

# ***Estoy Aquí: Music of the Chicano Movement:***

*A Smithsonian Folkways Music Pathway for students in Grades 6–8.*



## ***Teacher’s Guide***

*Lesson Hub 4:*

*Mariachi and Conjunto: Symbols of Chicana/o Identity and Cultural Pride*

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### **Lesson Overview**

***Mariachi*** has several meanings: It can be used to describe a certain type of musician, a certain type of performing ensemble, and certain repertoire. A mariachi plays mariachi in a mariachi! What we now recognize as the mariachi sound began in rural areas of western Mexico and spread as people migrated from rural to more urban areas. Eventually, this music traveled even further by way of radio stations, movie studios, and record companies. Modern-day mariachi groups often perform at festivals, restaurants, and celebrations. Many US schools (especially in the Southwest) now have thriving mariachi programs.

***Conjunto*** is another term that has multiple meanings. In a general sense, it simply means “group” or “ensemble.” From this perspective, many different musical genres have related conjuntos (e.g., *conjunto norteño*, *conjunto jarocho*, *conjunto de arpa grande*). Within the context of this lesson, however, the term conjunto refers to a specific style of dance music that originated in south Texas and the group of musicians who play this music. Conjunto is characterized by its use of the accordion and the *bajo sexto* as the main instruments.

Within this lesson, students will learn about these two music traditions, which gained popularity in the United States during Chicano movement and are still important to Mexican American communities today. As students engage with music from the SFR collection (through attentive listening and dance / movement), they will become familiar with the instruments associated with each of these traditions and will learn about the historical context from which they emerged. Students will also deepen their understanding of the two genres by comparing their distinguishing features.

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## Lesson Paths and Student Objectives \*



### 1. Exploring Mariachi: An Enduring Cultural Symbol

(30+ minutes)

- Students will identify instruments associated with mariachi.
- Students will explain the historical and cultural context of mariachi.



### 2. Experiencing Conjunto: Dance Music from South Texas (25+ minutes)

- Students will identify instruments associated with conjunto.
- Students will explain the historical and cultural context of conjunto.
- Students will actively experience conjunto through dance.









### 3. Comparing Mariachi and Conjunto (15+ minutes)

- Students will identify similarities and differences between mariachi and conjunto.

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\*Note: The learning icons used above signify the type of learning used in each Path. Keep in mind that these Paths are not intended to be sequential; rather, teachers or students may choose which Paths they'd like to use from each Lesson. The time estimate given for each Path indicates "in class" time. The + indicates there are optional extension activities and/or a suggested homework assignment.

While all learning types ( History and Culture,  Music Listening,  Music Making and Creation, and  Creative Connections) fulfill 2014 National Music Standards, non-music teachers will be able to use  History and Culture and  Creative Connections Paths without specific musical knowledge.

## Teaching Plan



### Path 1: Exploring Mariachi: An Enduring Cultural Symbol

#### **To prepare:**

- Preview Path 1 of the **Lesson 4 Slideshow**.
- Print the "[¡Que viva el mariachi!](#)" article or arrange to have students read it from a screen (access at the link provided above).

**Process:** Guide student learning while facilitating the student slideshow.

- Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson landing page. If you are able to use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow” link just below that, which will not show the notes.

#### **1. Watch Video:**

Play the embedded SFR video, featuring Mariachi Los Camperos.

#### **2. Lead Discussion:**

A. *What instruments did you notice?*

- **Details about typical mariachi instrumentation are embedded in the slideshow.**

B. *Have you ever heard a mariachi group perform? Where?*

- **Discussion points are listed in the slideshow.**

C. *What do you think this song is about?*

- This is a medley of songs called “**México lindo**,” which means “Pretty Mexico,” and “**Viva México**,” which means “Long live Mexico.”
- The lyrics reflect the **pride** many Mexican Americans feel about their **cultural heritage**.
  - Here is an excerpt from the lyrics (with translation):

*México lindo y querido*

*Si muero lejos de ti*

*Que digan que estoy dormido*

*Y que me traigan aquí*

*Dear beautiful Mexico*

*If I die far from you*

*Tell them I am asleep*

*And to bring me home*

**3. Watch Video:** Play the video again. This time, students can reflect on a new guiding question:

- *In what ways (other than lyrics/language) do the musicians convey a feeling of pride in their cultural heritage?*
  - **Discussion points are embedded in the slideshow.**

**4. Read Article:**

This [short article](#) discusses the history of mariachi.

