

FULBRIGHT-HAYS GROUP PROJECTS ABROAD

SEMINAR IN MEXICO: SUMMER, 2006

MÚSICA MEXICANA

AN EXPERIENTIAL CURRICULUM UNIT FOR
ELEMENTARY MUSIC EDUCATORS

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

This is a curriculum unit about Mexican music designed for elementary music educators. This lesson is based on a Fulbright-Hays seminar in Mexico that took place in the summer of 2006. During the seminar, participants (14 teachers of various subjects) got a first-hand look at the varied and intricate fine arts culture of Mexico. The subjects studied there included music, dance, textiles, visual art, culture, and politics. To describe the seminar as life-changing would be a severe understatement. The seminar had an enormous personal impact that I am unable to fully describe here. However, as I was impacted deeply on a personal level, my professional outlook was also enriched.

It is my belief that while many students are aware of Mexico and Mexican music, it is often a peripheral, perhaps stereotypical knowledge. In addition, students are frequently taught culture in a way that does not allow them to use it to connect with their own lives and the lives of others.

This highlights the concept of cultural authenticity, a subject on which I have previously researched and written.¹ Often, teachers who are pressed for time and energy do present culturally diverse materials, but may fail to present them in a way that is appropriately simplified yet in-depth enough to have an impact. My interest in and devotion to cultural authenticity deepened following the seminar, as I was exposed repeatedly to the disparity between the “Mexico” perceived by most Americans, and the Mexico that actually exists. These lessons are designed for the elementary music educator who is committed to honest and respectful presentation of Mexican music.

The Fulbright seminar was one in which participants quickly learned that it is difficult to isolate just one aspect of the arts with regard to Mexico, as fine arts in that country are intricately linked and work together. Thus, this unit is based on music but also includes elements of dance, visual art and other forms of expression.

The lessons included in this unit are designed to facilitate a cultural knowledge and expansion of awareness for fourth grade students (but can be adapted for students ranging from 2nd to 6th grades).

ASSUMPTIONS AND REQUIRED MATERIALS

While this unit is intended to be adaptable for elementary music educators with a variety of teaching styles and situations, some assumptions have been made:

- The educator has access to standard classroom materials, which may include a projector, a map, stereo/CD player, etc.

¹ Ford, M. 2004. *Expanding the Repertoire: A new definition of connoisseurship*. Unpublished article. University of North Texas.

- The educator uses a standard music textbook series, such as those published by Silver-Burdett or McMillan/McGraw-Hill.
- The educator has previously taught her students basic interpretive musical concepts such as the use of music to influence emotions or feelings.
- The educator sees her students 50 to 60 minutes a week.

UNIT OVERVIEW

The unit consists of three lessons. The first of these is historical and cultural in nature, and the others are more creative, using the experiences from the Fulbright Seminar and music presented there as a backdrop for more free-form, expressive lessons. As a musician, one of the things that impacted me personally in Mexico was the range of personal expression present in the fine arts. Not only were the arts a performance medium, but there was great value placed by “regular people” (those who were not performers by trade) on the importance of expressing oneself in an artistic way, whether through visual art, music, dance, or even in the decoration of one’s home. Traveling through the varied landscape of Mexico, this seemed to be a consistent theme in all the citizens and situations we encountered. As a musician and someone who believes strongly in freedom of personal expression, this had a significant impact on me, and I chose to use the power of expression to influence my lesson planning.

These lessons are experiential, designed so that the students take away a memorable, working knowledge of the culture being studied. While the lessons are light on musical concepts, it is my opinion that lessons such as these are equally important for the musical development of elementary students.

