

Fiesta Aquí, Fiesta Allá: Exploring Music and Dance in Puerto Rico, its Diaspora, and the Caribbean

A Smithsonian Folkways Learning Pathway for
students in Grades 9–12



Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2:

Música Jíbara Culture: Seis Music and Concursos

Lesson Overview

Música jíbara (“HEE-bah-rah”) is a genre of Puerto Rican music and a term that roughly translates to “country music.” Although the genre contains European influences from Spanish musical and literary forms, *música jíbara* is practiced in various contexts among Puerto Ricans of different cultural backgrounds.

This lesson explores *jíbaro* culture. It surveys the history of its development, describing the cultural exchange between Indigenous inhabitants and the Spanish *conquistadores* (colonizers) that led to the production of *música jíbara*, which is considered one of the most prominent Puerto Rican music genres. *Música Jíbara Culture: Seis Music and Concursos* studies the elements of what is called “*seis*” music, including improvisation in a form called “*décima*,” and explores its various performative contexts, focusing on *concursos* (competitive events). It gives a glimpse of the multifarious nature of Puerto Rican identity through examining the significance of *jíbaro* music and the role of *concursos* in the preservation, transmission, continuity, and innovation of this Puerto Rican form of cultural expression.

In This Guide

Lesson Overview	1
Lesson Components and Student Objectives*	2
Teaching Plan	3
2014 National Music Standards Connections	24
Additional Readings and Resources	26
Worksheets	27

Lesson Components and Student Objectives*



1. **Jíbaro Identity and Culture** (20+ minutes)

- Describe broadly what música jíbara is, and the various cultural influences from which it developed.
- Explain the contexts of música jíbara: island/diaspora; rural/urban; local/global; tradition/innovation; and ritual/secular.



2. **Seis Jíbaro** (20+ minutes)







- Describe how seis music relates to jíbaro culture.
- Identify the contexts of seis music performance.
- Identify musical elements and instruments associated with seis.



3. **Concursos: Décima Festivals** (30+ minutes)

- Explain what a concurso is and its relationship to seis music.
- Identify the criteria for a successful concurso performance.
- Write a décima, utilizing the typical features of its structure (ten lines, rhyming scheme, octosyllabic meter).

*Note: The learning icons used above signify the type of learning used in each Component. Keep in mind that these Components are not intended to be sequential; rather, teachers or students may choose which Components they'd like to use from each Lesson. The time estimate given for each component 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 Components without specific musical knowledge.

Teaching Plan

1. Component One: Jíbaro Identity and Culture



To prepare:

- Read through the component.
- Preview the **Lesson 2 Slideshow** (slides 1–17).
 - 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, which will not show the notes.)*

Slides 1–3: Information for the Teacher

Slide 4: Component 1 Introduction Slide: Jíbaro Identity and Culture

Slide 5: “El Alma de Puerto Rico”

A. Watch Video:

- Play the first two minutes (1:55) of the video "[El Alma de Puerto Rico](#)" by Ecos de Borinquen.
 - Tell students that this video features a staged performance and a recording session (two very different performance contexts); the music is presented as an authentic Puerto Rican genre called *musica jíbara* (“MOO-see-cah HEE-bah-rah”).
 - Note: If you have completed Lesson 1 (Exploring Puerto Rican Music and Dance), students have already watched this video - this opening activity serves as a good review.

B. Lead Discussion:

- Ask students to consider the following:
 - *Do you think this an urban or rural style? Who do you think listens to this type of music. (Música jíbara is originally the music of the jíbaro, the “**country folk**” of Puerto Rico. In this video, the “live” part of the performance takes place at some type of fiesta in a small mountain town (a rural setting). Today, however, this music is practiced all over Puerto Rico and its diaspora.)*
- Additional Context: Jíbaro music is widely considered one of the cornerstones of Puerto Rican identity. The music is associated with Christmas traditions: food, dance, and Fiestas de Reyes. Jíbaro culture comes to life during the Christmas season (Learn more in Lesson 3): *Parrandas*, similar to Christmas caroling, are a popular music practice during this time. Staged performances and competitions known as *concursos*, occur year-round, featuring musicians who play an

instrument called the “*cuatro*,” and *trovadores* (poet singers) who improvise in *décima*. Learn more about jíbaro culture and música jíbara on the slides that follow.

Slide 6: Jíbaro: “People of the Forest”

Share Information:

- The word **jíbaro** is a Taíno (Indigenous people of the island) word meaning “people of the forest” and has become a marker of identity in connection to Puerto Rican history and culture. The Taino were indigenous peoples who thrived on the island before the arrival of the Spanish.
- The term jíbaro once referred to Puerto Rican rural farmers of mixed-race ancestry, who accounted for the majority of the population until the 1930s. Nowadays it applies to Puerto Ricans of all ethnic and social backgrounds.
- In contemporary society, the jíbaro is a symbol Puerto Rican cultural pride, associated with core values (hard work, patriotism, and hospitality) and traditions.
- More about the image: Puerto Rican jíbaro (peasant) lifestyle is portrayed in this famous painting (El Velorio/The Wake) by Francisco Oller (also used in Lesson 1). This work presents a wake for the death of a child, called a “baquiné,” where you see people enjoying a celebration while parents weep and suffer the loss of their son. Through this work, Oller presents the social problems of the island, and depicts the rites of death in Puerto Rican culture. Find out more [here](#).

Slide 7: Who Are the jíbaros?

