



Gloria Estefan, Singer

Singing Through Struggles

Lesson Introduction

Interview Log: Interviewed on September 8, 2023 by David Bender

- Access *The Thread* episode of Gloria Estefan on our [YouTube channel](#) or at [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)
- Access her long-form interview on [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)

Learning Objectives

Social Studies Focus

- Gain new insights on growing up as a first-generation Cuban immigrant
- Put a human face on the Cold War and the consequences of Fidel Castro coming to power
- A trailblazing Cuban-American woman breaking down barriers in entertainment

English Language Arts Focus

- Situate a coming-of-age story in the height of the Cold War
- Inspire students to tell their own coming-of-age stories
- Tell stories of personal challenge and trauma
- Explore the path of pursuing individual passions for avocation and vocation
- Examine perspective taking from the point of view of one singer
- Explore the idea of purposeful work and a meaningful life
- Use Gloria Estefan's episode as evidence to write a rhetorical argument, commentary, or synthesis essay

Episode Overview

Gloria Estefan reflects on being raised in a Cuban family that faced challenges upon immigrating to the United States and how her unexpected journey into music served as an emotional outlet from a young age. Estefan discusses how she met her husband, explores their personal and professional dynamics, and highlights the impact of their collaboration.



Biography

Gloria Estefan was born Gloria Fajardo on September 1, 1957 in Havana, Cuba. As a toddler Estefan fled Cuba with her family to the United States when Communist dictator Fidel Castro rose to power. In 1975 she met keyboardist Emilio Estefan, who led a band called the Miami Latin Boys. Estefan became its lead singer and the band was renamed the Miami Sound Machine before going on to score several Top 10 hits in the 1980s and 1990s. She married Emilio Estefan in September of 1978. They have a son and daughter. One of the most successful crossover artists in Latin music history, Estefan is a seven-time Grammy Award-winning singer, songwriter, actress, and author of two *New York Times* best-selling children's books. She has sold more than 100 million records worldwide and achieved 38 #1 hits across the Billboard charts. In 1997 she founded the Gloria Estefan Foundation, which promotes education, health, and cultural development. Both Gloria and Emilio worked on the autobiographical musical about their lives called *On Your Feet!* that debuted on Broadway in 2015. That same year they were honored for their trailblazing contributions to music and Latin American culture with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



Teaching Tip: First Take

A **First Take** is a warm-up writing or conversation exercise created uniquely for *The Thread* that strengthens media literacy skills. Like an opening song in a musical, the first stanza of a poem, or even the first impression one person makes on another, the First Take asks students to reflect and share their initial thoughts and feelings about the episode's opening.

Suggested Steps

Before watching "Singing Through Struggles"

- Read the opening of Gloria Estefan's episode aloud to students:

"I would question, 'Why would I get all this fame when really that wasn't the point of making music?' And I remember thinking, maybe this is the reason – just to show people that, yes, you could go through terrible things. But it depends on how you deal with it and what you do with the cards that you're dealt, and that we have power in and a lot of control over our lives."



- Ask and Discuss:** What do you know about Gloria Estefan? What do you learn about her from these opening sentences? What insights can you infer?
- Next,** have students do a one-minute quick write reflecting on what she shared or have students get into pairs and share their thoughts and feelings.
- Last,** as a class discuss the reasons they think the filmmakers choose this opening for the episode?



Photos: Young Gloria Estefan playing guitar top; Singer and songwriter Gloria Estefan is shown performing on stage during a live concert appearance. (Alamy) lower left; Singer and songwriter Gloria Estefan is shown performing on stage during a live concert appearance. (Alamy) lower right



Teaching Tip:

THE THREAD Up Close

After watching the interview, have students debrief her life story with these suggested questions:

- ▣ How does the title “Singing Through Struggles” connect to the stories Gloria Estefan shared?
- ▣ What role has music played for her in overcoming her struggles and challenges?
- ▣ What inspired you most about Gloria Estefan?
- ▣ What was something new that you learned from the life stories she shared?
- ▣ In what ways did you connect with her life story?

After discussing, have students return to *The Thread* episode and engage students in a close read and analysis of her interview using the video and transcript. Depending on the lesson, question, or theme you are aligning *The Thread* with, have students annotate the transcript, select passages that reflect the assignment, and explain their reasoning in class.

