

# Sonia Manzano

TRAILBLAZING ACTRESS, AUTHOR, AND ADVOCATE



## BACKGROUND

Born in the South Bronx, Sonia Manzano is of Puerto Rican descent and was raised in a vibrant, culturally rich community that nurtured her creativity and imagination. After seeing *West Side Story*, she was inspired to pursue a career in the performing arts, setting her on a path defined by passion and perseverance. She attended the High School of Performing Arts in Manhattan and later earned a scholarship to Carnegie Mellon University, where she refined her craft. During her junior year, she was selected to perform in a student-created musical called *Godspell*.

## CAREER

Manzano launched her professional career as a member of the original Broadway cast of *Godspell* before earning the role that would define her legacy—Maria on *Sesame Street*. For over four decades, she brought authenticity to the show, impacting generations of children since the early 1970s. Beyond acting, she became a writer for the series, returned to the stage in additional Broadway productions, appeared in film, and built a career as an author and producer. She is also the creator of *Alma's Way* on PBS and has received numerous honors.

## IMPACT

At a time when positive Latino representation on television was scarce, Manzano broke barriers by bringing visibility, dignity, and cultural pride to Latino identity and the Spanish language. As the first Latina to hold a long-standing television role, she became a powerful role model for millions of children worldwide. Her work helped reshape media representation and opened doors for future generations of Latino actors, writers, and creators.

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