A. Discuss:

- “Jíbaro identity” is in many ways a construction based both in historical fact but also in myth told by the dominant culture
 - Ask students to discuss: *What is dominant culture? What is a dominant cultural narrative?*
 - **A dominant culture is one whose values, language, and ways of behaving are imposed on a subordinate culture or cultures through economic or political power. A dominant narrative is an explanation or story that is told in service of the dominant social group’s interests and ideologies.**
- The University of Michigan offers [activities](#) to discuss the idea of dominant culture/narrative.

B. Share Information:

- Famous literary works of poetry like the “Jíbaro's Verses” (Cabrera 1820) and “El Gíbaro” (Alonso 1849) presented romanticized ideas about peasant life and characterized jíbaros as rebellious and anti-establishment.

- Additional context (optional):
 - Miguel Cabrera, an educated Puerto Rican creole,* wrote the first documented mention of jíbaro character in *Coplas del Jíbaro* (The Jíbaro's Verses, 1820), a set of poems that criticized and mocked Spanish rule, Puerto Rican elites (e.g., Spaniards and creoles), and clerical authorities (i.e., Catholic Church).
 - * Creole historically referred to someone born in Puerto Rico to Spanish parents. Today, creole refers to all Puerto Rican natives of mixed heritage.
 - A. *The Jíbaro's Verses* were meant to give a symbolic voice to vulnerable social groups (e.g., enslaved Africans and peasant communities); ironically, the poems were written by a creole, with no ties to jíbaro culture beyond the romanticized ideas about peasant life.
 - B. Cabrera's depiction of jíbaro identity glorifies what creole liberalists perceived to be the anti-establishment attitude of a peasant, but his poems are only a small sample of many literary works about the jíbaro identity.
 - Manuel Alonso wrote *El Gibaro* (1849) using peasant idioms and linguistics. In it, he also describes different styles of jíbaro dances, including the *seis*. *El Gibaro* is considered Puerto Rico's first literary work, the book was essential in creating jíbaro traditions and music as icons of Puerto Rican national identity.

Slide 8: Who Are the jíbaros? (cont.)

A. Share Information:

- It is said that jíbaro communities were formed in approximately the late 1500s by settlers who desired to distance themselves from the constraints of Spanish governmental, racial, religious, and economic practices.
- Though they were independent, self-sufficient, and anti-establishment, dominant culture and dominant narratives characterized jíbaro culture and people as “uneducated,” “lazy,” and “irrelevant.”
- Additional Context: Dominant narratives also erased the jíbaro's mixed-race (blend of European, African, and Indigenous) origins, characterizing them solely as a white peasants who represented Puerto Rico's Hispanic heritage. Though jíbaro music has strong ties to European literary traditions (in particular the poetic strophe known as *décima*) and stringed instruments (such as the guitar, *cuatro*, and *tiple*), African—and to a lesser extent Indigenous—elements are intrinsic to jíbaro music and cultural practices as well.

B. Lead Discussion:

- *Can you think of a rural/peasant social group in the United States that suffers the same type of stigmatization, and who have made tremendous cultural contributions in the field of music?*
 - Students may come up with several answers, but you may also suggest: **the American hillbilly or Cajun.**
 - To learn about a rural/peasant social group that has been stigmatized despite their significant cultural contributions, see the Cajun and Zydeco music pathway.

Slide 9: What Is música jíbara?

Share Information:

- **Música jíbara is a broad term for Puerto Rican folk songs from the mountain regions and rural areas.**
 - It is an oral tradition rooted in rural creole culture, but also a product of social and cultural exchange among the native Puerto Rican Taíno, European settlers (predominantly from Spain), and people of African origin.
 - Música jíbara developed in the mountain regions of Puerto Rico, influenced by literary and musical forms brought to the island by early Spanish settlers during the colonial period.
 - The use of poetry and instruments, such as the guitar, signal its Spanish heritage.

Slide 10: Música jíbara: Aguinaldo and seis

Share Information:

- The repertory of música jíbara includes several musical forms of European and Caribbean origin, such as Spanish waltzes, polkas, and mazurkas, the guaracha, the Dominican merengue, and more recently, US jazz.
- There are two musical forms of música jíbara considered to be uniquely Puerto Rican in style and character: *aguinaldo* ("ah-ghee-NAHL-doe") and *seis* ("sayees").
 - The aguinaldo is associated with religious events (e.g., Christmas season, Thanksgiving, and Epiphany) and is explored more deeply in Lesson 3.
 - This lesson focuses on seis, a secular form of dance music that features sung poetry and the use of stringed instruments, drums, and other percussion.
 - The *décima* ("DAY-see-mah") is a poetic form of ten lines with a rhyme scheme of abbaa/ccddc. We will discuss the *décima* in Component 2.

Slide 11: Listen To seis

- A. Attentive Listening: Listen to an excerpt from "Y amo la libertad (And I Love Freedom)" by Ecos de Borinquen: *Can you hear the main musical characteristics of seis? (sung poetry, stringed instruments, drums, and other percussion)*

- *Note:* This excerpt is meant to provide a "taste" of seis. Learn much more about the origins and musical characteristics of seis in Component 2.
- B. Optional Engaged Listening: Prompt students to engage with the recording as they listen (clap, pat, step, dance, etc.)
- C. Additional context about the musicians (from the album liner notes):
For the past 35 years, Ecos de Borinquen has captured the soul of jíbaro music in its performances by crafting a delicate balance between tradition and innovation. In 2004, their record *Jíbaro Hasta el Hueso* was nominated for a Grammy in the Best World Music album category and a Latin Grammy in the Best Folk Music Album category, making it one of the most successful jíbaro recordings in history.

