

Name: _____ Class: _____

Lin-Manuel Miranda

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Lin-Manuel Miranda is best known for creating and starring in the Broadway musicals Hamilton and In the Heights. He has received the highest honors in theater, television, and music for his talents and innovation in the arts. In this informational text, Jessica McBirney discusses Miranda's life and career as an artist. As you read, take notes on the development of Miranda's career in the entertainment industry.

- [1] Lin-Manuel Miranda is an American writer and actor who has risen to popularity in recent years for his unique combination of hip-hop and Broadway-style music to tell stories. His two most popular musicals, *In The Heights* and *Hamilton*, both purposely feature a diverse range of actors and characters from different backgrounds.



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Formative Childhood

Lin-Manuel Miranda often cites his childhood years as a source of inspiration for his work. He was born on January 16, 1980, in Washington Heights, a majority-Latino neighborhood in Upper Manhattan, New York. His parents were of mostly Puerto Rican descent; his mother worked as a clinical psychologist, and his father was a Democratic Party consultant who advised New York City's mayor in political situations. Growing up in Washington Heights gave Miranda a love for music, especially hip-hop. For one month each summer, Miranda also went to stay with his grandparents in Puerto Rico. As a teenager, he wrote jingles for advertisements.

Miranda started attending Wesleyan University in 1998, where he co-founded a hip-hop comedy group called Freestyle Love Supreme. In his second year, he wrote his first full-length musical and titled it *In The Heights*; the story was set in his own home neighborhood of Washington Heights. Wesleyan's student theater group accepted it and performed the musical over one weekend in April of 1999. During the rest of his time at the school, Miranda wrote and directed other plays and musicals with the student theater program.

In the Heights

In The Heights stuck with him, and even after he graduated college in 2002 Miranda worked with professional directors to write five more drafts of the musical. The story centers on a young man named Usnavi, who runs a small store in Washington Heights and hopes to someday win the lottery so he can go back to his native country, the Dominican Republic. Miranda and the directors he knew finally got the show to play in an off-Broadway theater.¹ It was so successful that in 2008 the musical opened on Broadway; Miranda himself played the lead, Usnavi.

- [5] *In the Heights* won two Tony awards and the 2009 Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album. Miranda was also nominated for a Tony for Best Actor in a Musical.

After *In The Heights*, Miranda dabbled in a variety of areas and got to express his flair² for the unusual. He co-wrote a musical called *Bring It On: The Musical*, which played in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2011 before touring around the country. He appeared on several TV shows, including an episode of *How I Met Your Mother* written entirely in rhyme (a tip of the hat to Miranda's love for hip-hop), and in online comedy sketches and podcasts.

Hamilton

While all this was going on, however, Miranda was working on a big project. In 2008, he read Ron Chernow's biography of American founding father Alexander Hamilton. The book inspired him to write a song about Hamilton's rise to political power from a humble childhood in the Caribbean. Miranda performed the song, "Alexander Hamilton," at the 2009 White House Evening of Poetry, Music, and the Spoken Word. He began work on a second song about Hamilton called "My Shot" and then spent almost an entire year writing and rewriting it because he wanted every word to capture Hamilton's intelligence and strong personality.

Miranda also kept writing new songs about different parts of Hamilton's life, until he had what he called the *Hamilton Mixtape*. He performed selections from the *Mixtape* at a theater workshop in 2013, where he found some performers who joined him in transforming the *Hamilton Mixtape* into *Hamilton* the musical and taking it to an off-Broadway theater.

Miranda played the role of Alexander Hamilton, the lead character, in the off-Broadway production, which opened in January 2015. The show received incredibly high reviews, and all tickets sold out. In August 2015, *Hamilton* opened on Broadway. Miranda continued to play the lead for the next year. He also had the opportunity to play a minor role in Broadway's *Les Miserables*, fulfilling a lifelong dream.

- [10] *Hamilton* earned Miranda a new level of fame, as tickets for all the Broadway shows sold out every night for hundreds of dollars each and reviewers across the country gave the show their highest praise. The production won 11 Tony awards in 2016, including Best Musical.

2016 and Beyond

While putting the finishing touches on *Hamilton* in 2014 and 2015, Miranda collaborated with some writers at Disney to write the music for the movie *Moana*. That soundtrack also became very popular, and the movie was a big box office hit when it opened in late 2016. He also contributed to the soundtrack for J.J. Abrams' new 2015 Star Wars film, *The Force Awakens*.

In 2016 Miranda and several other *Hamilton* cast members performed several of the show's songs live at the White House, and at the end of the afternoon, Miranda performed freestyle rap based on prompts from President Obama.

1. Off-Broadway theaters are smaller and usually show less expensive performances than what is available on Broadway. Many shows that play off-Broadway later go on to be performed on Broadway.
2. **Flair (noun):** a natural ability or talent

In May of 2016, Miranda won the Drama League Distinguished Performance Award, an honor someone can only receive once in their life, but his career is far from over. He plans to star in the movie *Mary Poppins Returns* in 2018, and he has other plans and aspirations to create more movie soundtracks in the future.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best identifies a central idea in the text? [RI.2]
 - A. Miranda started a new genre of musicals that is very popular on Broadway.
 - B. Miranda saved Broadway's decline by creating a hit musical called Hamilton.
 - C. Miranda used his experiences and passions to create notable Broadway musicals.
 - D. Miranda created a completely new way to use hip-hop to teach history to children.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "his unique combination of hip-hop and Broadway-style music to tell stories." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "The book inspired him to write a song about Hamilton's rise to political power" (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "as tickets for all the Broadway shows sold out every night for hundreds of dollars" (Paragraph 10)
 - D. "he has other plans and aspirations to create more movie soundtracks in the future." (Paragraph 13)

3. How does the characterization of Miranda's childhood in paragraph 2 contribute to the author's description of his life? [RI.5]
 - A. It shows that his upbringing influenced his art.
 - B. It suggests that his parents were not musically inclined.
 - C. It explains why Miranda used hip-hop in Hamilton.
 - D. It provides information on the Latin American experience.

4. Which of the following best describes the progress of Miranda's career? [RI.3]
 - A. After achieving success with Hamilton, he created more hip-hop productions.
 - B. He wrote jingles as a teen and became more and more famous for his singing.
 - C. Once he was successful with In the Heights, he craved more attention.
 - D. He wrote and edited his scripts many times before producing his musicals.

5. How does the section on In the Heights contribute to the main idea of the article? Cite [RI.5] evidence from the text to support your answer.

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote *In the Heights*, *Hamilton*, and *Bring It On: The Musical*. What are some musicals that you have seen on stage or on film? How is the storytelling format of a musical similar to or different from that of a play?
2. The musical *Hamilton* portrays history through a Broadway musical with a hip-hop soundtrack. What do you think about Miranda's decision to interpret Alexander Hamilton's life and legacy in this way? What are some historical figures or events that you would like to see as a modern musical?
3. *Hamilton* the musical was inspired by a book that Miranda read. This small event in Miranda's life ignited an extraordinary change in his life and career. How has a small event in your life caused something else to happen? Did these events create positive or negative changes in your life?
4. *In the Heights* was inspired by Miranda's life in Washington Heights in New York City. What are some other books, plays, or movies that were inspired by someone's true experiences? Why do you think artists draw from their personal experiences in producing their work?