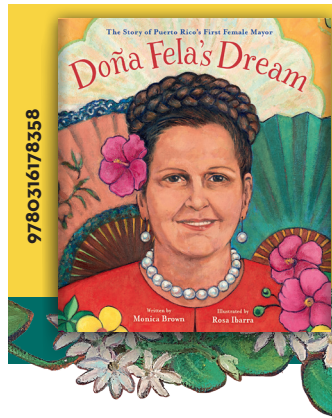
Timelines can be crafted in various ways. Access and print a template of footprints (<https://tinyurl.com/2asdp6tu>). Discuss the different events and experiences in Doña Fela's life. When and where was Felisa born and what occurred during her childhood? How did she become mayor of San Juan? What were her goals and accomplishments? Have students write or draw a major experience, event, or achievement in Doña Fela's life on each footprint. Ensure the information is chronological so there is a left-right walking pattern once the footprints are displayed on the floor.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

Author Monica Brown has woven several Spanish words and phrases in the narrative text of *Doña Fela's Dream*. Bilingual books are published in various formats including those in which a sprinkling of words in a second language are presented in context throughout a story written primarily in English. Bilingual picture books also offer an opportunity to learn new vocabulary as glossaries are generally included in the back matter. Pre-read *Doña Fela's Dream* before sharing it with students to know when a word in Spanish is presented within the context of the story. Place a sticky note on the glossary page to refer to it if needed. While reading aloud, pause at the end of a sentence containing a word in Spanish and ask students the meaning of that word. If they are not sure, flip quickly to the glossary and define the word then return to the story. This provides an opportunity for students to learn new words in context and to further their comprehension of the story.

ILLUSTRATOR EXPLORATION

In the back matter, Rosa Ibarra shares in her artist's note that she was born in Puerto Rico. As a child, she encountered Doña Fela several times and described her as kind and generous. Rosa Ibarra's art is influenced by her birthplace as she states, “Like the beautiful island of Puerto Rico, my art is full of color and warmth.” Conduct a picture walk through *Doña Fela's Dream* and have students discuss colors displayed in the oil paintings, examine how frames and borders set images apart, and explore the use of point of view or perspective. To learn more about this illustrator, visit <https://rosaibarra.com>.



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COMMEMORATIVE POSTAGE STAMP

Over the years, U.S. postal stamps have recognized individuals for the historical, social, or political achievements and contributions they have made to society. Visit <https://usps.gov> to see who has been featured on commemorative stamps and <https://about.usps.com/who/csac> for the selection criteria. Working individually or in pairs, have students revisit *Doña Fela's Dream* and select a key scene from the book to depict on their postage stamp. Then using a postage stamp template (<https://patternuniverse.com/download/postage-stamp-pattern/>) have students recreate a scene, add a phrase of their own or from the book, and determine the stamp's value. Display the completed commemorative stamps and conduct a gallery walk with students.

PATTERN WRITING – THE IMPORTANT BOOK

The Important Book by Margaret Wise Brown (1949) is a simple yet excellent picture book to demonstrate pattern language. Each page begins with a fact or trait about an object. Next, there are several descriptive sentences. Finally, the first line about the object is repeated. Read aloud *The Important Book* and discuss with students the pattern language that is used. Tell students this same pattern can be used to convey attributes about a person. Ask students to brainstorm words that describe Doña Fela such as kind, compassionate, caring, listener, or problem-solver. Working in pairs or small groups, have students use the following sentence frame to describe what is important about Doña Fela.

The important thing about _____ is that she is _____.

She is also _____, and _____, and _____, and helps people by _____.

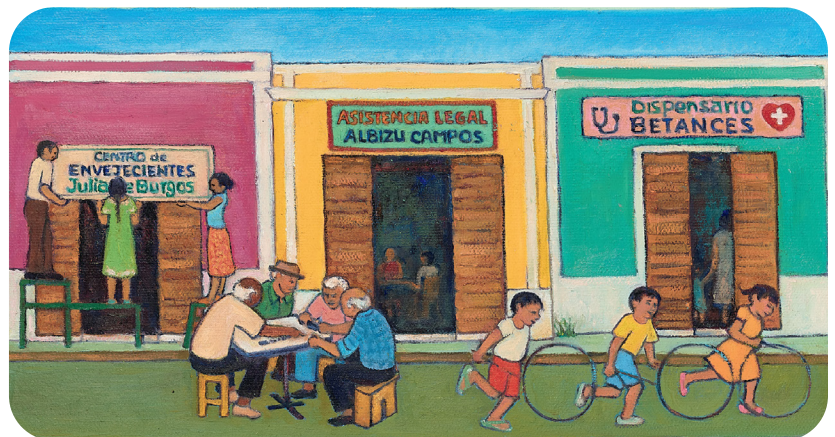
But the most important thing about _____ is that she is _____.

PONDERING THE NARRATIVE

After reading *Doña Fela's Dream: The Story of Puerto Rico's First Female Mayor* and engaging in one or more of the response activities, have students reflect on the life of this influential woman by asking:

- What was Doña Fela's greatest accomplishment(s)? Do you think she changed the lives of the citizens of San Juan through her actions? In what way?
- What was something important that you learned about Doña Fela? What did you learn about Puerto Rico? What are two connections you had to this biography?
- Do you have any lingering questions?

To learn more about Doña Fela and the museum dedicated to her, visit <https://museofelisarincon.com/biografia/>.



These Teaching Tips were created by Cyndi Giorgis, Professor of Literacy Education and Children's Literature at Arizona State University.