



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2006 Volume II: Latino Cultures and Communities

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## **Se Habla Espa-ol (También se Canta, se Baila, y se Escribe)**

Curriculum Unit 06.02.06  
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### **Introduction**

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I teach 7th and 8th grade Spanish in an inter-district magnet middle school in the urban New Haven Public School District. Across the district, there are 49 schools, with a student enrollment of more than 20,000. African American students make up more than half of enrolled students (54.82%), while Hispanics make up nearly one-third (30.95%). 11.08% of students are White, and the remaining students are from other backgrounds (NHPS).

New Haven represents the largest magnet district in the state, with 27 magnet schools. The magnet theme at my school is "communication and technology," and it is supported by a host of enrichment classes that focus on developing media literacy and technology skills. Whenever possible, I try to integrate technology into my lessons, and communication is always the primary objective of any Language learning.

As a Spanish teacher, the curriculum focuses around the 5 Cs. Communication is the most obvious goal, with Cultural understanding as a close second. The other three Cs include Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. The standards for Language learning ensure that students not only gain awareness of other peoples and practices, but also that they can analyze them and relate to them. It is nearly impossible to talk about any one of the Cs without at least touching upon another.

The ethnic makeup of my school reflects that of the city overall. The majority of students in my school are African American, while Latinos and European Americans make up the rest of the population. Students not only come from the immediate neighborhood, but other sections of the city as well. At least thirty percent of our students come from neighboring suburbs. Many of these suburbs vary greatly in terms of socio-economic classes, and have differing levels of ethnic and racial diversity.

My classes tend to be composed of higher-achieving students, and are generally heterogeneous in ethnic makeup. It can be a challenge to develop and present material that is interesting, educational, and relevant to the students. Because many of my students are not of Latino descent, they often feel that learning the Spanish language and about Spanish-speaking cultures is not relevant to them. It isn't unusual for any person (let alone a middle school aged child) to be resistant to the unfamiliar, so it is crucial that a connection is made in order to foster awareness, excitement, and growth.

By exploring the history of the Spanish-speaking world, and that of Latinos in the United States, through music, my students will have a frame of reference for understanding how and why these communities communicate as they do. This background knowledge will offer my students a view of Latinos that is relevant to their lives, and it will help them seek out comparisons and connections between other peoples and themselves.

I think it is very important for my students to understand the diversity of Latinos, and of Americans in general. By relating themselves to the music of Latinos (especially Afro-Latinos), students will gain a deeper interest and connection to the Spanish language and its community.

I have designed this unit to use with my seventh- and eighth-grade classes (Spanish I). While the language focus is rather simple (present-tense, general vocabulary), this unit may be adjusted to suit different students' needs. The basic theme of this unit is applicable to any level language class. Different songs and selections might be used to emphasize other (more complex) language concepts. Lyrical content should be considered as well, based upon the maturity level and general atmosphere of the class.

## Rationale

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It is sometimes difficult to catch a student's interest with just a tidbit of history or a random cultural fact. Linguistics is generally even less interesting to a middle-schooler. In order to pique curiosity and create excitement about a given topic, lessons need to be very interactive and engaging. Students need to relate to the material and develop a sincere interest in the subject. While most children succeed best with consistency and a rigid structure, variety is what keeps students from losing interest; the more variety in teaching techniques, the better!

Music is a way to reach others, regardless of the language. My students love music, and I know they will be excited to discover the connections between different cultures and languages through this medium. Music can also provide opportunities to learn vocabulary and grammar.

I've noticed that increasingly students will come into my classroom and ask me, "Se-orita Reyes, what does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?" Sometimes they ask about a word or phrase that they heard from a friend or family member, more often they are inquiring about a song lyric. Latino artists such as Daddy Yankee and Shakira are receiving as much airplay on English language programs as on their Spanish language counterparts. Even on television, channels are created for and marketed to the young Latino demographic by featuring programs in English, Spanish, and in many cases 'Spanglish.' With this media, the 'Latinization' of the United States has clearly reached mainstream pop culture. Now, more than ever, students are beginning to see the practicality of speaking Spanish.

In addition to the sometimes difficult task of motivating students, a major challenge in the classroom is removing oneself from U.S.- and Anglo- centered thought. Often my students try too hard to compare Spanish to English, or other cultures to their own. While comparisons can greatly improve understanding, they also can have the negative effect of creating an "us v. them" or "right v. wrong" mindset. It is imperative that students understand that all people are different, and that people create language, art, and music that is appropriate for them.

I have always been fascinated by Spanish and Latin American history, as well as with music, so I wanted to create a unit to help me share these passions with my students. I hope that by providing my students with history and works of art that they will understand and appreciate the uniqueness of the various Spanish-speaking cultures. The rich cultural history of Spain and Latin America will demonstrate the individuality of different peoples, and will allow students to see the world from different perspectives. History, along with examples of cultural traditions and cultural evolution (particularly musical ones) will prove to students that Spanish and Latino traditions have developed independently of U.S. culture, not as by-products or copies.

