

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

A Smithsonian Folkways Music Pathway for
students in Grades 3–5.



Teacher's Guide

Lesson Hub 3:

Música Jíbara: Aguinaldo and the Season of Celebrations

Lesson Overview

In Puerto Rico, Christmas season is celebrated from the beginning of December through the second week of January. During this extended holiday, family and friends armed with guitars and an assortment of percussion instruments drive on a whim, late at night, to an unsuspecting friend's house. They wake their friends by banging vigorously on the door, goading them to join in singing, dancing, and merriment. This distinctive type of Puerto Rican Christmas caroling is known as *parranda* (or *trulla*, “troo-yah”). Traditionally, a *parranda* begins with a certain type of song known as an **aguinaldo** (“ah-ghee-NAL-doh”), which pays homage to the host.

Aguinaldo, meaning “gift” in Spanish, can be understood as a present that takes the form of song. The aguinaldo is one of the two most popular song types associated with *música jíbara* (Puerto Rican folk music). Within the festive context of *parranda*, it is offered in exchange for food and drink. Though the aguinaldo is primarily associated with the Christmas season, it is important to remember that its repertoire extends far beyond nativity-related themes. There are many aguinaldos about secular topics that are sung at different times during the year.

This lesson explores the aguinaldo, especially in the context of Christmas-related activities in Puerto Rico. It surveys the history of its development, describes its performance contexts, and features what is arguably the most widely celebrated liturgical event in Puerto Rico, *El Día de Los Reyes* (Epiphany). Students will identify instruments used in performances of aguinaldo, experience its musical characteristics (e.g., melody, rhythm, structure), and will even have an opportunity to write and perform their own *decimillas* (a poetic form used to structure aguinaldos).

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Lesson Paths and Student Objectives*



1. Aguinaldo and the Christmas Season (30+ minutes)

- Define *aguinaldo* and describe its relationship to the Christmas season in Puerto Rico.
- Explain the social significance of the *parranda/trulla/as alto navideño* tradition and its relationship to aguinaldos.



2. Experiencing Aguinaldo (30+ minutes)







- Describe the history and development of the Puerto Rican *aguinaldo*.
- Identify and demonstrate the characteristics of *decimilla* (a common poetic form used to structure aguinaldos).
- Within specific guidelines, compose and perform an original decimilla.



3. Instruments of Aguinaldo (20+ minutes)

- Identify the main instruments associated with aguinaldos in Puerto Rico.
- Explain how these instruments reflect the cultural influences of aguinaldo.

*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



1. Path One: Aguinaldo and the Christmas Season

To prepare:

- Read through the path.
- Preview Path 1 of the **Lesson 3 Slideshow** (slides 4–22).
 - 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 2–3: Information for the Teacher

Slide 4: Path 1 Introduction Slide – Aguinaldo and the Season of Celebrations

Slide 5: Opening Attentive Listening Activity: Aguinaldo

Listen and Discuss:

- Play a short excerpt from the embedded track (“Christmas Carol”).
- *Does this example sound like a Christmas carol to you? Why or why not?*
 - **Advance through the next several slides for more information.**

Slide 6: What is an Aguinaldo?

Share Information:

- The song you just heard (“Christmas Carol”), is an example of a song type called *aguinaldo* (pron. “aa-ghee-NAHL-doh”).
- **The term aguinaldo literally means “gift,”** and is often interpreted as Christmas gift.
- Puerto Ricans often sing aguinaldos as musical gifts during Christmas season. They are sometimes conceptualized as musical offerings, or *pagamento*, to the Three Kings in ritual celebrations, or as a musical offering to a host who is receiving musical guests.
 - *Pagamento* is a musical pact of sorts—it is offered in exchange for a granted wish asked to the kings. To learn more, read an article [HERE](#).
- It is important to note the aguinaldo is not exclusive to the Christmas season. For example, they were also used as music during *baquiné* (“bah-kee-NAY),” a funerary ritual practice rarely seen today.
- **However, the main focus of this lesson is on its context as an element of Christmas season festivities in Puerto Rico.**

Slide 7.1: Two Important Forms of *Música Jíbara*

Share Information:

- The aguinaldo is one of the two most popular genres of *música jíbara* ("MOO-see-kah HEE-bah-rah," folk music). It is important to note, however, that this genre is not exclusive to *música jíbara* (for example, aguinaldos are also played in the *plena* genre).
 - See Lesson 2 for more about seis ("sayees"), the other genre common in *música jíbara*. Seis is a secular form of dance music that features sung poetry and an ensemble comprised stringed instruments, drums, and other percussion.
 - **If you did not complete Lesson 2, consider clicking the down arrow for a quick overview of *música jíbara*.**

Slide 7.2: What Is *Música Jíbara*?

