Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was born to a Spanish father and Creole mother in a town near Mexico City in November 1651 when Mexico was still a Spanish territory. At that time, women were not allowed to attend school and were discouraged from reading, writing poetry, and studying. However, Inés de la Cruz loved to do all of these activities. In addition to speaking Spanish, she also learned Latin and Nahuatl, a native language spoken in Mexico before the Spanish arrived. Her family sent her to live at the royal court when she was 12 years old where she was personally tutored by the wife of a
government official. She became known for her vast knowledge in science and literature, something very uncommon for women at that time.

As she became older, she was pressured to stop studying and get married. In order to be allowed to study as much as she wanted, Inés de la Cruz decided not to marry and instead became a nun when she was 26 years old. As a nun, she collected several books and became a productive author. She wrote poems and plays in multiple styles about different themes in life, such as romance and the church. She wrote some of her poems in Nahuatl, publicly respecting the language that many Spanish settlers considered less important than Spanish. She even had her writing published in Spain.

Although being an author was unusual for a nun, Inés de la Cruz became famous for how she wrote about women. She did not consider women to be inferior to men as was common in that time. Instead, she created female characters who were strong, brave, and clever. This angered the leaders of the church, but Inés de la Cruz was not intimidated. She said that women have a right to be educated just like men. Because of her stance on women’s rights, she is considered to be the first feminist author published in the New World.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz died in Mexico City at the age of 44. Famous for standing up for women’s rights, she is still honored in Mexico today. The town she was born in was renamed after her, and her picture is on the Mexican currency.