## Background

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### The Spanish-Speaking World

The Spanish-speaking world is very diverse historically, geographically, and culturally. Latin America is home to an amazing range of peoples, and it has contributed significantly to the formation of the United States as we know it today. I feel that it is very important for students understand the extensive history of Spain and the Spanish-speaking world, in order to understand and appreciate the diversity of Spanish and Latino culture and music.

#### *The Spanish*

Spain itself is a very interesting country, with a rich and varied history and culture of its own. The many peoples that populated Spain over time each brought with them different musical styles and instruments, as well as language, religion, and art. Knowing the history of Spanish culture and national identity is key to understanding the diversity of Latin America and the spectrum of cultures it reflects.

The original tribes of the Iberian Peninsula are generally referred to as the Iberians. They mixed with Celts that invaded the region in the eighth century B.C. to form the Celtiberians. The Celts brought their music, which relied heavily on the use of drums and pipes. Various Mediterranean peoples settled along the Mediterranean coast of the peninsula and created colonies there, while the migrant Gypsies of Roma camped throughout Iberia.

In the beginning of the Christian era, the Iberian Peninsula was part of the Roman Empire, and was named Hispania. The Vulgar Latin spoken eventually evolved into what we know as Spanish, which is now spoken by more than 400 million people around the globe (Infoplease). Much of what is commonly regarded as Spanish culture was developed during the Roman rule, particularly the Roman Catholic religion and the Spanish language.

The Germanic Visigoths had gained control of almost the entire peninsula by the early part of the fifth century. The Christian Visigoths persecuted Jews in the region until the Moors gained control of the greater part of the Iberian Peninsula in the early seventh century. The Moors were Muslims from northern Africa that had crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and moved northward through the region. The Moors maintained control for nearly 800 years. Under Muslim rule, Christians and Jews were not persecuted, but were taxed as non-Muslims.

In addition to their relative religious tolerance, the Moors were exceptional for their commitment to education

and the arts. Because Christians and Jews were allowed to practice their religions under Moorish rule, their cultures and customs thrived during this period. Musical traditions and styles were allowed to co-exist, and to influence one another. While the majority of Europe was living in the Dark Ages, Muslims were building libraries, mosques, and palaces, and introducing more efficient methods of farming in Hispania.

In the eleventh century, less tolerant Muslims were invading the region, prompting subjects to rebel. Although the *Reconquista* (the Christian Re-Conquest of Iberia) started within years of the Moorish invasion, it really gained momentum at this time, as people began to be persecuted once again. Christians regained control of Galicia (a region in northern Spain) in 739, and increasingly over time more of Spain was being liberated from Moorish occupation. King Ferdinand II of Aragon instituted the Spanish Inquisition in 1478. The *Reconquista* was completed in 1492 when King Ferdinand and his wife Queen Isabella of Castilla y Leon captured Granada, the last Moorish stronghold.

Moorish influence can still be seen in Spain, especially in the southern regions. Many of the architectural masterpieces created by the Moors remain, although mosques were converted into Catholic churches and cathedrals. Another lasting mark of the Moorish period is the flamenco music that is a fusion of European, Gypsy, and Islamic musical influences. One of the most important contributions to modern music is the guitar, which developed out of Middle-Eastern stringed instruments, and is the primary instrument used in flamenco music.

As explained above, the Spanish history and culture is very rich and complex. The musical styles of Spain are no exception to the incredible cultural collisions evident in various Spanish traditions. While each region in Spain boasts its own unique sound, the most famous and influential of Spanish musical styles is the flamenco. Flamenco is characterized by its distinctive guitar style and rhythm. Flamenco also refers to the style of singing as well as the dance that generally accompany the music.

Due to the lack of written music remaining from Celtic, Visigothic, or Moorish periods, we can only assume the connections and inspirations of Spanish music. We can generally infer that similarities in musical instruments and musical styles are due to different cultural, ethnic, and religious influences- and not just coincidence.

## **Expanding the Spanish World**

The year 1492 also marked the year that the Catholic monarchs expelled all the Jews from Spain, and sponsored Christopher Columbus' first voyage to the New World. Columbus explored several Caribbean islands and claimed 'Hispaniola' in 1492 for Spain. Subsequent voyages brought Columbus to Puerto Rico, Cuba, numerous other islands, and even the Central and South American mainlands.

Columbus' "discovery" of the New World, along with the unification of Spain by King Carlos I, created a foundation for the Spanish Empire. Many explorers and conquistadors followed Columbus' cue, and soon all but the most remote regions of Central and South America were being explored, colonized, and exploited. King Carlos I was the first to say that the sun never set on the Spanish Empire, as it included much of Europe, as well as most of the Americas, and parts of Asia and Africa during his reign.

The Spanish practiced forced conversion in its colonies, and indigenous peoples were generally not treated well. Independence movements swept Spanish America in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Ecuador was the first to claim independence from Spain, in August of 1809. By 1825, all but five Spanish territories had ceded from Spain. The empire eventually collapsed in 1898, with the loss of the Cuba and Puerto Rico in the

## Spanish-American War.

Naturally, the Spanish brought with them to the New World their language, religion, and other aspects of their culture. Not only were Spaniards bringing European and Middle Eastern goods and ideas to the New World, they were bring African goods as well as slaves. The Africans, of course, brought with them their languages, religions, and cultures.