- A related activity can be facilitated in several ways:
  - Read aloud (students take turns)
  - Read to students
  - Students read independently
  - Students read with a partner or in a small group

**5. Share Information:**

**Use the information embedded in the slideshow** to provide additional information about the history of mariachi in the United States.

**6. Watch Video:**

Play the embedded SFR video, “What Makes a Good Mariachi?”

- If time allows, lead a short discussion about this topic.

**7. Think/Pair/Share Activity:**

- *What is mariachi?*
  - Students “think” individually about this question.
  - Students discuss their ideas with a partner or small group.
  - One group member “shares” an idea with the full class.
    - **Discussion points are provided in the slideshow.**

## **Path 2: Experiencing Conjunto: Dance Music from South Texas**



### **To prepare:**

- Preview Path 2 of the *Lesson 4 Slideshow*.

**Process:** Guide student learning while facilitating the student slideshow.

- Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson landing page. If you are able to use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow” link just below that, which will not show the notes.
- Scroll to the Path Menu slide (slide 3) and click on Path 2.

### **1. Engaged Listening (“El coco rayado”): Experience 1**

Play several 30–45-second clips from this recording, asking students to engage with the music in different ways:

- Pat or step on the beat
- Clap on the offbeat
- Identify and clap with the rhythm of the bass line

### **2. Engaged Listening (“El coco rayado”): Experience 2**

Listen again: This time, encourage students to sing along with the melody of the refrain when it occurs.

- Lyrics: “Que sí, que sí. Que no, que no. Ese coco rayado lo quiero yo”
- English Translation: Oh yes, oh yes. Oh no, oh no. I want that stripped coconut.
  - The full lyrics can be found in the liner notes here (pg. 23): <https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/folkways/artwork/SFW40477.pdf>.

### **3. Share Information**

Use the information provided in the slideshow to share musical, historical, and cultural context about conjunto music with students.

### **4. Active Music-Making Experience (Dance):**

Use the instructions provided in the slideshow to teach students a basic cumbia dance step:

- Learn the “feet”
- Learn the “arms”
- Try it with a partner
- Try it with the music

- A video showing a group of music educators learning this dance is embedded in the slideshow.

## **Path 3: Comparing Mariachi and Conjunto**



### **To prepare:**

- Preview Path 3 of the **Lesson 4 Slideshow**.
- Print the compare/contrast worksheet for each student (find below).

**Process:** Guide student learning while facilitating the student slideshow.

- Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson landing page. If you are able to use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow” link just below that, which will not show the notes.
- Scroll to the Path Menu slide (slide 3) and click on Path 3.

### **1. Attentive Listening Activity:**

- A. Pass out the compare/contrast worksheet.
  - B. Play the audio recording of “Mexico lindo,” (mariachi)
    - Students will write down observations of musical elements, expressive qualities, and historical cultural context.
  - C. Play the audio recording of “El coco rayado.” (conjunto)
    - Students will write down observations of musical elements, expressive qualities, and historical cultural context.
  - D. Finally, students will compare their observations. (how mariachi and conjunto are similar and different).
    - **A list of key similarities and differences is provided within the slideshow.**
    - A rubric for this activity can be found below.
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## **2014 National Music Standards Connections**

*MU:Pr4.1.a Demonstrate and explain how the selection of music to perform is influenced by personal interest, knowledge, context, and technical skill.*

- Can I interpret mariachi and conjunto performers' repertoire choices?