Slide 12: Música Jíbara, Migration, and Diaspora

Share Information:

- Música jíbara has been impacted by migration and globalization, two phenomena characteristic of the modern world.
- Migration outside of Puerto Rican boundaries has led to the creation of ***diasporic communities***, a term used to describe a population that has scattered voluntarily or forcibly away from its homeland.
 - Historically, the term was used to refer to the forced mass dispersion of Jews around the globe, but more recently, it represents any national, ethnic, or cultural group of people who identify with a homeland (e.g., Puerto Rico), but live outside of it (e.g., New York).
- Jíbaros migrated to urban centers in Puerto Rico and the United States (New York) looking for employment, thus affecting the social and cultural contexts within which música jíbara is produced, transmitted, and performed. Although música jíbara continues to be practiced in the countryside, it has also developed into an urban form of expression.

Slide 13: Diaspora and Musical “Authenticity”

Share Information:

- Puerto Ricans outside the island develop a new identity that fuses and reinterprets cultural elements of the homeland (e.g., Puerto Rico) and the host nation (e.g., Hawai’i).
- Diasporic communities are often preoccupied with perceptions of “authenticity” and go to great lengths to preserve, maintain, and transmit their musical traditions and customs.
- Sometimes, they aim to represent musical expressions as they were originally created and performed, rather than desiring change and embracing innovation.

Slide 14: Diaspora Discussion

Lead Discussion: Ask students to consider the following:

- *Are you or anyone you know members of a diaspora? (Diasporas are migrant communities that live outside the place they consider their homeland, but retain strong ties to their place of origin.)*
- *Based on the definition of diaspora, why do you think authenticity is such a crucial issue?*
 - **Authenticity is often important to diasporic communities because they feel the need to legitimize or prove that they are just as Puerto Rican (or Jewish, or Mexican, say) as those back home.**
 - **Issues of language, for example, for New-York-born Puerto Ricans (sometimes called “Nuyoricans”) can factor into one’s identity; speaking Spanish has been a point of contention between island-born Puerto Ricans and those born in the US.**
- *Do you think diasporic identities and music can be as “authentic” as the homeland’s? Why or why not?*
 - **Though the island of Puerto Rico is the place of origin for many Puerto Rican music genres, even the most traditional folk music (including jíbaro music) has been heavily impacted by migration to the US. Most of the recordings made by jíbaro music legends, such as Ramito “el cantor de la montaña,” were recorded in New York.**
 - **Other genres such as plena and salsa are purely a diasporic phenomenon, born from Puertorican immigrants to New York and other cities in the US.**
- *What is the relationship between the concepts of diaspora and the “American melting pot”?* **(The melting pot is an oft-used metaphor for the birth of the US as a Nation, a meeting point of different peoples coming together to form something new, a “fusion”).**

Slide 15: Globalization and Music

Share Information: The way that music crosses borders and establishes itself in a new location is also related to **globalization**.

- Globalization refers to flow or movement of people (i.e., social), ideas (i.e., cultural), money and goods (i.e., economic) between nations.
- This flow across national borders is rapid and large in scale, and it’s closely related to technological development (e.g., mass transportation, global telecommunications, the internet).

Slide 16: Globalization and Music (cont.)

- A. Share Information: Globalization accounts for countless cultural innovations including the creation of commercially successful popular styles of music such as reggaeton, a dance genre of popular music derived from Puerto Rican, Panamanian, Jamaican, Cuban, and Dominican cultural exchange.
- B. Lead Discussion:
- *How does globalization affect the way you listen to music?*
 - **Hints to guide discussion:**
 - **Before this lesson you had probably never heard of jíbaro music or Ecos de Borinquen, but you probably have heard of reggaeton icons Daddy Yankee and BadBunny. Reggaeton and other Latin genres such as salsa, bachata and cumbia circulate in the global market with great speed and range of influence that connects people at all corners of the earth.**
 - **Local sounds like jíbaro music, however, can also be found on Spotify, Youtube and Facebook, creating their own niches within the worldwide web and in circuits of world music performance (Smithsonian Folklife festivals, Womex, etc.)**

Slide 17: Learning Checkpoint:

- **What is “jíbaro identity”? (The term jíbaro is a marker of identity connected to Puerto Rican history and culture. Traditionally, it refers to rural farmers of white or mix-race ancestry. Today, it can apply to Puerto Ricans of all ethnic and social backgrounds. It is a symbol of Puerto Rican pride.)**
- **What is música jíbara, where did it originate, and what are its cultural influences? (Música jíbara is a broad term for Puerto Rican folk songs from mountain regions and rural areas. It is an oral tradition with Indigenous (Taíno), Spanish, and African influences. It contains literary forms such as décima poetry.)**
- **What are the two most common forms of música jíbara? (Aguinaldo and seis.)**
- **How do diaspora and globalization affect music?**
 - **As is the case with all diasporic musics, outside its place of origin, the way that música jíbara is produced, transmitted, and performed changes when it establishes itself in a new place.**

- **New identities are formed in diaspora, reinterpreting and fusing cultural elements from home (e.g., Puerto Rico) and the host nation (e.g., Hawai'i).**
- **The way that music crosses borders and establishes itself in a new location is also related to globalization. Technology ensures that this movement across borders is fast and large-scale, leading to countless cultural innovations including the creation of commercially successful popular types of music.**
- **In the case of Puerto Rico, migration—at least since the 1950's with the advent of commercial flights—has been circular, meaning there is a constant flux of Puerto Ricans moving between the Island and Diaspora communities in the US. This circular movement was crucial in the creation of music styles such as jíbaro music, plena, salsa, and reggaeton.**

Slide 18: Lesson Navigation Slide

2. Component Two: Seis Jíbaro



To prepare:

- Read through the component.
- Preview the **Lesson 2, Component 2 Slideshow** (slides 19–32).
 - 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, which will not show the notes.)*
- Optional: Print or prepare to view song lyrics ([find below](#)).