During the Spanish colonial period (which lasted about 400 years), many Spaniards took indigenous wives to bear their children, and in many places, African slaves were also mixed in with the Spanish blood. This willingness to intermix set the Spanish apart from the English, though both were major colonial powers. The Spanish history differs greatly from that of the English settlers because the majority of Spaniards to cross the ocean were men, while the British colonists came to the New World as families. Additionally, the Spanish were more accustomed to the ethnic and cultural diversity they had known in Spain. Modern-day Latin Americans are usually of Spanish, Indigenous, and/or African descent. The term ' *La Raza*' (the race) is sometimes used to refer to the Latino population.<sup>1</sup>

Over time, Africans, Spaniards, and Native Americans exchanged ideas, words, foods, and customs (as well as DNA). The term "The Columbian Exchange" refers to the exchanges that occurred during the Colonial era. I think it is particularly interesting to note that many foods that we think of as being native to Latin America are, in fact, of African origin. Bananas, sugar, and coffee are all grown in the Americas, but were originally native to Africa. Many Latin rhythms and musical instruments are also originally African.

As in Spain (and anywhere else in the world), music styles vary greatly within Latin America. Latin American regions have distinctive musical styles that reflect and represent their unique ethnic, cultural, historical, and geographical traits. Some regions are more ethnically European, while others are predominantly Indigenous. Mestizo and Afro-Latinos can be found in various ratios as well.

Musical styles and traditions in Latin America are generally categorized by the rhythms, instrumentation, and singing incorporated. While music can vary widely from region to region, the commonality between Latin music is the hybridization of cultures found throughout. Caribbean regions tend to be more heavily influenced by African rhythms and instruments (particularly percussion) than non-Caribbean regions. Indigenous influences can be seen in most Latin American regions, but are more dominant in regions with higher Indigenous and Mestizo populations. In regions where residents are predominantly ethnic Europeans, the music tends to reflect this, and may show only small allusions to Indigenous or African styles.

Just as with the music of Spain, it is difficult to accurately determine the precise evolution of Latin American music. It is difficult to tell whether African music came into the Spanish colonies in its purest form, since most African slaves transported to the New World were held in various European ports before crossing the Atlantic Ocean. African slaves may have brought with them to the Caribbean islands a combination of African and European music. Similarly, it is hard to tell whether Spaniards came to the colonies with an African twist to their own Spanish music.

### *Spanish-Speakers in the United States*

There are many different definitions of the terms 'Latino,' 'Hispanic,' and 'Latin American.' 'Latino' may apply to people of Latin origins, in the United States, or abroad, depending on which definition you read. Usually, it is used in the United States to refer to people of Latin American origin. 'Hispanic' generally refers to people of

Spanish origin, although many Latin Americans have no Spanish blood in them. Some definitions include Brazil as being a Latin American nation, while others apply the term strictly to Spanish-speaking nations.<sup>2</sup>

The United States Census Bureau defines 'Hispanics' as people who originate from Spanish-speaking countries or regions. The Census Bureau notes that Hispanics may be of any race, and also uses the term 'Latino' to describe such people. More importantly than which term the U.S. Census uses to categorize people is the term with which people identify. More than 35 million people (excluding the 3.9 million U.S. residents of Puerto Rico) identified themselves as Hispanic/ Latino on the 2000 U.S. Census. The most recent estimates place the current number near 43 million (U.S. Census).

Of these 40-plus million self-proclaimed Latinos living in the U.S. today, more than half claim Mexican heritage (U.S. Census). This is true for two primary reasons; because most of the western half of the United States once belonged to Mexico, and because of immigration. Puerto Ricans make up the next largest group of Latinos in the U.S. The remainder of the United States' Latinos come from more than twenty nations, and bring with them their cultures as well as their language(s).

Latinos in the United States have as many musical traditions and styles as they have varying heritages. Many think of the *clave* as the beat that makes music *Latin music*. While this is one of the key factors in most Afro-Cuban and Afro-Cuban influenced music, it is one of many sounds that make Latin music unique.

Naturally, Mexicans were among the first Latinos in the U.S., and they continue to comprise a large portion of new immigrants. On February 2, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, ending the Mexican-American War. In addition to ending the war, the treaty gave about two-thirds of Mexico (which included Texas, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico) to the United States. Almost all of the 80,000 Mexicans who lived in these territories chose to stay on their land and were guaranteed under the terms of the Treaty the same rights as other U.S. citizens.

The United States took imperial power out of Spain's hands in 1898, with its victory in the Spanish-American War. Cuba became a republic, and Puerto Rico became a territory as a result. Cuba gained freedom in 1902, while Puerto Rico remains to this day a U.S. territory. Puerto Ricans joined the ranks of other Americans in 1917, when United States President Woodrow Wilson extended citizenship to residents of Puerto Rico. Since that time, several waves of immigration have helped to change the face of the U.S.

