



Sonia Manzano

"Maria" on Sesame Street & Author

For over 30 years, Sonia Manzano inspired, educated, and delighted children and families as "Maria" on *Sesame Street*. Named among the "25 Greatest Latino Role Models Ever" by *Latina Magazine*, Manzano broke ground as one of the first Hispanic characters on national television. Throughout her career, she has continued to contribute to enriching diversity on television, on the stage, and in the educational realm. A first generation America of Latin descent, Manzano's tale is one of perseverance and courage as she overcame countless obstacles to become one of the most influential Latinas in television.

Manzano was raised in the South Bronx, where her involvement in the arts was inspired by teachers who encouraged her to audition for the High School of Performing Arts. She was accepted there and began her career as an actress. A scholarship took her to Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, and in her junior year, she came to New York to star in the original production of the off-Broadway show *Godspell*. Within a year, Manzano joined the production of *Sesame Street*, where she eventually began writing scripts for the series. She was thrilled to help write the story line for "Maria's" marriage and birth of "Maria's" baby, played for a while by Manzano's real-life daughter Gabriela.

Manzano is releasing two books in fall 2015: her memoir, *Becoming Maria: Love and Chaos in the South Bronx* (Scholastic), and a Christmas picture book, *Miracle of 133rd Street* (Simon & Schuster). *Becoming Maria* was praised by *Kirkus Reviews* for its "lyrical and unflinching account of her tough Nuyorican upbringing in the South Bronx," and calls it a "touching memoir." *Kirkus Reviews* says "Manzano lovingly details life-changing moments," with a "stark and heartbreaking contrast to her *Sesame Street* character."

Sonia Manzano knows a thing or two about determination. Now a twice nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Performer in a Children's Series, Manzano didn't have a lot of resources as a child growing up in the South Bronx. Immensely talented, Sonia never gave up, and within a year of graduating college, Manzano found herself on *Sesame Street*. An equally impressive and captivating stage actress, Manzano has appeared on stage in several critically acclaimed theater performances, including *The Vagina Monologues*, "The Exonerated," and "Love, Loss, and What I Wore." Movies include *Deathwish*, *Follow That Bird*, and *Elmo in Grouchland*.



An award-winning television writer and children's book author, Manzano is a master storyteller. She won 15 Emmys as part of the *Sesame Street* writing team, and also wrote for the Peabody Award-winning children's series *Little Bill*. Continuing to inspire children off screen, Manzano's children's book, *No Dogs Allowed*, was selected by the General Mills initiative "Spoonfuls of Stories" to become a children's musical to encourage childhood literacy. Her first young adult novel, *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano*, examines the Latino community during the Civil Rights Movement through the eyes of a young girl coming of age in the midst of social upheaval in Spanish Harlem in 1969. The book was a Pura Belpre Honor. As good a writer for parents as she is children, Manzano has also written a parenting column for the Sesame Workshop website called "Talking Out Loud." She is also an advisor for literary NY institution Symphony Space and is often a reader for Selected Shorts. She regularly reads for their adult literacy program All-Write.

A staunch advocate for education, Manzano shares her extraordinary talent to help children to succeed. A fearless trailblazer, Manzano opened the doors for Latinas on screen. Infusing humor and charm into her presentations, Manzano inspires audiences with her passion, strength and insight into success. Whether speaking out for literacy, diversity, or addressing the issues children face in our media-saturated life, she is a familiar, engaging voice that brings new light to her roles and to our lives.

RESUME:

- 2015: Author of her memoir, *Becoming Maria: Love and Chaos in the South Bronx* and a Christmas picture book, *Miracle of 133rd Street*.
- 2013: Pura Belpré Award, which recognizes works that best portray, affirm, and celebrate the Latino cultural experience.
- 2013: Named among the 25 Greatest Latino Role Models Ever by *Latina Magazine*
- 2013: Awarded the New York Women in Film Muse Award
- 2012: Published *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano*
- 1973-2009: Actress and Writer on *Sesame Street*
- 1999-2001: Writer on *Little Bill*
- 2003: Received the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Award and the Hispanic Heritage Award for Education
- 2007: Published *No Dogs Allowed*
- 2005: Inducted into the Bronx Hall of Fame
- 2004: Honorary Doctorate in fine arts from Notre Dame University
- 2004: Published *A Box Full of Kittens*



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