Slide 19: Component 2 Introduction Slide: Seis Jíbaro

Slide 20: What Is *música jíbara*?

Share Information: (If students did Component 1, this will be review).

Música jíbara (“MOO-see-cah HEE-bah-rah”) is a broad term for Puerto Rican folk songs from the mountain regions and rural areas.

- It is an oral tradition rooted in rural creole culture, but also a product of social and cultural exchange among the native Puerto Rican Taíno, European settlers (predominantly from Spain), and people of African origin.
- *Música jíbara* developed in the mountain regions of Puerto Rico, influenced by literary and musical forms brought to the island by early Spanish settlers during the colonial period.
- The use of poetry and instruments, such as the guitar, signal its Spanish heritage.

There are two musical forms of *música jíbara* considered to be uniquely Puerto Rican in style and character: *aguinaldo* (“ah-ghee-NAHL-doe”) and *seis* (“sayees”).

- The aguinaldo is associated with religious events (e.g., Christmas season, Thanksgiving, and Epiphany) and is explored more deeply in Lesson 3.
- This lesson focuses on seis, a secular form of dance music that features sung poetry and the use of stringed instruments, drums, and other percussion.
 - The *décima* (“DAY-see-mah”) is a poetic form of ten lines with a rhyme scheme of abbaa/ccddc. We will discuss the *décima* later in the lesson.
- *Jíbaro* identity in Puerto Rico and the diaspora is discussed in depth in Component 1.

Slide 21: What Is Seis?

Attentive Listening: Listen to several excerpts from “[Y amo la libertad \(And I Love Freedom\)](#)” by Ecos de Borinquen, an example of seis music. After each excerpt, pause the track and ask one of these questions:

- *Can you guess whether this type of music is for dancing or listening and why?*
 - **Though the rhythm of the seis is lively and was originally meant for dance, taste in dance music has changed, so today it is mostly for listening.**
 - **The seis is the primary medium for singers to craft poetic texts in a form called *décima*. Often these texts are improvised.**
- *What instruments or family of instruments are being performed?* (chordophones, including *cuatro* and six-stringed guitar; idiophones [percussion], including the *güiro* [“WEE-roë”]; and voice. Notice there are no drums.)
- *Does the sound express rural (countryside) or urban (city) culture; how?*
 - **Rural: uses acoustic instruments**
 - **Although students won’t notice unless they speak Spanish, you might want to mention that the lyrics are bucolic (e.g., countryside), express pride in rural identity (e.g., farmer), and concern mostly festive topics.**

Slide 22: What Is Seis? (cont.)

Attentive and Engaged Listening:

Play excerpts from the song again and ask:

- *Is this song in a major or minor key? (major, D Major)*
- *Can you sing the tonic or central pitch? (Listen to hear if students sing the correct pitch [D])*
- *Can you sing the bass line? (You may need to turn up the volume or boost the bass! A description of the bass line is included in the following question.)*
- *Optional [advanced]:* *Let’s see if we can hear what part each stringed instrument is playing:*
 - **Let’s sing the bass line again: The bass is outlining the chord sequence (Dmajor-Gmajor-Amajor), by playing the root and fifth in syncopated fashion (on the 2 and the end of 2).**
 - **Can you hear the high-pitched instrument? That’s a Puerto Rican instrument called the *cuatro*. It is playing a countermelody that intertwines with the singer.**
 - **The guitar is right in the middle, playing a syncopated bass line: the accent comes on the end of 4 (the “upbeat”) and 1. **note: It might be easier to hear the guitar in the instrumental section after the singer finishes the first verse.**

Slide 23: What Is Seis? Historical Connections

Share Information:

- The term *seis* (six) is likely tied to a Spanish religious ritual called *seises* (plural), a 16th-century Christian ritual practice from Seville, Spain.
- *Seises* were performed by six pairs of boys, dancing and singing before an altar during Corpus Christi and other religious events.
- The connection between both traditions is that early *seis* performances in Puerto Rico were performed for six dancing couples only, although it later included many more dancers.

Slide 24: Seis Is ...

Share Information:

- The *seis* is **one of the most prolific music genres in all Latin America**. There are over 100 styles of *seis*, including foreign varieties and many Puerto Rican ones that are no longer in use or are rarely used.
- In Puerto Rico, there are two main types of *seis*, one for dancing (fast and lively) and another for singing (slower), but several regional varieties of both exist.
- As a dancing category, Puerto Rican *seis* is influenced by various Spanish dances such as the *fandango*, a dance characterized by its use of *zapateado* (foot stomping) as an instrument.
- The different regional varieties of *seis* are named after numerous references to places, people, and other such markers of identification.
- A few examples include: *seis fajardeño* (“fa-har-DAY-nyoh”), named after the town of Fajardo; *seis de Andino* in honor of the person who popularized it; the name *seis chorreao* signals aspects of choreography; and *seis de controversia* (“con-troh-VER-seah”) refers to a duel between singers.

Slide 25: Seis in Context

A. Share information:

- *Seis* is played in both religious and secular contexts: weddings, patron saint feast days, baptisms, competitions, festivals, family gatherings.
- Over time, the *seis* lost its popularity as a dance form in jíbaro culture. Presently, it is primarily used as a medium for poetic and instrumental improvisation.

B. Attentive Listening: Listen to “Seis Fajardeño” by Cuerdas the Borinquen, from the album *Puerto Rico in Washington*.

- It features a **controversia** (controversy), where two singers trade verses and try to outdo one another.
- Consider printing out or displaying the lyrics/translation ([find below](#)), so students can follow along.