From the middle 1940s through the next twenty years, the U.S. saw a huge influx of Puerto Rican migration into the contiguous United States. The opportunity offered in the States lured many to leave the island behind. Their citizenship status and inexpensive airfare allowed Puerto Ricans to easily make the move to the mainland. Today, more Puerto Ricans live in New York City than in the Puerto Rican capital San Juan.

Beginning in the late 1950s, Cubans began immigrating to the U.S. to escape the Cuban Revolution. The largest numbers of Cubans immigrated to the United States in the years just after the Revolution ended, claiming political exile. Cuban immigration dropped sharply after 1962, but has had other significant waves since, most notably during the Mariel Boatlift of 1980 (Gonzalez 108-113).

Latin Americans from the Caribbean, and Central and South America have entered the United States for more than one hundred years, both legally and illegally. Large numbers of Panamanians began immigrating to the U.S. in the 1950s, and Colombians followed in the 1960s. The number of Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Hondurans entering the U.S. skyrocketed from the 1970s to the 1990s. People came from these Central American countries seeking refuge from the ongoing civil wars and political unrest in their homelands that had

claimed so many victims (Gonzalez 129-163). Currently, Colombians are among the fastest growing Latino populations within the U.S.

Latin American immigrants have a relatively new situation living in the United States in the twenty-first century. Travel between nations is in most cases easier than ever before, and modern technology has made it entirely possible for immigrants to maintain close communication with their native lands. In the past, immigrants brought their music and traditions with them, but newer technology allows them to access music from native regions currently, keeping cultural connections alive.

Interestingly, the Latino population's growth is not only due to immigration, but also to the aging of Americans in general. Latinos in the U.S. have a median age that is about ten years younger than that of the American population as a whole (U.S. Census). More and more Latinos are being born in the United States, while the rest of the population is growing older by comparison.

Spanish is the second most widely spoken language in the United States, after English. According to the U.S. Census, over 2 million people over the age of five years speak Spanish at home (U.S. Census). A report issued in 2002 listed the United States as the country with the fourth largest Spanish-speaking population in the world (Morton). Many experts predict that the U.S. will soon become the nation with the second largest Spanish-speaking population, following only Mexico in number.

### **Music of the United States (and the Latino Influence)**

The music of the United States has changed considerably since the founding of our nation in the eighteenth century. A multitude of musical styles and influences, as well as sound and technological innovations have helped to shape the music of today. While many Latinos are in the spotlight of the modern U.S. music scene, they have been historically influential behind the scenes as well.

Just as Spanish and Latin American music was created from a mix of influences, so was American music. The music of the United States has not remained unaffected by the diversity of the U.S. population, and has in many cases been irreversibly changed by it.

Syncopation is a major component of contemporary American music. Syncopation was at one time practically unheard of in the United States. Syncopation refers to placing the stress on a beat that is normally unstressed. There are several ways to create syncopated rhythms, by stressing, quickening, or skipping certain beats in a measure. Syncopation came to the U.S. from Africa, via Latin American music, and has become a defining quality in American music.

Jazz and Ragtime rely on syncopation as a staple of the musical style. American Jazz developed around the turn of the 20th century- in New Orleans. The Jazz form draws heavily from European and Latin influences. Many of the musicians in early American Jazz bands were Latinos, though segregation, discrimination, and language barriers limited opportunities for many.

In the United States, the Big-Band sound was very popular in the early part of the century, and many of the popular acts incorporated Latin themes, influences, and music. Cuban music became the standard for 'international' Latin music, affecting music in other Latin American regions as well as the U.S. (Morales 11). Rumba, habanera, Argentine tango, bolero, merengue, cumbia, and even the mambo that was so popular in the States during the 1950s and 1960s all have roots in Latin and African traditions.

Over the last hundred years, much has changed in American music, but syncopation has been consistently present. Originally percussion instruments (such as drums) created the syncopated beat in American music. Incorporating syncopation into piano playing became a major innovation and allowed a European instrument to be utilized to create a more African and Latin sound.

One of the most significant Latino musical contributions in recent history is Salsa music. Salsa emerged in the 1960s in New York, where Puerto Rican and Cuban immigrants created a sound unique to the U.S. By combining traditionally Caribbean rhythms and instruments with a more American pop-jazz-rock sound. This music is closely oriented with dancing, and has become a staple at many clubs in the U.S. (both Latin and non-Latin). Salsa is often called *música tropical* because of its relation to the Caribbean.

Since the early roots of Jazz, American music has moved through too many musical styles and fads to name. The most influential (in my opinion) American musical styles that have evolved from the original Jazz are R&B (Rhythm and Blues) and Rock 'n' Roll. From these two broad musical categories, countless musical genres have emerged. Most of today's Rock 'n' Roll relies on a melody of guitar riffs and syncopated bass lines. Modern R&B is a close relative to Hip Hop and layers lyrics on top of syncopated rhythms (primarily percussion).