- *A lesson introducing students to traditional Mariachi music.* Instruments and musical styles are highlighted. I very much enjoyed learning about Mariachi while in Guadalajara. While it is impossible to describe the range of emotions and sentiments evoked by a superb mariachi performance, I thought it would be helpful to introduce mariachi music to young students. Even if the students are already familiar with the signature mariachi sound (as most people are), it will be helpful to give them a cultural context in which to place this music.
- *A lesson highlighting physical movement as a form of musical expression.* This lesson was inspired by my experiences in Mexico with various forms of dance, both the Ballet Folklórico and the modern dance group Delfos. In spending time with the Delfos dancers, I thought more seriously about how expressive my own body can be, both in subconscious body language as well as with deliberate movement. While modern dance does not always fit into regular parameters of what one might consider “dance,” the value is placed on the movement itself and how that physical expression relates to music. Since my late-elementary students often feel self-conscious about “dancing,” I felt that this value would translate well to young children.
- *A lesson encouraging self-reflection via music and art.* The final lesson helps students to examine their own perceptions of themselves by learning about Frida Kahlo and drawing their own self-portraits, inspired by music. I found myself deeply moved by my studies of Frida Kahlo, particularly her use of art to release feelings she could not otherwise express. Combined with a popular lesson of mine called “Drawing to Music,” this lesson helps students use the arts to connect with their feelings and emotions. While many of the details of Frida’s life may be

difficult (or inappropriate) to discuss with young children, I found two very good children's biographies that are suitable for use in the classroom.

Due to the varying and often harried nature of elementary music teaching schedules, this curriculum unit was designed with flexibility in mind. Each lesson may span one to two weeks, depending on the music teacher's schedule and how much she wishes to embellish or add information to each lesson. The lessons can also be used individually for the music educator who is pressed for time, or wishes to cover some of these musical aspects at other times during the year. These lessons were designed for a fourth grade class. However, depending on the teacher's creativity, these lessons can be adapted for students in grades 2 to 6.

Several of these lessons require additional resources from the teacher (ie., musical selections). Following the lesson plans is a section of references and resources. Here I have included those materials which have been most helpful to me and might be of use to the educator. Internet links have been provided whenever possible.

STANDARDS

This lesson covers many of the standards from the 4th grade Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Following is a summary of all the standards covered. Standards are also specifically noted in each lesson plan.

TEKS MUSIC STANDARDS

- (1) Perception. The student describes and analyzes musical sound and demonstrates musical artistry. The student is expected to:
 - a. Categorize a variety of musical sounds, including childrens' and adults' voices; woodwind, brass, string, percussion, keyboard, and electronic instruments, and instruments of various cultures.

- (2) Creative expression/performance. The student performs a varied repertoire of music. The student is expected to:
 - b. sing songs from diverse cultures and styles or play such songs on musical instruments.

- (5) Historical/cultural heritage. The student relates music to history, to society, and to culture. The student is expected to:
 - a. identify aurally-presented excerpts of music representing diverse genres, styles, periods, and cultures;
 - b. describe various music vocations and avocations;
 - c. perform music and movement from diverse cultures;
 - d. perform music representative of American and Texas heritage; and
 - e. identify concepts taught in the other fine arts and their relationships to music concepts.

TEKS MULTI-SUBJECT STANDARDS

§110.6. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND READING

- (1) Listening/speaking/purposes. The student listens actively and purposefully in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:
 - a. determine the purposes for listening such as to gain information, to solve problems, or to enjoy and appreciate (4-8).

- (5) Listening/speaking/culture. The student listens and speaks both to gain and share knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to:

- a. connect his/her own experiences, information, insights, and ideas with those of others through speaking and listening (4-8).
- (6) Listening/speaking/audiences. The student speaks clearly and appropriately to different audiences for different purposes and occasions.
- a. present dramatic interpretations of experiences, stories, poems, or plays to communicate (4-8).
- (15) Writing/purposes. The student writes for a variety of audiences and purposes, and in a variety of forms. The student is expected to:
- a. write to express, discover, record, develop, reflect on ideas, and to problem solve (4-8);
 - d. write to entertain such as to compose humorous poems or short stories (4-8).

§113.6. SOCIAL STUDIES

- (7) Geography. The student understands the concept of regions. The student is expected to:
- c. compare the regions of Texas with regions of the United States and other parts of the world.
- (20) Culture. The student understands the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups to Texas. The student is expected to:
- a. identify the similarities and differences within and among selected racial, ethnic, and religious groups in Texas;
 - b. identify customs, celebrations, and traditions of various culture groups in Texas.