Slide 26: Seis jíbaro: Instruments

Share information:

- In seis music, melodic and harmonic materials are performed by members of the chordophone family.
 - They are the guitar, which is said to have originated in 16-century Spain, and the guitar-like *cuatro*.
- The *cuatro* is a folkloric string instrument and a national symbol of Puerto Rican identity.
 - The name derives from earlier versions of the instrument built with only four strings, or four double-courses of strings; however, the modern *cuatro* has five double-courses (ten) of metal strings, including two lower bass strings.

Slide 27: Seis jíbaro: Elements and Instruments

A. Share Information:

- Cuatro players are called *cuatristas* and are known for fast and virtuosic playing and improvisation skills.
- Improvisation is central to seis music. Innovations by modern *cuatristas* include the use of chromaticism (notes that are not in the scale) and jazz harmonies.
- Other seis instruments of the chordophone family are the *bordonúa* (bass), *tiple* (“TEE-play”), and *requinto* (“ray-KEEN-toe”), all adapted from the Spanish guitar.

B. Watch Video:

- This short video, which features “El Cuatro” by Ecos de Borinquen, illustrates this information.

Slide 28: Seis jíbaro: Listening for Harmony

A. Share Information: Seis music is typically written in major keys with relatively simple harmonic progressions (e.g., I–IV–V), and often include the so-called “Andalusian cadences” (I– \flat VII– \flat VI–V).

B. Engaged Listening:

- Listen to “Seis Fajardeño” again. Ask students to identify chord changes lifting one finger for the tonic chord, two for the subdominant, and three for the dominant.
Hint: I = 2 bars; IV = 2 bars; V = 4 bars.
- *Optional extension for music performance ensembles:* Play this I, IV, V chord progression on instruments.

Slide 29: Seis, trovadores, and décima

Share Information:

- Jíbaro ensembles include **trovadores** (“tro-bah-DOOR-ays”), poet-singers, who have mastered the art of improvisation.
 - Trovadores improvise on a wide range of themes, including bucolic scenes, religious references, patriotic sentiment, political commentary, and historic events, often using satire as a medium of expression.
 - Trovadores use a Spanish poetic form called *décima* (a ten-line strophe) to structure their compositions.
 - Those who master the *décima* can improvise over the ten-line scheme “on the spot.”
 - They can recite classic works from memory.
- Other types of *décima* singers are called **cantores** (En. cantors), who pre-compose their songs.
- Seis is a rich oral tradition; trovadores play an important role in the preservation and transmission of *décima*.

Slide 30: Seis jíbaro: Listening for Melody

A. Share Information:

- Each of the various styles of seis has a signature stock melody (a basic melody from which cuatristas improvise), which differentiates it from the others. The *seis fajardeño* (from the city of Fajardo) is one of the most popular styles chosen by trovadores to accompany *décima*.
- Stock melodies played on cuatro in the introduction of the song also serve as models for improvisation during interludes between the sung poetry and solo sections.

B. Attentive Listening:

- Play an excerpt from “Seis Fajardeño” by Cuerdas de Borinquen.
- Listen for the “stock melody.”

Slide 31: Seis jíbaro: More Instruments!

Share Information: Seis music is usually accompanied by two members of the idiophone family. They are the **güiro** (pronounced “WEE-roe”) and **maracas**, instruments that are widely used in various Latin American and Caribbean musical cultures.

- The *güiro* is an Indigenous instrument made from a thin, dried gourd that may be varnished or unfinished. It has small, equidistant grooves cut into the anterior face of the gourd, which are scraped with a *puya*, or long metal comb, producing a ratcheting sound.

- *Maracas*, also an Indigenous instrument, are rattles traditionally made of a dried calabash containing seeds, or any similar dried gourd that produces a rattling sound when shaken. Modern maracas are often made of leather, wood, or plastic.
- Modern ensembles also include electric bass, bongos (a pair of small, portable, open-bottomed drums of different sizes).

Slide 32: Learning Checkpoint

- *What are some of the most important characteristics of seis music?*
(improvisation, oral transmission, trovadores, virtuosic cuatristas, décima, simple repetitive chord progressions, signature stock melodies)
- *What instruments belong to the seis ensemble?* **(guitar, cuatro, güiro, maracas, bongos, sometimes electric bass)**
- *How does seis relate to música jíbara?* **(whereas música jíbara is a broad term for "rural Puerto Rican folk song," seis is a particular type of song that follows a certain structure. Many folk songs performed by jíbaros are "seis")**

Slide 33: Lesson Navigation Slide

3. Component Three: Concursos: Décima Festivals



To prepare:

- Read through the component.
- Preview the **Lesson 2, Component 3 Slideshow** (slides 34–47).
 - 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, which will not show the notes.*)

Slide 34: Component 3 Introduction Slide: Concursos: Décima Festivals

Slide 35: Watch and Listen: “Dialogos”

- A. Watch Video: Play “Dialogo” by Ecos de Borinquen (recorded at the 2005 Smithsonian Folklife Festival).
- B. Lead Discussion: *Why do you think this mini-documentary is called “dialogos” (dialogues)?*
 - **There is a dialogue between the singers (called trovadores – “troh-bah-DOOR-ays”)**–they are taking turns in this performance, the two singers take turns improvising, in conversation with one another.
 - **There is also a musical dialogue between the trovador and the musician (who is playing the *cuatro*).**
 - Note: If students did not complete Component 2, tell them that a *trovador* is a poet-singer who has mastered the art of improvisation, and a *cuatrista* (“kwa-TREE-stah”) is the musician who plays the *cuatro*, also with virtuosity and improvisation.