Within the last ten to fifteen years, there has been a huge "Latin Explosion" of music, dance, food, and culture. The nineties brought us Jennifer Lopez and Ricky Martin, and put Latin music in the spotlight. Since then, Americans have become more aware of the Latinos singing, dancing, and even living among them. Popular American music now includes not only the rhythms that Latinos have brought to the U.S., but the musicians themselves. Whether singing (or rapping) in English or Spanish, Latino musicians have placed themselves in the mainstream of American Pop culture.

## Objectives

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I will integrate both Latino and Latino-influenced music into this unit in order to demonstrate the power of language to my students. This unit will primarily serve as a grammar review. We will reinforce the present tense of regular *-ar* , *-er* , and *-ir* Spanish verbs, as well as the present tense of the irregular verbs *estar* , *ser* , and *ir* .

By the end of the unit, students will be able to:

- Recognize and conjugate regular Spanish verbs ( *-ar* , *-er* , *-ir verbs*)
- Recognize and conjugate irregular Spanish verbs ( *estar* , *ser* , *ir*)
- Discuss and interpret (broad) history of Latin America
- Discuss and interpret history of Latinos in the U.S.
- Understand and Interpret Spanish music lyrics
- Identify and compare different music genres



## Strategies

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Through oral drills, written assignments, communication activities, and research projects, students will be able to understand and properly communicate Spanish. Music will provide a catalyst for the students' enthusiasm, and in turn, their learning. Listening to, comparing, and interpreting music will engage students and leave lasting impressions.

Strategies used will include:

- Practice the present tense endings of regular *-ar* , *-er* , and *-ir* verbs
- Practice present tense of irregular verbs
- Discuss historical implications of Latinos in the U.S.
- Listen to Latino and current Latino-influenced music
- Compare and contrast different musical genres
- Identify verbs used in songs
- Translate and interpret song lyrics
- Recognize vocabulary and grammar components
- Make connections between Latino music and themes

I will provide students with a cultural and historical background to use as a context for this lesson. This is not overly ambitious, because we will have discussed much of this in previous lessons. A good portion of the background will be review, and the rest will be in-depth looks at topics we've touched on earlier.

We'll not only listen to various Spanish and Latino music, but also listen to Latin-influenced American music. We'll read Spanish, Latin American, and Latino literature, and look at art of this type. We'll see (and hopefully do) Spanish and Latin American dances. We'll also examine Indigenous and African music, art, literature, and dance.

I think that students will really benefit from experiencing authentic cultural works. I imagine that students will be able to draw out conclusions about the exchange that takes place culturally when people migrate. I hope they'll think about how that has affected American culture as they understand it, and how it might change in the future.

I've chosen three lessons to highlight in this unit that represent different aspects of Latino culture. The three songs I selected are all at least somewhat familiar to my students, which will lessen the likelihood for resistance. Each lesson focuses on a different aspect of Latino culture, and represents a different musical style. I'd hoped to find a current song in Spanish that would appeal to my particular students, but was unable to do so. The songs I encountered were either too advanced grammatically, or were not age-appropriate in content.

The first lesson is based around the United States' national anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner*. The original version was a poem named 'The Defense of Fort McHenry,' written by Francis Scott Key in 1814. After witnessing the attack on Fort McHenry during the Battle of Baltimore, Key was so inspired by the sight of the American flag still flying, that he wrote the poem. Key's poem was set to the tune of an old English drinking song, and in 1931, *The Star-Spangled Banner* became the National Anthem of the United States (Star-Spangled-Banner).

Many versions of the song have been recorded, and sung by many people, in many languages. British record producer (and immigrant) Adam Kidron of Urban Box Office produced a Spanish-language version, *Nuestro Himno*. The anthem was recorded in 2006 by a variety of musical artists, including Pitbull, Carlos Ponce, Olga Ta-on, and Wyclef Jean. The song was recorded in response to the proposed immigration reform in the United States and released in time for major pro-immigration rallies; and it has been the focus of much controversy. Students will study both the English and Spanish lyrics, analyze each, and will discuss the need for a Spanish language version, and the implications of that.

The second lesson, *Guantanamera*, examines a traditional Cuban folk song. This song is a *guajira*, a type of song with strong Spanish influences, which relies on lyrics more so than melody. *Guajira* artists frequently improvise lyrics, as has happened with *Guantanamera*. Though the original music was written by José Fernández Díaz in 1928, and has any number of versions, the most well known lyrics were adapted by Julian Orbón in the 1940s. This version adapts its lyrics from Cuban writer José Martí's collection of poetry, *Versos Sencillos*, published in 1891.

José Martí was born in Cuba, when it was still under Spanish rule. He fought for Cuban independence, and spent time in prison as well as in exile, for speaking out against the Spanish government. Martí spent many years in Spain and in the United States. Martí is one of Cuba's most famous patriots and authors, and was killed while fighting against the Spanish in 1895. In the 1960s, American folk singer Pete Seeger brought the Cuban song to the American public. The song *Guantanamera* has become known as both a song of protest and as a song of patriotism, in the U.S. as well as in Cuba.

