

Miguel de Cervantes

Miguel de Cervantes served in the army as a soldier. During this time he was wounded in battle and lost the use of his left hand. Later the Moors took him prisoner and held him as a slave for five years. When they finally released him, he returned to Spain to pursue his writing career. He could not make a living as a writer, however, so he took a government job. While working at this job, he was wrongfully accused of taking money from the government accounts and had to spend a short time in prison. It was in this dreary atmosphere that he began work on *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. The first part of *Don Quijote* was published in 1605, and it was an immediate success.

Cervantes wrote *Don Quijote* to end the popularity of the ridiculous romances of chivalry. Seven hundred years earlier, Spain had been invaded by the Arabs. For centuries the Spaniards fought to expel them, finally succeeding at the Conquest of Granada in 1492. After this historic victory, numerous stories were written about the heroic knights. *Amadis de Gaula* was one of the most popular and best-written romances of chivalry. Because it was so popular, many other romances of chivalry were written, all filled with tales of exaggerated virtues and evils, perhaps not unlike the "Superman" movies of the 1980s.

As you read the play, note how the character of Don Quijote is portrayed as an idealist who is full of imagination. He is ready to slay giants and rescue damsels in distress. His faithful sidekick, Sancho Panza, tries to protect his master from danger. In contrast to his master, Sancho Panza can distinguish between fantasy and reality.

Today, if you travel through Spain, you will find these characters on display in the form of wooden carvings or paintings. In the United States, the play *The Man of La Mancha* was made popular as a musical. *Don Quijote de la Mancha* has been translated into many languages and is no doubt available in English in your local library.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Don Quijote de la Mancha

Discussion Questions:

1. One sometimes hears the expression, "You're tilting at windmills." After reading these skits, can you figure out the meaning of this phrase?
2. *Don Quijote de la Mancha* was published in two parts (1605 and 1615) and has become a famous classic that continues to offer insight on the human condition. As illustrated through the characters of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza, the human condition struggles to determine the difference between what two concepts?
3. What things does Don Quijote imagine about Aldonza? the windmill? the barber's basin?
4. Can you name any TV shows or movies that are based on fantasy?
Can you name any TV shows or movies that deal with fantasy versus reality?