

# **MEXICAN-INSPIRED PUPPETS TELL STORIES**

Cynthia Carlton

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Fairfax County Public Schools

Music/Drama

Grades 2/3

Students attend music class twice/week for 30 minutes. Six weeks are needed to complete the unit.

Each student will make a puppet from a gourd or wooden paddle. The students will work in small groups to act out the Mexican ballad, *Don Gato*, or an original mini-drama based on typical Mexican celebrations, *Las Posadas* or *Día de los Muertos*. Students will perform for their parents and peers.

## National Standards for Music Education:

Content Standard #1: singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

Students will sing expressively, with appropriate dynamics, phrasing, and interpretation.

Students will sing from memory songs representing genres and styles from diverse cultures.

Content Standard #7: evaluating music and music performances

Students will devise criteria for evaluating performances.

Content Standard #9: understanding music in relation to history and culture

Students will identify by genre or style aural examples of music from various historical periods and cultures.

## Fairfax County General Music Objectives for Second and Third Grade:

Objective 2.14: dramatize songs, stories, and poems

Objective 2.17: create sound effects to songs, poems, and stories

Objective 2.32: explore how vocal inflections change the meaning of a story, or song

Objective 2.34: respond to music through art

Objective 2.35: respond in a positive manner to the group effort of making music

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Objective 3.13: create movement which interprets poems, and stories

Objective 3.29: practice appropriate concert behavior as an actively involved listener

Objective 3.32: use terminology to express personal interpretation

Objective 3.33: explore folk songs and tales from various cultures

Objective 3.35: respond to music through art

Objective 3.36: dramatize children's literature through music and movement

Objective 3.37: contribute in a positive manner to the group effort of making music

## Materials:

**Stories:** *Señor Don Gato* by John Manders. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2003. Mexican folk

ballad with narration written by Cynthia Carlton (attached), 8 performers.

*Las Posadas* by Jennifer Blizin Gillis. Chicago, IL: Heinemann Library, 2002.

*Las Posadas* and *Día de los Muertos* – Original plays written by Cynthia Carlton (attached), 8–10 performers needed for each mini-drama.

**Gourds:** 2–3” gourds (natural shape or banana); must be smooth-surfaced

Try your local markets in the Spring when gourds have dried; order from Greg Leiser Farm

(<http://www.gourdfarmer.com>; these are sold un-cleaned), Welburn Gourd

(<http://www.welburngourdfarm.com>; these are sold cleaned or un-cleaned), or Foothills Farms

(<http://www.foothillsfarm.com>; these are sold un-cleaned); OR grow your own!

**Dremel Drill:** use flat, circular bit to cut ends off gourds, creating a flat surface; do not drill far into the neck of the gourd—it is nice to retain the seeds inside!

**Wooden Paddles,** flat face: purchase at AC Moore Co. or any arts and crafts store

**Fabric:** use fabric remnants and colored felt; purchase at any fabric or arts & crafts store

Cut fabric squares to approx. 7” x 7” for girl puppets.

Cut a rectangle approx. 3” x 8” for boy puppets.

Punch a small hole in center of fabric and felt pieces.

**Scissors:** cut the fabric hole to size for the paddle puppets (adult usage only)

**Dowels:** gourds will need a round hole drilled in small end for adding a dowel

**Glue Gun:** for adding fabric “clothing” to the puppets, ears, and for gripping the dowel to the gourds

**Permanent Markers:** students create faces on their wooden paddle or gourd puppets

Teacher may want to pre-paint a white oval on one side of the surface for the faces.

May choose to add to decoration to poncho, or paper Red Cross hats for doctors in *Don Gato*.

**Performance Platform:** long table set on its side, covered with black cloth, or any other creative solution

## Reference List:

Web sites:

Holiday Traditions of Mexico (short article):

[www.californiamall.com/holidaytraditions/traditions-mexico.htm](http://www.californiamall.com/holidaytraditions/traditions-mexico.htm)

Holidays and Fiestas in Mexico (list and description of most holidays):

[www.tomzap.com/holiday.html](http://www.tomzap.com/holiday.html)

Books:

dePaola, Tomie. *The Night of Las Posadas*. New York: Putnam's, 1999.