Although *Guantanamera* has been performed and recorded by countless artists, I've chosen to use Cuban singer Celia Cruz's version, with Orbón's/Martí's words. Celia Cruz (1925-2003) was born in Cuba and eventually, like Martí, left the island because of political reasons. Cruz spent the majority of her life in the U.S. and is one of the most famous voices in Salsa, but many of her songs had a strong sense of love and nostalgia for her native home. Students will discuss Cuba's fight for independence, and relate Martí's patriotism to that of Celia Cruz, to that of people generally.

The third lesson focuses around *La Bamba*, a traditional Mexican wedding song (and dance) from the Veracruz region. Like the *guajira*, *La Bamba* has a lyric structure that allows for improvisation and it is not uncommon to hear the basic tune sung with a variety of lyrics. Though *La Bamba* is often heard still, the accompanying *zapateado* (footwork) is no longer an integral part of the wedding celebration. This amazing dance (in which a newly married couple dance cooperatively to the song while using only their feet to tie a

long ribbon into a bow) can still be seen in *Ballet Folklórico* performances, as it remains a symbol of Mexican song and dance.

I have chosen to use Ritchie Valens' version of *La Bamba*, for its simple lyrics and as a way to explore Latino contributions to early Rock 'n' Roll. Ritchie Valens (1941-1958) was born Richard Valenzuela in California to Mexican-American parents. Valens changed his name to increase his chances for success, as many Latinos were discriminated against, and released his first single in 1958. Later that year, Valens released his biggest hit, *Donna*, with *La Bamba* as the B-side. Valens was only seventeen when he died in the famous plane crash that killed rockers Buddy Holly and the Big Bopper as well.

Though *La Bamba* wasn't Valens' biggest hit, it is the only Spanish-language song that made it onto *Rolling Stone Magazine's* list, "The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time," in November 2004. In 1987, Columbia Pictures released a dramatized biography of the young musician, titled *La Bamba*. The Mexican-American band, Los Lobos, made a cameo appearance in the film and released its own version of the song, refreshing the idea of Latin music as pop music.

Students will look at song as part of dance and tradition. Students will learn how Latinos have influenced popular American music, and will see how Latinos have sometimes had to sacrifice aspects of their own identities to conform to a sense of "American-ness." Students will learn about the tradition of *La Bamba* and draw comparisons to traditions in their own cultures.

## Classroom Activities

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This unit will be taught toward the end of the school year as a fun, interesting, and educational approach to reviewing the year's material. By this point in the year, students will already have a solid understanding of basic present-tense grammatical structures, and will be familiar with several aspects of vocabulary for daily use. This unit will provide a nice reinforcement that will allow students to actually see how the language they've learned can be used everyday.

The activities suggested below can be modified to suit any class' needs. Individual lessons may be taught at different points throughout the year, instead of as a unit. Other songs may be substituted, as may vocabulary and grammatical objectives. Songs may be selected to correspond with interdisciplinary lessons across the curriculum, and timed accordingly.

### Sample Lesson #1 Nuestro Himno (The Star-Spangled Banner- U.S. National Anthem)

*Duration:* 4-5 Days

*Objectives:* By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Discuss the meaning of *the Star-Spangled Banner* and interpret the English lyrics
- Analyze the reason for the creation of *Nuestro Himno*

- Identify Spanish words and phrases in *Nuestro Himno*
- Compare musical styles of two versions of U.S. National Anthem

#### Materials:

CD player, Spanish-English dictionaries, handouts, paper. Audio of both *The Star-Spangled Banner* and *Nuestro Himno* (available on CD, or online, as indicated in *Resources* ).

#### Activities:

Day 1- *Nuestro Himno* will be playing as students enter the classroom. Students will be given a handout with the lyrics of *The Star-Spangled Banner* , with many of the words missing. Students will individually fill in the missing English lyrics, and then we will correct them as a class. As a class, we will create a list of unfamiliar words to serve as an English vocabulary list. Students will then work in pairs to write a summary of the song, in their own words.

Day 2- Again, *Nuestro Himno* will be playing as students enter the classroom. Students will share their interpretations of the English lyrics with the class. We will then read a brief history of the writing of *The Star-Spangled Banner* (see *Resources*). As a class, we will discuss the meaning behind the anthem, and observe how the language used is very different from modern American English.

Day 3- As in the two previous days, the students will enter the classroom as *Nuestro Himno* plays. Students will be provided with lyric sheets to accompany the Spanish version of the National Anthem (with a Spanish-English glossary of unfamiliar words at the bottom). Students will take turns reading the Spanish lyrics aloud, while they underline familiar words. We will create a class list of familiar words, and attempt to piece together the meaning of the lyrics.

Day 4- Students will enter the classroom as *Nuestro Himno* plays. In pairs, students will compare the (provided) English translation of the lyrics to the original English lyrics. Students will discuss whether the Spanish translation is accurate, and which is more effective.

#### Closure:

Students will write an open-ended response to the question: 'Do you think it is a good idea to have a Spanish-language version of *The Star-Spangled Banner*? Explain why you feel this way.' Students should be able to write a clear response, and recall information and details about both the English- and Spanish-language versions of the anthem to support their opinions.