§114.2. LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH, ELEMENTARY.

- (3) Cultures. The student gains knowledge and understanding of other cultures. The student is expected to:
- a. demonstrate an understanding of the practices (what people do) and how they are related to the perspectives (how people perceive things) of the cultures studied; and
 - b. demonstrate an understanding of the products (what people create) and how they are related to the perspectives (how people perceive things) of the cultures studied.

§117.14. ART

- (1) Perception. The student develops and organizes ideas from the environment. The student is expected to:
- c. communicate ideas about self, family, school, and community, using sensory knowledge and life experiences.

- (2) Creative expression/performance. The student expresses ideas through original artworks, using a variety of media with appropriate skill. The student is expected to:
 - a. integrate a variety of ideas about self, life events, family, and community in original artworks;
 - b. design original artworks.
- (3) Historical/cultural heritage. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture as records of human achievement. The student is expected to:
 - b. compare and contrast selected artworks from a variety of cultural settings.
- (4) Response/evaluation. The student makes informed judgments about personal artworks and the artworks of others. The student is expected to:
 - a. describe intent and form conclusions about personal artworks; and
 - b. interpret ideas and moods in original artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers and others.

§117.16. THEATRE

- (1) Perception. The student develops concepts about self, human relationships, and the environment, using elements of drama and conventions of theatre. The student is expected to:
 - a. respond to sounds, music, images, and the written word, using movement;
 - b. express emotions and ideas, using interpretive movements, sounds, and dialogue.
- (2) Creative expression/performance. The student interprets characters, using the voice and body expressively, and creates dramatizations. The student is expected to:
 - c. develop characters and assume roles in short improvised scenes, using imagination, personal experiences, heritage, literature, and history.
- (5) Response/evaluation. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances. The student is expected to:
 - c. compare and contrast the ways ideas and emotions are depicted in art, dance, music, and theatre and select movement, music, or visual elements to enhance classroom dramatizations.

LESSON ONE: AN INTRODUCTION TO MARIACHI MUSIC

GOALS

Students will learn the historical and cultural context of mariachi music, and will sing & perform a mariachi song.

STANDARDS (TEKS)

Music: 1A, 2B, 5A – E

Languages Other Than English, Elementary: 3A – B

Social Studies, Geography: 7C Culture: 20A – B

MATERIALS

CD or other music player, world map, at least one CD of authentic mariachi music (see “Additional Resources”), student mariachi song (i.e., from standard music textbook series)

PROCEDURES

1. Play an excerpt (about 30 seconds) of a mariachi song. Ask students if they can identify it by name (beyond, “Mexican music!”). If students are unaware, use the map or globe to show them where Mexico is.
2. Explain that the class will be learning about traditional mariachi music.
 - a. **What is mariachi music?** Mariachi music is the traditional music of Mexico.
 - b. **What do mariachis wear?** Performers often wear the charro costume.
 - c. **What do mariachis play?** In a mariachi group, there are as many as six to eight violins, two trumpets, and a guitar. Then there is a high-pitched, round-backed guitar called the vihuela, used for rhythm; a deep-voiced guitar called the guitarrón which serves as the bass of the ensemble; and a Mexican folk harp.²
 - d. **When do mariachis play?** The traditional music is used for celebrations: weddings, birthdays, quinceañera parties. Sometimes people dance along with the music.

² From the article, “History of the Mariachi,” <http://www.mariachi.org/history.html>

- e. **Is mariachi the only type of music from Mexico?** No. People in Mexico listen to banda music, reggaeton, salsa, classical and popular styles.
3. Play another example of mariachi music. Ask students the following questions:
 - a. What instruments do you hear?
 - b. What is the singing like?
 - c. What is the mood of the music?
4. Using the student textbooks, students can learn & sing a Mariachi song, using the guidelines suggested in the teacher's edition.
5. Students read lyrics and sing & perform the mariachi song in both Spanish and English.