Kroll, Virginia. *Uno, Dos, Tres Posada: Let's Celebrate Christmas*. New York: Viking, 2006.

Levy, Janice. *I Remember Abuelito: A Day of the Dead Story*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co., 2007. [in English and Spanish]

Moehn, Heather. *World Holidays: A Watts Guide for Children*. New York: Franklin Watts, 2000.

Wade, Mary Dodson. *El Día de los Muertos*. New York: Children's Press, 2002.

## **Established Goals:**

Students will create puppets to dramatize two Mexican holidays and a Mexican ballad.

Students will work in small groups to prepare dramatic presentations.

Students will interpret stories using vocal inflection.

Students will devise criteria to evaluate performances.

## **Understandings:**

Students will learn about holidays in Mexico: *Las Posadas* and *Día de los Muertos*.

Students will sing *Don Gato*, a Mexican ballad, expressively.

Students will make puppets from natural materials using their own creativity for faces and costumes.

Students will understand how to prepare a dramatic interpretation of a song and mini-plays to communicate information.

Students will evaluate performances by devising criteria.

Students will listen actively and purposefully to gain and share knowledge.

## **Key Questions:**

Teacher:

What do I want students to understand about selected Mexican holidays?

With knowledge of reading ability and personal qualities, how will I place students?

How do I set up the rehearsal time?

How will I make a schedule of adult assistance during practices?

What are the criteria for dramatic speaking and how will I communicate these ideas?

Student:

How will students practice vocal inflection of dramatic interpretation of plays and song?

What evaluating criteria will students select to determine a great performance?

How will students support each other's learning and practice in their small groups?

What details should be included on individual puppets?

## **Assessment Evidence:**

Student will create a puppet to use in storytelling.

Student will memorize individual part for speaking dramatically, or for interpretive pantomime.

Student will create appropriate movement to dramatize his/her part.

Student will discuss and add sound effects to stories.

Student will identify customs and traditions of Mexico by discussion before and after puppet performances.

Student will self-assess progress with written response.

Student will perform for parents and peers.

## **Learning Plan:**

### **Set up interest and prior knowledge**

Read *Don Gato*, song/book by John Manders.

Share variety of puppets discovered in Mexico.

Ask students if any know of *Las Posadas* or *Día de los Muertos* celebrations.

Read *Las Posadas* by Jennifer Blizin Gillis.

Explain project.

## **Activities:**

### **Week One** (2 lessons):

Work on memorizing the ballad, *Don Gato*. Read mini-dramas, assign parts.

### **Week Two** (2 lessons):

Invite adult coaches to work with small groups throughout the practice period. Make a schedule.

Students practice in small groups. Continue to memorize *Don Gato*.

### **Week Three** (2 lessons):

Create puppets during Art class. Art teacher provides space and assistance.

Continue to practice parts in small groups. Memorize completely.

Take self-assessment (attached) with teacher direction.

Weeks Four and Five (4 lessons):

Practice ballad or mini-drama with puppets.

Practice in front of the class.

Students develop criteria to evaluate presentations:

Allow class to develop a list of qualities that should be present in a dramatic production. Teacher asks, *“What would you expect to see? What should a good speaker sound like? How does a performer project his or her voice?”*

Make class list visible for rehearsals. Before watching a rehearsal, ask individual students to comment on ONE quality (e.g., expressive speaking voice) when rehearsal is over. Students can help each other improve by giving feedback.

Week Six (2 lessons):

Practice presentations in front of class.

Observation, evaluation, and reflection.

Ready for performance!



