

Miguel de Cervantes and Don Quijote

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Miguel de Cervantes is one of the most pivotal figures in universal literature and one of the most celebrated authors of all time. Born in Madrid to a deaf surgeon, he was destined to lead the style of an adventurous romantic and a youth in search of truth and belonging.



Cervantes was born in Madrid in 1547. As a child, he enjoyed reading and received his formal education from the local Jesuits. His first published work, a short collection of poems, appeared in 1569 when he was 22 years old. He became a soldier the following year and suffered severe wounds in the Battle of Lepanto. Later, he was captured by Turks on his way home and spent the following five years in cold and isolated captivity. The battle left him not only with a crippled left hand and two chest wounds, but also an exciting yet painful experience that seeped into his later writing and mentality. After returning to Spain, Cervantes dedicated himself to literature. His first novel, *La Galatea* appeared in 1585 but did not gain any success. Upset, Cervantes turned his talents to the theater but also met with failure. Only two of his plays survive.

In the late 1580s, Cervantes undertook a career as a commissary for the Spanish Armada. His job of collecting grain supplies from rural areas proved difficult and thankless. Few people were willing to provide any goods, and Cervantes ended up in prison on two occasions of mismanagement. It was during his work in the Spanish Armada that he created and began to write one of history's most legendary heroes, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*.

Don Quijote is the story of an old land-owner who grows insane from his intense readings of chivalries and romances. Lost in the imaginary world of princesses, dragons and knights on

dashing steeds, he grows to believe that he is a knight and even convinces the peasant, Sancho Panza to join him as his squire.

What follows is a grand adventure full of hilarity, stupidity and a whole load of playful fun. The most famous portion of the whole tale, however, is Don Quixote's encounter with a few dozen windmills in the fields. Mistaking them for giants, Don Quijote expresses the urgent need to kill them at once and despite Sancho's pleas against it, he charges, breaks his lance and falls off his horse. This episode has become one of the most well-known tales in western literature and has captured the imagination of the whole world with its charm and humor. With this humor, Cervantes also pokes fun at the chivalry genre and at the knights of past ages.

Cervantes continued to write even after the success and fame of Don Quixote but died on April 23, 1616, unable to complete *The Labors of Persiles and Sigismunda* before his death.

Even today, his legacy and influence remain enormous. He is credited with writing the first modern novel and his work has inspired and influenced countless authors from Gustave Flaubert to Fyodor Dostoyevsky. His work has also imbibed Spanish culture like no other. Numerous statues and monuments stand in his honor all across the world and he even appears on several stamps, including those of Spain and the Soviet Union.

Without the world's lankiest and quirkiest knight and without one of the most brilliant writers in universal literature, it would have been lacking a jewel that would've ornamented it like no other. It would have lacked Don Quixote de La Mancha.



1. What is Miguel Cervantes' legacy and influence?

2. Describe a famous passage from Don Quijote.

3. Why do you think Cervantes wrote Don Quijote?

4. What genre would you use to describe Don Quijote and why?