ASSESSMENT

1. What is a mariachi group?
2. What instruments do they play?
3. What occasions do they play for?

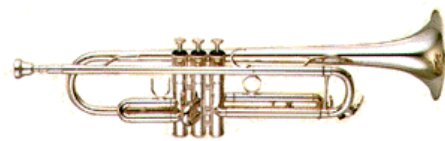
Mariachi Music



Guitarrón



Mariachis in their charros



Vihuela

LESSON TWO: TELLING A STORY WITH MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

GOALS

Students will make connections between bodily movement and music, and will interpret a piece, using their movements to tell a story.

STANDARDS (TEKS)

Music: 1A, 2B, 5A – E

Theater: 1A – B, 2C, 5C

English, Language Arts, and Reading: 1A, 5A, 6A, 15A

MATERIALS

CD or other music player, a selection of instrumental, but very expressive, music that is less than 2 minutes in length,³ a video of a Ballet Folklórico performance or other ballet/dance performance in which a story is told through dance/movement.

PROCEDURES

1. Review with students that there are different ways to tell a story, both with and without words.
2. Ask students if they can recall an incident where music, but not words, was used to explain what was happening in a story (i.e., scary music for horror movies, romantic music or silly music in cartoons, ballet dance, etc.).
3. Tell students that they will be using music and movement to tell a story without words (try to avoid using the word “dance.”)
4. Divide students into small groups and give them the following instructions:
 - a. In each group, choose one person to be the writer and one to be the presenter.
 - b. Listen to the music.
 - c. In your group, discuss what you think is happening (Are there people? Animals? Are they going somewhere, doing something? What?) The writer will jot down ideas.

³ Please see “Resources” section for suggestions.

- d. As a group (with everyone participating), act out what is happening in the story. Do not use words, only your bodies and gestures. Gestures and movements must match the music (ie., slow movements if the music is slow, fast movements if the music is fast, etc.).
5. Group Performances: The music plays, and the group members act out the action of the story. After they are done, the rest of the class must guess what the group was trying to act out. The “presenter” of the group tells the class whether they guessed correctly.
6. If students are particularly shy or self-conscious, the teacher can go around the class and personally assess each group’s performances while other students continue to work.

ASSESSMENT

1. Did the students’ story match the music?
2. Did the students’ movements accurately convey the story?

Name(s): _____

Telling a Story with Music and Movement

The music sounds like... (If you're stuck, here are some ideas: What's going on? Is it busy, sad, happy? Are there people or animals? What are they doing? How do they feel?)

Tell a story that matches the music and your answers above:

How will you act it out?

LESSON THREE: FRIDA KAHLO AND MUSICAL EXPRESSION

GOALS

Students will learn about Frida Kahlo, understand the value of self-portraits, and will make their own self-portraits based on their feelings about different types of music.

STANDARDS (TEKS)

Music: 1A, 2B, 5A – E

Art: 1C 2A – B, 3B, 4A – B

MATERIALS

CD or other music player, the attached worksheet template, examples of Frida Kahlo self-portraits, the children's book *Frida Kahlo: The Artist who Painted Herself*⁴ or other brief biography of Frida Kahlo, four contrasting styles of music (angry, sad, fast/dance, quiet), art supplies.

PROCEDURES

1. Explain to the students that they will be drawing and learning about a famous artist, Frida Kahlo.
2. Read the book *Frida Kahlo*.
3. Explain the concept of self-portraits and emphasize that most of Frida's pictures were self-portraits, made to describe how she felt at different times.
4. Show some slides of Frida's different self-portraits.
5. Introduce the attached template. Explain that the students will use music to make their self-portraits.
6. Play the first selection of music. Discuss briefly with the students what mood it is (happy, sad, dance, etc.) If students need help understanding the mood, ask them what you think people would be doing if they listened to the music (dancing, crying, sleeping, etc.). Try to encourage them without giving them too many "hints."

⁴ Please see "Resources" section for more details.

7. Tell students to answer the question in box number 1. In that box, they are to draw themselves and how they feel listening to the music. They can draw their faces showing how they feel (angry, sad, happy, sleepy), or they may draw themselves doing something along to the music.
8. After five or ten minutes, move on to the second selection – remind students that they can go back and finish their portraits later if they are not finished.
9. Repeat for each musical selection.
10. Allow students time to finish their page of portraits and add finishing touches.