*MU:Pr4.2.a Explain how understanding the structure and the elements of music are used in music selected for performance.*

- Can I explain how the elements of music are used in mariachi and conjunto music?

*MU: Pr4.2.c Identify how cultural and historical context inform performances.*

- Can I explain how the cultural context of music affects the performance?

*MU:Pr4.3.a Demonstrate and explain how intent is conveyed through interpretive decisions and expressive qualities (such as dynamics, tempo, timbre, and articulation/style).*

- Can I explain why conjunto music inspires people to dance?

*MU:Pr5.1.b Rehearse to refine technical accuracy and expressive qualities to address challenges, and show improvement over time.*

- Can I practice the basic cumbia step and show improvement over time?
- Can I practice singing the refrain and show improvement over time?

*MU:Pr6.1.a Perform the music with technical accuracy to convey the creator's intent.*

- Can I demonstrate a basic cumbia step and sing the refrain accurately?

*MU:Pr6.1.b Demonstrate performance decorum and audience etiquette appropriate for the context, venue, genre, and style.*

- Can I engage with this music in a way similar to how it might be experienced in a dance hall (with a partner)?

*MU:Re7.1.a Demonstrate and explain, citing evidence, how selected music connects to and is influenced by specific interests, experiences, purposes, or contexts.*

- Can I explain the context within which this music been performed, and where is it performed today?

*MU:Re7.2.a Classify and explain how the elements of music and expressive qualities relate to the structure of contrasting pieces.*

- Can I identify and explain the instruments and other music elements used by mariachi and conjunto musicians?



***MU:Re7.2.b Identify the context of music from a variety of genres, cultures, and historical periods.***

- Can I identify the historical and performance context of mariachi and conjunto music?
- Can I identify and explain how the performance contexts of mariachi and conjunto differ?

***MU:Re8.1.a Describe a personal interpretation of contrasting works and explain how creators' and performers' application of the elements of music and expressive qualities, within genres and cultural and historical context, convey expressive intent.***

- Can I describe the “essence” of mariachi and conjunto?
- Can I explain how musicians convey expressive intent through this music?
- Can I identify and explain how the use of music elements and expressive qualities differ between mariachi and conjunto?

***MU:Re9.1.a Evaluate musical works and performances, applying established criteria, and explain appropriateness to the context, citing evidence from the elements of music.***

- Can I identify and explain the criteria that should be used to evaluate the quality of a mariachi or conjunto performance?

***MU:Cn11.0.a Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.***

- Can I describe what conjunto and mariachi music means to the Mexican American community and/or people who identify as Chicana/o/x?
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## **Additional Reading and Resources**

- Champion, D., De Leon, R., & Vidaurri, C. L. (1999). *Taquachito nights: Conjunto music from south Texas* [Liner notes]. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. <https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/folkways/artwork/SFW40477.pdf>.
- Galán, H. (1995). *Songs of the homeland* [Film]. Galán Incorporated Television & Film. <http://www.galantvfilm.com/store.html>
- Galán, H. (2001). *Accordion dreams* [Film]. PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/accordiondreams/all/>
- Knighton, E. J. (n.d.). Chips and salsa: A taste of mariachi music for the high school [Lesson plan]. *Smithsonian Folkways Recordings*. [https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/lesson\\_plans/FLP10010\\_mexico\\_mariachi\\_band.pdf](https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/lesson_plans/FLP10010_mexico_mariachi_band.pdf)
- Lin, J. (n.d.). Mariachi: Music from the heart of Mexico [Lesson plan]. *Smithsonian Folkways Recordings*. [https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/lesson\\_plans/FLP10013\\_mexico\\_mariachi\\_general.pdf](https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/lesson_plans/FLP10013_mexico_mariachi_general.pdf)
- Loza, S. (2019). *Barrio harmonics: Essays on Chicano/Latino music*. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press.
- Smithsonian Folkways Recordings (n.d.). ¡Que viva el mariachi!: Music, meaning, and movimiento. *Explore: Soundscapes*. <https://folkways.si.edu/que-viva-mariachi-meaning-movimiento/latin-world/music/article/smithsonian>
- Ragland, C., Peña, M., & Paredes, A. (1993). *Borderlands: From conjunto to chicken scratch* [Liner notes]. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. <https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/folkways/artwork/SFW40418.pdf>

Sheehy, D. (2002). *¡Viva el mariachi!*, by Nati Cano's Marichi Los Camperos [Liner notes].