Here is an example of *A Thread* connection: In any unit on the Cold War, the Bay of Pigs will be covered. Gloria Estefan’s father, José, participated in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. Her personal anecdote offers a unique insight:

“I was on a plane recently and I watched *Bridge of Spies*, which I had never seen. At the very end of the movie, it says that the subject of the film was the man that negotiated the exchange for Cuba and the United States, where political prisoners were exchanged [for], drugs and medicine. One of those men was my father. So when I read that, I was so shocked. But he did come back and they promised those men that if they learned English that they could join the U.S. Army as officers. He joined the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant. We were stationed in San Antonio, Texas, where my sister Becky, was born. I was six years old. This was 1963 and my father had just been shaking hands with President Kennedy right before his assassination because he had had an event where he was thanking the Bay of Pigs survivors and the men that had been released.”

Connections

- ▣ What new insights did you learn from Gloria Estefan’s family’s experience during the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, and the Bay of Pigs?
- ▣ Gloria and Emilio have been married for over forty years. What did you learn from her interview about the work involved in maintaining such a long relationship?
- ▣ Telling stories of adversity and trauma takes courage, strength, a sense of safety with trusted loved ones and adults, and knowing what is right and wrong. How did Gloria Estefan heal from her personal pain and trauma? What can we learn from her experiences?
- ▣ What new insights did you gain about (yourself, your community, your world) from her struggles and her tremendous success ?



Activity: Singing Through Struggles

Gloria Estefan was the first Latina to be inducted into the [Songwriters Hall of Fame](#). She has sold more than 100 million records worldwide, remains one of the most successful songwriters of all time both on the Latin and Pop charts, was awarded a [Kennedy Center Honor](#) in 2017, and a [Gershwin Prize for Popular Song](#) in 2019 alongside her husband. She explains in [one interview](#) after hearing of her award that songwriting is a bit of a mystery to her. Sometimes songs “pour out of me” and other times when she is co-writing with another artist she listens to the music and needs to feel something before putting it into words. She recalls writing her first song, a parody of her school Our Lady of Lourdes Academy, at the age of 14 or 15 and explains in [American Songwriter](#) that her process is different every time.

“I’ve learned a lot through the years. First of all, inspiration is crucial, but that can come from anything, just a spark that you need to start the process. I have different ways that I write. By the way, most of my songs have been written between midnight and six in the morning, because that’s the time when the songs always came up. That’s the time that, not only is it my own time, but no one’s gonna call me or interrupt, or need something from me. Also, the majority of the hemisphere is asleep, and the channels are open, so there are songs that come through me. I think I’m kind of a vehicle. I just happen to be the one in the driver’s seat. Songs come from a very, very deep place, either from emotions or experiences.”

Explore the Additional Resources collected on Gloria Estefan and her trailblazing career. And if you feel so inclined, write a song using the title of this episode, “Singing Through Struggles,” as an inspiration.



Additional Resources

- ▣ [Gloria Estefan](#)
- ▣ [The Gloria Estefan Foundation](#)
- ▣ [Estefan Enterprises Inc.](#)
- ▣ [On Your Feet!](#)
- ▣ [Songwriters Hall of Fame - Gloria Estefan](#)

Historical Context

- ▣ Timeline from PBS: [Post-Revolution Cuba](#)
- ▣ Learn more about the historical context of Gloria Estefan’s family by reading [“Before the Revolution,”](#) in *Smithsonian Magazine* and accessing the archive about [The Bay of Pigs](#) from the JFK Library

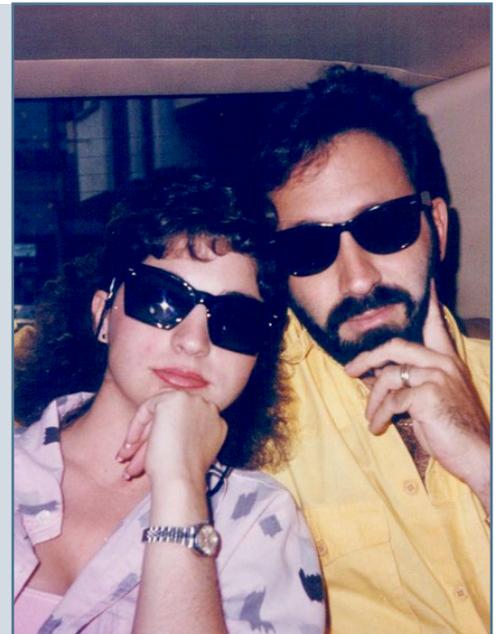


Photo: Gloria Estefan and her husband Emilio in Paris.

