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

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:


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

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

   www.tomzap.com/holiday.html

Books:


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.
Narrator 3: It’s December 16th 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.

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 24th.

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 long ago.

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

(Actors take a bow.)

(Narrators take a bow.)
Narrator 1: Bienvenidos! Día de los Muertos is a Mexican holiday celebrated every November 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd}. 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…… yyyyyes! 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 31st. 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. 1st is called All Saints’ Day? Then, on Nov. 2nd 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

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!)