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. <https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/folkways/artwork/SFW40459.pdf>

Sheehy, D. (2005). *¡Llegaron Los Camperos!* [Liner notes]. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

<https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/folkways/artwork/SFW40517.pdf>

Soto, A. C. (n.d.). Conjunto music from south Texas [Lesson plan]. *Smithsonian Folkways*

*Recordings*. [https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/lesson\\_plans/FLP10021\\_usa\\_conjunto.pdf](https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/lesson_plans/FLP10021_usa_conjunto.pdf)

Soto, A. C. (2008). Conjunto in the classroom. *Music Educators Journal*, 95(1), 54–59.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432108318482>

Worksheets  
**Compare and Contrast Worksheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

	“México lindo” medley <i>Mariachi Los Camperos</i>	“El coco rayado” <i>Rubén Vela y su Conjunto</i>	Comparing these songs, how are they similar or different?
<b>Timbre/Texture</b> (what instruments/sounds/style of singing do you hear? Language? Many instruments? Only a few instruments?)			
<b>Tempo/Dynamics</b> (fast, slow, does the tempo change, loud, soft, do the dynamics change, etc...)			
<b>Purpose and Use</b> (why do people usually perform this music? What is it for?)			
<b>Meaning</b> (what does the music mean to the people who enjoy it?)			
<b>Performance Context</b> (where is this music performed? What is the role of the audience? Are the musicians dressed in a certain way?)			
<b>Historical Connections</b> (where/when/how did this tradition develop?)			

# Mariachi and Conjunto Compare and Contrast Activity

2014 National Music Standards Documentation for this Learning Experience (5<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> Grade):

*MU:Re7.1.a Demonstrate and explain, citing evidence, how selected music connects to and is influenced by specific interests, experiences, purposes, or contexts.*

*MU:Re7.2.a Describe how the elements of music and expressive qualities relate to the structure of contrasting pieces.*

*MU:Re7.2.b Identify and compare the context of music from a variety of genres, cultures, and historical periods.*

*MU:Re8.1.a Demonstrate and explain how the expressive qualities (such as dynamics, tempo, timbre, and articulation) are used in performers' and personal interpretations to reflect expressive intent.*

*MU:Cn11.0.a Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.*

Suggested Rubric for Standards Documentation:

<b>4 = Exceeds Standard</b>	<b>3 = Meets Standard</b>	<b>2 = Approaching Standard</b>	<b>1 = Does Not Meet Standard</b>
<p><i>Using sophisticated descriptions or terminology</i>, the student accurately identified musical elements and expressive qualities within each selection.</p> <p><i>Using sophisticated descriptions or terminology</i>, the student accurately identified similarities and differences between ways in which musical elements and expressive qualities are used in mariachi and conjunto music.</p> <p>The student compared the historical and performance context of mariachi and conjunto in a <i>deep</i> and <i>thoughtful</i> way.</p>	<p>The student accurately identified musical elements and expressive qualities within each selection.</p> <p>The student accurately identified similarities and differences between ways in which musical elements and expressive qualities are used in mariachi and conjunto music.</p> <p>The student compared the historical and performance context of mariachi and conjunto.</p>	<p>The student identified <i>some</i> musical elements and expressive qualities within each selection.</p> <p>The student identified <i>some</i> similarities and differences related to musical elements, expressive qualities, and performance/historical context in mariachi and conjunto.</p>	<p>The student identified <i>few or none</i> of the musical elements and expressive qualities within each selection.</p> <p>The student <i>needed help</i> in order to compare the historical and performance context of mariachi and conjunto.</p>