Slide 36: Concursos: Décima Festivals

Share Information:

- The term **concurso** (“kohn-KUR-soh”) means “competition” in Spanish and although it may not be a *fiesta* in the strict sense, today this festive staged event is the premier performance venue for *seis* improvisation and competition.
 - If students did not do Component 2 (or if they did, ask them if they can recall), explain that *seis* is a secular form of *música jíbara* (Puerto Rican country music) that features sung poetry and the use of stringed instruments, drums, and other percussion.
 - Concursos are organized regionally as well as on a national level, with over 90 competitions held in Puerto Rico yearly. There are also international trovador festivals.

- The great enthusiasm for this type of event highlights the central role improvisation plays in *seis* music as a living oral tradition and as a unique creative process and mode of making music.

Slide 37: Concursos: Décima Festivals

Share information:

- In concursos, cuatristas and trovadores create spontaneous compositions (i.e., improvisations) under the pressure of time, the demanding expectations of the audience, accompanying musicians, and a jury.
 - While winning a concurso is a great honor to the individual, these staged competitions are also central to the preservation, transmission, and longevity of *seis* music and culture.
 - Concursos have been compared to sporting events, where active audience participation is expected. Audiences help to create the thrill of the competition.
 - Although the idea of “authenticity” as a marker of value can be problematic (as discussed in Component 1), it continues to be an element on which participants are judged.

Slide 38: Cuatristas

Share Information:

- Trovadores improvise accompanied by virtuoso cuatristas, who perform cyclical harmonic and rhythmic patterns, as well as melodic interludes. In doing so, cuatristas engage singers in musical dialogue.
- Within the context of a concurso, the cuatrista is also judged on the ability to perform spontaneous variations on stock melodic patterns and to showcase creative ability during solo sections.

Slide 39: Audiences

Share Information:

- Concurso audiences include fans and occasional viewers, and old and young generations.
- Some are trying to rekindle their cultural ties with *jíbaro* music and may not fully understand the complexities of this oral folk tradition. However, they find joy in participating in the struggles and triumphs of trovadores as they duel off.
- Indeed, it is the virtuosity on the cuatro and the quick wit of the trovador that makes concursos such an ideal medium of performance not only for entertainment, but also for the transmission, preservation, and continuation of *seis* culture in Puerto Rico and its diasporas.

Slide 40: Judging a Concurso

Share information:

- Although the idea of “authenticity” as a marker of worth can be toxic, it continues to be an element on which participants are judged.
- One of the ways in which “authenticity” is measured during competition is based on the structural features of improvisation.
 - For a trovador, this means the masterly application of the *décima* (“DAY-see-mah”), the poetic form used in many seis performances.
 - Trovadores duel and try to outdo each other. This is known as *controversia* (“con-tro-VER-seah,” Eng.: controversy,) or *pico pico* (beak to beak) in reference to cock fighting, a favorite jíbaro pastime.
 - Equally important to *décima* improvisation is the *pie forzado* (“PEE-ey for-ZAH-doh,” literally, forced foot), a theme selected by the jury and announced publicly to the audience during a performance.

Slide 41: Listening for Décima**A. Share Information:**

- The name “*décima*” comes from the fact that the poetic form is made of ten (or *diez*) lines.
- To improvise their poetry successfully, a trovador must possess a clear idea of the formal features of the *décima*—its rhyme scheme, the octosyllable meter, and how it relates to the *pie forzado* (main theme)—as well as having intimate knowledge of the harmonic and rhythmic elements of seis music.
- The *pie forzado* of this example (shown on the slide) is freedom, and was suggested by an audience member:

<u>Décima Example</u>	<u>Rhyme Scheme</u>	<u>Translation</u>
Cual los pájaros del monte Los nómadas del espacio Entré ligero y despacio Sin fronteras ni horizonte. Como el parlero sinsonte Que ofrece a la humanidad Cofre de tonalidad En pentagrama divino Así pinto mi camino Y amo la libertad.	A B B A A C C D D C	Like the birds of the woodlands, Nomads of the sky, Flying easily yet slowly, Without frontiers or horizon. Like the prattling mockingbird Offering humankind A chest of tonality In divine staff. So do I trace my path, For I love freedom.
Excerpt from “Y amo la libertad (And I Love Freedom)” by Ecos de Borinquen		

B. Attentive Listening:

- Listen four times to the first *décima* from “Y amo la libertad,” focusing on a different feature of *décima* each time:
 1. Rhyme scheme
 2. Octosyllabic meter
 3. *pie forzado* (main theme)
 4. knowledge of harmonic and rhythmic elements (**hints: do you hear any repeated rhythmic patterns? Can you hear the syncopation? Can you hear the I, IV, V chord progression?** (re-visit Lesson Component 2 for more on this).
 - Note: This step can be skipped if the lesson is taught outside of a formal music classroom.

Slide 42: Write your own *Décima*!

Creative Connection:

- Following the structure (ten lines), rhyme (ABBAACDDC) and meter scheme (in general, octosyllabic), students will create their own *décimas* in English (or in Spanish, or another language if they prefer). Consider the following ideas:
 - Assign as homework.
 - Students choose their own *pie forzado* (theme).
 - Teacher chooses the theme (all students write about the same theme)
 - Each student comes up with an idea for a theme and places it in a hat/bowl. Students draw and have to write a *décima* about that topic.
 - Each student comes up with an idea for a theme and places it in a hat/bowl. The teacher draws one and all students write a *décima* about that topic.
 - Students can perform their rhymes for each other in a *controversia*.
- Extension for the music classroom: Add instruments to recreate the *seis* style: Use stringed instruments (piano/ukulele/guitar/etc) to play the I (2 bars), IV (2 bars), V (4 bars) chord progression, as well as percussion instruments. Students can speak (or sing, if they want to make up a melody) their *décimas* with this accompaniment. Students can re-visit the recording on the previous slide for ideas about rhythms and melodic patterns.

