



SONIA MANZANO
"MARIA" ON SESAME STREET / CHILDREN'S BOOK AUTHOR

Sonia Manzano is a first-generation American of Latino descent who has affected the lives of millions of parents and children since the early 1970s, when she was offered an opportunity to play "Maria" on *Sesame Street*.

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 storyline for "Maria's" marriage and the birth of "Maria's" baby, played for awhile by Manzano's real-life daughter Gabriela.

Manzano has performed on the New York stage in the critically acclaimed theater pieces "The Vagina Monologues," "The Exonerated," and "Love, Loss, and What I Wore." She is an advisor for the literary New York institution Symphony Space and is often a reader for Selected Shorts. She regularly reads for their adult literacy program All-Write.

She has written for the Peabody Award-winning children's series *Little Bill*, and has written a parenting column for the Sesame Workshop website called "Talking Out Loud." Her first children's book, *No Dogs Allowed!*, was published by Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing in 2004. It is in its third printing. Her second book, *A Box Full of Kittens*, was published in 2007. Her first young adult novel will be published by Scholastic in the fall of 2012. She is working on a memoir and has contributed her poem "Cheesybreadville" to Marlo Thomas and Friends' *Thanks and Giving* book and CD. *No Dogs Allowed!* has been turned into a children's musical, with productions in Coral Gables, Florida and the Atlantic Theater in New York.

Manzano received the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Award in Washington, DC and the Hispanic Heritage Award for Education in 2003. She received an honorary doctorate in fine arts from Notre Dame University in 2005. Closer to home, she is proud to have been inducted into the Bronx Hall of Fame in 2004. She was voted one of the most influential Hispanics by *People Magazine en Español* in February 2007. Manzano has 15 Emmy Awards to date as part of the *Sesame Street* writing staff and was twice nominated for an Emmy Award as Outstanding Performer in a Children's Series. *A Box Full of Kittens* received the Notable Video Award from the American Library Association in 2009. Manzano was



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also proud to be on hand to help receive *Sesame Street*'s Lifetime Achievement Award from the Academy of Arts and Sciences last year in celebration of the shows 40th anniversary in September 2009.

Manzano was voted Volunteer of The Year by Project Sunshine in 2009. She, along with Al Roker, is one of Learning Leaders readers for their annual event at Lincoln Center. Manzano has also served on the Peabody Foundation and Symphony Space Boards, and is active with the Bronx River Alliance.

TOPICS:

- 1,2 3, Who Let Latinos on TV
- From the South Bronx to Sesame Street
- Would Elmo Make a Good Board Member?
- Can Muppets Read?
- Coping with Alzheimer's