### **Sample Lesson #2 Guantanamera**

*Duration:* 5-6 Days

Objectives: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and compare important Cuban patriots (Celia Cruz and José Martí).
- Discuss tradition and nostalgia
- Conjugate and use the verb *ser*
- Create Spanish poems

*Materials:*

CD player, Spanish-English dictionaries, handouts (biographies, lyrics), paper. Audio of *Guantanamera* (available on CD, or online, as indicated in *Resources* ).

*Activities:*

Day1- *Guantanamera* will be playing as students enter the classroom. Students will review the verbs *ser* and *estar*. Students will do oral drills to reinforce the verb forms. Students will ask one another questions using these verbs, and answer each. We will then discuss a brief history of Cuba, and locate the island on a world map.

Day 2- Again, students will hear *Guantanamera* as they enter the room. After quickly reviewing *ser* and *estar*, students will be given short biographies to read. Half the class will read about Celia Cruz, while the remainder read about José Martí. Students will be paired (one that read about Cruz with one that read about Martí), and list similarities and differences between the two artists. Then, students will share their findings with the class.

Day 3- Students will listen to *Guantanamera* three times. The first time, they will simply listen to the lyrics. The second time, students will fill in missing lyrics. Students will have an opportunity to check their work or fill in additional information as they listen to the song for the third time. As a class, we'll correct the assignment. As a class, we'll look over the lyrics and translate them into English.

Day 4-5- Students will enter the classroom as the song plays. We will take turns reading the lyrics aloud, and then will sing *Guantanamera* as a class. Students will create their own short poems, using the *Versos Sencillos* as a model. Students will be expected to write in Spanish, using appropriate grammar and vocabulary. Students may need to work on this project at home in addition to in class.

*Closure:*

Students will read their poems aloud, in front of the class. Each student will be responsible for responding to the others' poems. This written response may be in the form of a question, comment, or compliment.

**Sample Lesson #3 La Bamba**

*Duration:* 3-4 Days

*Objectives:* By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Discuss history of Mexico and Mexican Americans
- Understand lyrics
- Discuss and interpret music, dance, and traditions
- Analyze importance of cultural awareness

#### Materials:

CD player, Spanish-English dictionaries, handouts, paper, ribbon or string, and scissors. Audio of *La Bamba* (available on CD, or online, as indicated in *Resources* ).

#### Activities:

Day 1- As students enter classroom, *La Bamba* will be playing. We will review the verb *ser* and its uses. We will read the lyrics of the song as a group, and translate them. Students will make a list (as a class) of what they 'know' about the song. We will locate Mexico on a world map, and again create a class list of 'facts.'

Day 2- Students will hear *La Bamba* as they enter the classroom, and review what they learned about the song. We will, as a class discuss Mexican/American history. Students will read about the tradition behind *La Bamba*, and a short biography of Ritchie Valens, which we'll then discuss as a class.

Day 3- Students will hear *La Bamba* playing as they enter class. Students will each be given a long piece (about 3 feet) of ribbon or string. Students will be grouped into pairs. Students will have to tie the ribbon into a bow using only one hand (the student's partner will help to make sure there is no cheating as the teacher walks around the class to observe). After allowing about 3 to 5 minutes for this task, the class will stop and everyone will say whether they were successful. Students will then be allowed to work together. Students will try to tie a ribbon into a bow, using one hand from each member of the pair. After 3 to 5 minutes, the class will stop and discuss whether this was easier or more difficult than the first task.

#### Closure:

Students will analyze the task of tying the ribbon. They will write a response to the lesson, describing the different aspects (listening to the music, learning the history, reading about Ritchie Valens, and tying the ribbon), and how they felt about each.

#### *Extension Activity:*

If time allows, show (excerpts from) the movie, *La Bamba*. Also, video footage of the dance being performed would be an excellent addition to the lesson. Many theaters host performances by different *Ballet Folklórico* troupes, and a field trip would be entertaining and educational.

## Notes

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1. Spanish & Colonial history is widely available, and was gathered from a variety of sources. Primary websites consulted include Wikipedia and Infoplease. Texts by Gonzalez, Stavans, Ochoa, and Kattán-Ibarra provided historical and cultural background for my research. Morales provided the bulk of musical history. See *Annotated Resources* for further information.
2. The introduction to Gonzalez's book, *Harvest of Empire*, considers the *Latino* and *Hispanic* labels. See chapter 9, "The Latino Imaginary," in Flores' book, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop*, for another perspective on these terms. I also address this issue in my 2005 curriculum unit, *Hispanic Heritage Month: What Are We Celebrating, Anyway? (Examining the Role that Culture Plays in Forming Identity)*. See *Annotated Resources* for more information.

## Works Cited & Annotated Resources for Teachers

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Carraher, Janice. "La Bamba Explained." [http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/travel/jcar/jcbamba.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/travel/jcar/jcbamba.html)

An interesting article explaining various traditional and typical Mexican songs and dances.

Flores, Juan. *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

A look at the way Puerto Rican culture has formed on and off the island. Examines the way Puerto Ricans have been portrayed over time, as well as their contributions to American culture as a whole. Chapter 9 is an interesting look at the concept of a 'Latino Community.'