Slide 43: “Concurso de Trovadores” Winners

- A. Watch Video: Watch the embedded video (which was briefly introduced in Lesson 1 as an optional activity). It was recorded at the Bacardí Festival, which for over twenty years has sponsored the largest and most prestigious concurso, Concurso de Trovadores Bacardí.

- The trovadores in this video are the first-place winners from 1984-1998: they are singing a seis fajardeño (style of seis from Fajardo, Puerto Rico - visit Component 2 to learn more) accompanied by cuatros, guitar, *güiro*, and symphony orchestra.
- Notice the large stage, sound equipment, number of musicians, thousands of people in the audience, and that the video is recorded for TV broadcast.
 - As you watch, think once more about the criteria for a successful concurso performance: Use of structure (décima), effective improvisation related to the topic (pie forzado), and expression/audience engagement.

B. Discuss:

- You have limited experience with the structure (décima), you don't know the pie forzado (topic), and you may not speak the language ... but in your limited experience: *Does anyone in this group seem to "out-do" anyone else or engage the audience more than others? If they were competing against each other, who do you think would win?*

Slide 44: Décima, Beyond Puerto Rico

Share Information:

- As a popular poetic form, the décima is now firmly rooted in the musical traditions of many cultures, both in Spain and Latin America (including Portuguese-language décimas in Brazil).
- It is closely tied with live performance and, often, improvisation.
- International festivals, concursos, and television shows often bring together décima performers and musicians from various countries to share their related yet distinct traditions.
- Decimania, a non-profit organization in Puerto Rico has for several years been responsible for organizing one of the most important International Décima Festivals.
 - The annual event brings together Improvisers and singers of décima from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Colombia, Canary Islands, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Mexico, Panama and Spain.

Slide 45: Décima, Beyond Puerto Rico (Colombia)

Attentive Listening:

- Remind students: As you have learned in this lesson, in Puerto Rico, the décima stanza provides the structural basis for *seis* (an important musical form associated with *música jíbara*). Décima improvisers are known as trovadores.
- Listen to an example of how décima is sometimes used in Colombia (“Décima La Miseria Humana” by Los Gaiteros de San Jacinto).
 - *What main difference do you hear? (In Colombia, trovadores often improvise and sing décimas with no accompaniment)*

Slide 46: Décima, Beyond Puerto Rico (Mexico, Cuba, Chile)

A. Share Information:

- In **Mexico**, trovadores sing or recite décimas as part of a music tradition called *huapango arribeño*.
 - Huapango arribeño is a genre from the central mountainous region of México (which includes the states of Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, and Querétaro). Décimas are rhythmically recited in between sung choruses (either a cappella or over accompaniment), or they can be sung over accompaniment.
 - Note: Décimas are also an important part of *son jarocho* music (Mexico). Learn more about son jarocho in the Music of the Chicano Movement Pathway, [Lessons 9](#) and [11](#).
- In **Cuba**, improvisers are called *repentistas*, and décimas are performed within the context of *punto* music.
 - Punto is a music tradition from the rural regions of Western and Central Cuba. The name “Punto” refers to the use of a pick rather than strumming.
- In **Chile**, décimas are typically performed in as part of a tradition called *canto a la poeta*.
 - Canto a lo poeta: Cantores (singers) are traditionally accompanied by the 25-string Chilean guitarrón (often played by themselves) and/or a guitar. When singing about more mundane topics, their songs are known as canto a lo humano. These can take the form of versos por historia when the topic is a historical figure or event. When singing about religious topics, the songs are known as canto a lo divino.

B. Attentive Listening (Optional): If time allows, listen to a sample of the three embedded tracks.

- If taught in the context of a music classes, listen for how other music elements are applied (in addition to décima). For example: instrumentation, picking style, vocal timbre - sung or spoken, tempo, rhythmic patterns, structure/form, etc. **The most important takeaway for students is that the décima is important and popular far beyond Puerto Rico.**
 - “El huapango resplandece,” by Guillermo Velázquez y Los Leones de la Sierra de Xichú (Mexico) - **Listen for rhythmically recited décimas.**
 - “Pinar del rio y tabaco,” by Cuyaguaje (Cuba) - **Listen for the use of a pick instead of strumming.**
 - “Brindis por Violeta Parra,” by Hugo González (Chile) - **Listen for singing, accompanied by Chilean guitarrón.**

Slide 47: Lesson Component 3: Learning Checkpoint

- *What are concursos and what is their social function? (A concurso is a festive, staged, competitive event. It is a premier performance venue for seis improvisation and competition. They are often compared to sporting events because of audience participation, which adds a sense of excitement).*
- *What is the relationship between cuatristas and trovadores? (Within the context of a concurso, trovadores improvise, accompanied by cuatristas in a sort of musical dialogue).*
- *What is the structure of décima? (Formal features of the décima: rhyme scheme, octosyllable meter, pie forzado, harmonic and rhythmic elements).*
- *What are the criteria for a successful concurso performance? (Performances are judged based on improvisation and structure. Trovadores must master the use of the poetic form known as décima. Trovadores duel and try to outdo each other with their melodic and lyrical improvisations. Competitors must base their improvisations on the pie forzado (i.e., forced foot): a theme selected by the jury and announced publicly to the audience during a performance).*
- *How is décima used in other places around the world? (The décima is now firmly rooted in the musical traditions of many cultures, both in Spain and Latin America. International festivals, concursos and television shows often bring together décima performers and musicians from various countries to share their related yet distinct traditions. Some examples include: Colombia/no accompaniment, Mexico/ huapango Arribeño, Cuba/Punto, Chile/Canto a lo poeta).*

Slide 48: Lesson Navigation Slide

2014 National Music Standards Connections

MU:Cr1.1.E.Ia Compose and improvise ideas for melodies, rhythmic passages, and arrangements for specific purposes that reflect characteristic(s) of music from a variety of historical periods studied in rehearsal.