## **STUDENT SELF ASSESSMENT**

### **Mini-Dramas and Don Gato**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. I am being a good listener as my team practices the play.**

☐ **YES**    ☐ **NO**    ☐ **SOMETIMES**

**2. I have memorized my part.**

☐ **YES**    ☐ **NO**    ☐ **I began to memorize**

**3. I am using my voice expressively.**

☐ **Yes, I am trying**    ☐ **I don't understand how**

**4. I am being a positive and helpful member of the group.**

☐ **YES**    ☐ **NO**    ☐ **I DON'T KNOW**

# LAS POSADAS

Original play written by Cynthia Carlton

(10 characters)

Characters: Narrators 1, 2, and 3, Mary, Joseph, donkey, 2 pilgrims, 2 innkeepers

Spanish vocabulary: *Las Posadas* – the inns

*Piñata* – decorated container of paper or pottery filled with candy and fruit

*Peregrinos* – pilgrims, the travelers who went house to house asking for lodging

*Burro* – donkey

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**Narrator 1:** *Bienvenidos!* This mini-play is called *Las Posadas*.

**Narrator 2:** The actors are Mary (wait), Joseph (wait), a donkey (wait), pilgrims (wait), and innkeepers. (While introducing, wait while each puppet pops up.)

**Narrator 1:** *Las Posadas* in Spanish means “the inns,” like.....like a motel!

**Narrator 3:** These are places someone can **stay** when they are **traveling**. (Ask audience:) Can YOU say it? *Las Posadas*? (Wait while they say it.)

**Narrator 2:** Let’s watch and see what happens.

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**Narrator 3:** It's December 16<sup>th</sup> in Mexico! A **grand** celebration is about to begin! For nine nights, neighbors act out the Christmas story of Mary and Joseph. All the travelers are called *peregrinos*. They are looking for lodging at an inn. (wooden drum, walking sounds)

Here's what MIGHT happen in a Mexican village.

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**Mary:** Joseph, I'm **very** tired. Would you find an **inn** where we can stop for the night?

**Joseph:** Mary, we HAVE tried and find them **all full**. Little *burro*, help Mary. You are strong and **you** can carry her until we find an inn.

**Donkey:** Yes, master. I am at your service.

**Narrator 3:** Other travelers joined them on their way.

**Pilgrims, Mary, Joseph, and Donkey:** (Sing in rhythm:) Please dear neighbor – we ask for shelter – our beloved Mary – cannot continue.

**Innkeepers:** This is no inn – continue on your way – we will not open – you may be a scoun - - - drel!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

**Pilgrims, Mary, Joseph, and Donkey:** Please dear neighbor - we ask for shelter – this is Joseph – his wife is Mary.

**Innkeepers:** Enter! Enter! We did not recognize you! Although our home is poor, we happily offer it to you.

**Pilgrims:** Hooray! Hooray!

**Innkeepers:** Join us for breaking the piñata. We'll have refreshments and dancing! (All dance to the maracas, then leave.)

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**Narrator 3:** Each night of *Las Posadas*, the community visits their neighbors like this celebration with prayers, food, and music.

**Narrator 1:** The **biggest** celebration is on December 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Narrator 2:** Hey, that's **Christmas Eve!** Mexican people sound bells, blow whistles, and..... (interrupted by Narrator 3)

**Narrator 3:** and **fireworks!** The community will attend a special mass at midnight. When they get home after mass, they eat a large meal. Holiday foods are special, and Mexicans LOVE to fix **good** food.

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**Innkeepers:** We love being the host for our neighbors. We acted this out to show what REALLY happened to Mary and Joseph as they traveled to Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

**Pilgrims:** We, the pilgrims, are called *peregrinos* in Spanish. We **also** were travelers, and had the privilege of being nearby when Jesus was born.

**Mary:** 2000 years ago, we had a **hard** time finding lodging in Bethlehem.

**Joseph:** Today, in Mexico, neighbors walk in a procession at night, singing a song that asks for lodging, to remember that time l – o – n – g ago.

**Donkey:** Then, each community celebrates. I LOVE the food part!

(Actors take a bow.)

(Narrators take a bow.)

# DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

Original play by Cynthia Carlton

(9 characters)

Characters: Narrators 1, 2, and 3, Speakers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6

Spanish vocabulary: *Angelitos* – “little angels,” or spirits of deceased children

*Pan dulce* –chewy, lightly sweetened bread topped with a sweet, decorative topping

*Calaveras* – skulls used for decoration during Día de los Muertos; some are made from sugar and eaten

*Papel picado* – Mexican folk art of cutting paper (often tissue paper) into elaborate designs to create banners that are commonly displayed for holidays, as well as during weddings and other parties

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**Narrator 1:** Bienvenidos! *Día de los Muertos* is a Mexican holiday celebrated every November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. Listen as we share fascinating facts about *Día de los Muertos*.

**Narrator 2:** Did you say *Día de los Muertos*? Don’t you mean Day of the Dead?

**Narrator 1:** Why……. yyyyes! Day of the Dead is what we would say in English. But we’ll also be talking about *angelitos*, *pan dulce*, *calaveras*, and *papel picado*!

**Narrator 3:** Now just a minute, just - a - minute! This is moving TOO fast.

Let's start at the very beginning.

**Narrator 1:** I'd like to introduce you to our storytellers (fill in with the names of student actors):

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
and \_\_\_\_\_.

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**Speaker 1: (very dramatically)** The gates of heaven opened wide at midnight on October 31<sup>st</sup>. Down came the *angelitos*.

**Speaker 2:** Aren't those the spirits of all the children who are gone?

**Speaker 1:** The *angelitos*, little angels, we would say. Yes! They spend 24 hours with their families. The families have been busy decorating with many things loved by their little *angelito*.

**Speaker 3:** Each person who is gone, is honored by their favorite toys, favorite food and drink, and brightly colored yellow, marigold flowers.

**Speaker 4:** Hey, what about the *calaveras*? You know, the..... skulls?

**Speaker 1:** Well, the powdered sugar skulls ARE very popular treats and tasty!  
Usually they have the names of the loved one on them. Ummmm –

*calaveras*. Those skulls and skeletons are used for decorating all over the place.

**Speaker 5:** Hi! This **is** interesting! You know, the skeletons are a reminder of all the people no longer living. Many Mexicans believe that if the spirits are happy, they will protect the family, and bring good fortune.

**Speaker 6:** Did YOU know Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> is called All Saints' Day? Then, on Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup> it's called All Souls' Day?

**Speaker 3:** Really? Two days of celebration?

**Speaker 4:** Yep - you got the picture!

**Speaker 5:** So, the Mexican people celebrate and remember their family members.

**Speaker 6:** Guess what? Even the cemeteries are busy those two days with **music**, and **picnics**, and **beautiful** flowers.

**Speaker 1:** At home there is a big fiesta. They serve good food, including *pan dulce* – which is a sweet bread. These memories are very important to the Mexican people.

**Speaker 2:** You can't forget the cut paper designs so popular in Mexico!



**Speaker 3:** Oh, yeah, they ARE colorful and easy to make.

**Speaker 4:** In Spanish, we call it *papel picado*. That means paper --- cut, **or**, cut paper.

**Speaker 5:** *Papel picado*. Nice words. (Nod.)

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**Narrator 1:** So, you think you know a lot of facts now? (All speakers nod.) You guys made learning about *Día de los Muertos* a lot of fun!

**Narrator 2:** Thanks to **ALL** of you.

**Narrator 3:** Well done!!!!

(Speakers take a bow.)

(Narrators take a bow.)

# **DON GATO**

A Mexican ballad

Narration by C. Carlton

**Narrator 1:** We'd like to share with you a ballad that we learned called ***Don Gato.***

**Narrator 2:** Don Gato means: Mr. Cat, a very **important** cat!

**Narrator 1:** A ballad tells a story by singing. Listen carefully to the lyrics as we present the sad tale with a happy ending.

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Song (All children but the actors sing the song from the book.)

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**Narrator 1:** Let's thank the performers for their expert pantomime. (Wait while puppets take a bow.)

**Narrator 2:** I'm glad Don Gato has 8 more cat lives!

**Narrator 1:** Me, too! We want this show to have a sparkly ending!

(Puppets and narrators take a bow by standing up!)