Gonzalez, Juan. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.

A succinct look at the history of Latin America as well as Latinos within the U.S. Includes personal stories of Latinos that reflect various historical and cultural perspectives.

Kattán-Ibarra, Juan. *Perspectivas Culturales de España*. Chicago: National Textbook Company, 1995.

A concise history of Spain, beginning with the Paleolithic age. Explores not only historical, but also cultural developments in each period.

Montgomery, David. "An Anthem's Discordant Notes: Spanish Version of 'Star-Spangled Banner' Draws Strong Reactions." *Washington Post*. Friday, April 28, 2006; Page A01.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/27/AR2006042702505\\_2.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/27/AR2006042702505_2.html)

Discusses opposing viewpoints of the song.

Morales, Ed. *The Latin Beat: The Rhythms and Roots of Latin Music from Bossa Nova to Salsa and Beyond*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003.

A very interesting (and pretty clearly-written) look at the formation of Latin American music, and its influence and impact in the United States.

Morton, Linda. "Targeting Hispanic Americans." *Puerto Rican Herald*, 2002.  
<http://www.puertorico-herald.org/issues/2002/vol6n45/TargetHispAmer-en.shtml>

Statistics on the U.S. Latino population, and the impact they have on the consumer marketplace.

Ochoa, George. *The New York Public Library Amazing Hispanic American History: a Book of Answers for Kids*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998.

A great resource for adults as well as children. Filled with questions and answers on a variety of Latino topics. Very easy to navigate, and includes a glossary, index, and a list of excellent resources for finding more in-depth information on the topics.

Reyes, Alexandra. *Hispanic Heritage Month: What Are We Celebrating, Anyway? (Examining the Role that Culture Plays in Forming Identity)*. New Haven: Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, 2005. </curriculum/units/2005/2/05.02.06.x.html>

Curriculum unit with historical background. Explores concepts of identity, culture, and ethnic labels.

Stavans, Ilan. *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

A sharp, witty, illustrated history of Latinos in the United States. Begins with the Spanish Conquest of the New World, and continues from there.

"A Spanish Version of the 'Star-Spangled Banner'" April 28, 2006

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5369145>

A small write-up of *Nuestro Himno*, with lyrics and audio link.

"Has America Lost its Voice?" *The National Anthem Project*. <http://www.tnap.org/factsheet.html>

Survey addresses patriotism in the U.S. Interesting facts about the national Anthem and music education.

"Listen to 'Nuestro Himno'." *Washington Post*. Friday, April 28, 2006.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/audio/2006/04/28/AU2006042800499.html>

Offers audio of *Nuestro Himno*.

<http://www.actfl.org>

The official website of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Details national standards and guidelines for World language education.



<http://www.census.gov>

The U.S. Census Bureau's official website. Filled with fascinating facts on almost every aspect of the American population.

<http://www.classicbands.com>

Offers statistics and biographies of classic rock musicians.

<http://www.infoplease.com>

A website of encyclopedic information. Good for general history, common knowledge, and information.

<http://www.nhps.net/>

Official website of the New Haven Public Schools. Contains vision, mission statement, demographics of district.

<http://www.seekalyric.com>

Great site for looking up lyrics by artist or title.

<http://www.star-spangled-banner.info/>

The official website of 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' Lyrics, history, audio, and sheet music available for the U.S. National Anthem.

<http://wikipedia.org>

An amazing resource for information. Much of the content can be edited by the public, so the site contains a lot of information that other encyclopedia sites may miss (especially good for pop culture issues) and is updated frequently.

Cruz, Celia. *Irresistible*. Orfeon Records, 1995.

A compilation from Celia Cruz's Mexican tours in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Includes *Guantanamera*.

Valens, Ritchie. *Come On, Let's Go!* Del-Fi Records, 1998.

Original recordings remastered on CD. Includes *La Bamba*.

Various artists. *Somos Americanos*. Urban Box Office, 2006.

A compilation of songs by Latino artists. Features several versions of *Nuestro Himno*. A portion of all sales is donated to the National Capital Immigration Coalition and other immigrant rights groups.

*La Bamba*. Columbia Pictures Corporation, New Visions Pictures, 1987.

Engrossing PG-13 drama depicts the life of Ritchie Valens. Use your judgement if showing this to younger students.

## Annotated Student Resources

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Montgomery, David. "An Anthem's Discordant Notes: Spanish Version of 'Star-Spangled Banner' Draws Strong Reactions." *Washington Post* . Friday, April 28, 2006; Page A01.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/27/AR2006042702505\\_2.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/27/AR2006042702505_2.html)

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Audio of *Nuestro Himno*.

<http://www.star-spangled-banner.info/>

The official website of 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' Lyrics, history, audio, and sheet music available for the U.S. National Anthem.

## Suggested Classroom Materials

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- A world map
- A CD player
- Samples of different Latino music
- Lyric sheets for songs used
- Biographies of featured artists
- Ribbon or string
- Scissors
- A VHS or DVD player
- Video depicting relevant performances (musical, dance, etc.)

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