- Students will compose a *décima* that adheres to its formal features (structure, rhyme scheme, octosyllabic meter, *pie forzado*).

MU:Cr3.2.E.Ia Share personally developed melodies, rhythmic passages, and arrangements – individually or as an ensemble – that address identified purposes.

- Students will perform their *décimas*.

MU:Re7.2.E.Ia Explain how the analysis of passages and understanding the way the elements of music are manipulated inform the response to music.

- Students will identify how elements of music and expressive qualities are usually applied in *seis* music (song structure/form, rhythm, tonality, harmonic structure, instrumentation).
- Students will identify musical characteristics found in *seis* music that can be traced back to European, African, and Indigenous traditions.
- Students will identify how musical elements are applied when *décimas* are used in other places (Colombia, Mexico, Cuba, Chile).

MU:Re8.1.E.Ia Explain and support interpretations of the expressive intent and meaning of musical works, citing as evidence the treatment of the elements of music, contexts, (when appropriate) the setting of the text, and personal research.

- Students will explain the contexts within which *música jíbara* (and *seis* music specifically) was/is performed.
- Students will describe how *trovadores* and *cuatristas* use certain expressive qualities to convey expressive intent (e.g., improvisation, *décima*, *pie forzado*, *controversia*).

MU:Re9.1.E.Ia Evaluate works and performances based on personally- or collaboratively-developed criteria, including analysis of the structure and context.

- Students will explain the criteria upon which a *concurso* performance is judged.
- Students will use these criteria to evaluate the performance of *trovadores*, within the context of a *concurso*.

MU:Cn10.o.H.Ia Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.

- Students will explain how and why Puerto Ricans incorporated characteristics of European, Indigenous, and African traditions into the musical practice known as música jíbara.
- Students will make personal choices as they create and perform original décimas.

MU:Cn11.o.T.Ia Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

- Students will describe the historical development of música jíbara in Puerto Rico.
- Students will explain how and why música jíbara has been affected by diaspora and globalization.
- Students will explain several contexts within which seis music was/is performed.
- Students will identify characteristics of seis music that are also found in poetry.
- Can I explain the purpose and historical and cultural significance of concursos.
- Students will identify how décimas are used in several different music cultures.

Additional Readings and Resources

Bofill-Calero, Jaime O. 2013. "Improvisation in Jíbaro Music: A Structural Analysis." [PhD diss.], University of Arizona.

Jmedranoartcollection. January 10, 2015. "The Iconic Painting Called 'Velorio' by Francisco Oller." *Puerto Rico Art* (blog). *Puerto Rico Art Review & Art Collection*. <https://puertoricoartreview.com/2015/01/10/el-velorio-by-francisco-oller/#:~:text=Francisco%20Oller's%20El%20velorio%20%2F%20The,of%20de%20ath%20in%20our%20culture>.

Moore, Robin. 2010. *Music in the Hispanic Caribbean: Expressing Music, Expressing Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. 2022. "Inclusive Teaching." *Dominant Narratives*. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/dominant-narratives/>

Worksheets

“Seis Fajardeño” Lyrics/Translation by Cuerdas de Borinquen

(Victor)

Ay! siempre he soñado ser libre
Siempre he soñado ser libre
Allá en mi pequeño lar
Vi una décima cantar
De muchísimo calibre
Y dejé en ton que mi voz libre
Con respeto y seriedad
Y honreando su dignidad
Su prestigio y gallardía
Hoy está la patria mía
En pós de su libertad
Hoy está la patria mía
En pos de su libertad

Oh, I've always dreamed of freedom
I've always dreamed of freedom
Over there, in my little place
I saw a décima performed
One of high caliber
And with clarity, I let my voice lose
Respectfully and with sobriety
And honoring its dignity
Its prestige and gallantry
Today, my homeland exists
In search of its freedom
Today, my homeland exists
In search of its freedom

(Edicilio)

Con amor y frenesí
Con amor y frenesí
Te brindo un verso mi hermano
Y de ser un borincano
Estoy orgulloso si
Si mi patria para mi
Me brinda sinceridad
Ella brinda su amistad
Para los otros países
Y si miran sus matices
En pós de la libertad
Siempre llevan sus matices
En pós de la libertad

With love and in a frenzy
With love and in a frenzy
I offer a verse to you, my brother
And of being a Borinquen
I'm proud, yes
If to me, my homeland
Proffers sincerity
She offers friendship
To other countries
And if you notice its hues
In search of freedom
They always wear their hues
In search of freedom

(Victor)

Ay, no aplaudo la esclavitud
Ay, no aplaudo la esclavitud
Más la condeno, señor
Porque soy un trovador
Que Dios le dió por virtud
Predicar en su inquietud
En toda una eternidad
Y a toda capacidad
Le pido que no se asombre
Si ven cómo lucha un hombre
En pós de su libertad
Si ven cómo lucha un hombre
En pós de su libertad

Oh, I don't applaud slavery
I don't applaud slavery
However, I condemn it, sir
Because I'm a trovador
To whom God gave the virtue
To predicate in his restlessness
For an eternity
And in his full capacity
I ask you not to be surprised
To see a man struggle
In search of his freedom
If you see a man struggle
In search of his freedom