ASSESSMENT

This lesson can be assessed both through review of the students' work, and orally using the following questions:

1. Who was Frida Kahlo?
2. What is a self-portrait?
3. What does it mean to say music has a “mood”?

Frida Kahlo – Self Portraits



Frida in 1926



Frida in 1947



Frida in 1938



Frida in 1940



Frida & her pet monkey, 1938

My Self Portraits – Different Versions of “Me”

| 1 | 2 |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | |
| What mood is this music? | What mood is this music? |
| 3 | 4 |
| | |
| What mood is this music? | What mood is this music? |

From Lesson Three: *Frida Kablo & Musical Expression*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

TEACHING RESOURCES

- Cavalier, D., Jurey, E.B., & Cruz, M.A., eds. 1994. [*Mexican Folk Dances \(World Dance Series\)*](#). Miami, FL: CPP/Belwin.
- Frith, Margaret. 2003. [*Frida Kablo: The Artist Who Painted Herself*](#). New York: Grosset & Dunlap.
- Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. 2004. [*Best of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán: Ultimate Collection*](#). Sony Music Corp.
- McMillain/McGraw-Hill Publishers. 2005. *Spotlight on Music – Textbook Series*.
- Prieto, C. & Quintana, E. 2001. [*Sonatas y Danzas de México*](#), Urtext Records.
- Winter, J. 2002. [*Frida*](#). New York: Arthur A. Levine books. (Available in English and Spanish.)

OTHER RESOURCES & REFERENCES

- Clark, S. 2005. "[Mariachi music as a symbol of culture in the United States.](#)" *International Journal of Music Education*, 23, 227-237.
- Del Conde, T. 2001. *Frida Kablo: La pintora y el mito*. Plaza & Janés; México, D.F.
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- Ford, M. 2004. "Expanding the Repertoire: A new definition of connoisseurship." Unpublished article. University of North Texas.
- Henze, R., Lucas, T., & Scott, B. 1998. "[Dancing with the monster: Teachers discuss racism, power and white privilege in education.](#)" *The Urban Review*, 30(3), 187-210.
- Herrera, H. 1983. [*Frida: A Biography of Frida Kablo*](#). New York: Harper Collins.
- Johnson, Sherry. 2000. "[Authenticity – Who needs it?](#)" *British Journal of Music Education*, 17: 277-286.
- Kuronuma, Y. & Olechowski, J. 2004. *Entre dos siglos: Música Mexicana*. Quindecim Recordings.
- Regelski, T. 2002. "[Critical education, culturalism and multiculturalism.](#)" *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*. 1(1), April 2002.

INTERNET RESOURCES

[¡Puro Mariachi!](http://www.mariachi.org/) Mariachi resources and information. <http://www.mariachi.org/>

[Education World Lesson Plans: The Beat of Mexico](http://www.education-world.com/a_lesson/01-1/lp234_03.shtml). Basic mariachi lesson plan for elementary students. http://www.education-world.com/a_lesson/01-1/lp234_03.shtml

[¡Mariachi Mania!](http://www.outreachworld.org/resource.asp?Curriculumid=399) Basic mariachi lesson plan for elementary students.

<http://www.outreachworld.org/resource.asp?Curriculumid=399>

[Mexican Music: Three Fun Songs for Children](http://cnx.org/content/m12599/latest/). Lesson plan by Catherine Schmidt-Jones.

<http://cnx.org/content/m12599/latest/> (Also see [“Musical Travels for Children”](#),

<http://cnx.org/content/col10221/latest/>)

[Music Kids](http://www.elbalero.gob.mx/pages_kids/music/music_kids.html). Sound clips of indigenous Mexican music from Nayarit, Sinaloa and Chiapas.

http://www.elbalero.gob.mx/pages_kids/music/music_kids.html

[Mexico for Kids](http://www.elbalero.gob.mx/index_kids.html). From the Mexican government: information about the country for children.

http://www.elbalero.gob.mx/index_kids.html