Share Information:

- ***Música jíbara*** is a broad term for Puerto Rican folk songs generally associated with 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 (indigenous peoples), European settlers (predominantly from Spain), and people of African origin.
 - *Música jíbara* is 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 8: Season of Celebrations!

Share Information:

- **Aguinaldos are very common throughout the entire Christmas season.**
- In Puerto Rico, Christmas (*Navidad*) season is celebrated from the first week of December to January 13 (six weeks!). Some highlights covered in this Path include:
 - Christmas Day
 - *Fiesta de Reyes* (Epiphany): January 6 for the Three Magi (Three Wise Men).
 - *Octavitas* (eight days after January 6, Three Kings celebrations also occur during this period).

Slide 9: Día de Navidad: Christmas Day

A. Share Information:

- Around Christmas Day, Catholic mass services (called *the misa de aguinaldo*) are celebrated with aguinaldos (here, meaning both songs and presents).

- Many families in Puerto Rico also gather together on Christmas Day to eat typical dishes and give presents.
 - Note: Learn more about how Christmas is celebrated in Puerto Rico in Lesson 10.

B. Attentive Listening:

- Listen to the embedded example of an aguinaldo that might be performed in this religious context (from Kacho Montalvo's ethnographic recordings from southwestern Puerto Rico).
 - Especially if you are teaching this Path in a music classroom, prompt students to listen for **call and response form** and **instruments** (**cuatro** [Puerto-Rican double-course guitar], **guitar**, and **güiro**).
 - These lyrics, which are sung throughout Latin America, are believed to be some of the oldest existing examples of this tradition:
 - La Virgen lavaba (the Virgin washed)
 - San Jose tendía (San Jose tended)
 - El niño lloraba (the child cried)
 - Joaquin lo meció (Joaquin/rocked him)

Slide 10: Día de los Reyes: The Three Kings / Epiphany

A. Share Information:

- More aguinaldos are sung on January 6th, when Día de los Reyes (Epiphany) is celebrated.
 - This *fiesta* is held in adoration of the Three Magi who, according to Christian lore, presented the newborn Jesus with offerings of myrrh, gold, and frankincense.
- Traditionally, Puerto Rican children receive additional gifts on January 6, delivered overnight by the Three Magi.
 - On the eve of the 5th, they place grass in shoeboxes for the Magi's camels to feed on.
 - The next morning, they wake up to find the gifts left by the Kings!
- For Día de Reyes, towns hold fiestas that involve Catholic mass and outdoor celebrations, food, music, and vendors.

B. Watch Video:

- To illustrate, watch the short, embedded video, within which, Lin Manuel Miranda describes how his family celebrates Three Kings Day.

Slide 11: Promesa de Reyes

A. Share Information:

- In Puerto Rico, many *promesas* are celebrated around the 6th of January.

- **A promesa, or “promise,” involves calling upon saints to protect, cure, and offer spiritual guidance.**
- In exchange, devotees offer prayers and *aguinaldo* as *pagamento* (payment or offering).

B. Watch Video:

- To illustrate, watch the short, embedded video of a promesa, held at someone’s house. While watching, ask students to consider:
 - *What do you notice about the environment?*
 - *What do you notice about the music?*
 - Hints to guide the discussion: In this video, there is a **combination of religious/secular and solemn/festive moments: People are praying the rosary, adorning the altar with wooden saints, flowers, and candles. People are eating, socializing, dancing, and singing aguinaldo** (which is a festive kind of music). Although a variety of instruments are played, the most prominent are the **cuatro and güiro, with singing.**
- For more information on “Promesa de Reyes,” teachers can watch [this excellent film, produced by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture](#) (approx. 40 minutes).

Slide 12: Talla de Santos

Share Information:

- *Promesas* are associated with other age-old artistic traditions, such as *talla de santos* (pron. “TAH-yah day SAHN-tohs”), wooden carvings / sculptures of saints (in this case, the Three Kings/Magi).
 - Note: Images of these are shown on the slide.
 - These sculptures adorn altars in people’s homes, and are maintained with flowers, candles, and other gifts throughout the year, as part of the promesa.

Slide 13: Puro Party! (More Fiestas)

Share Information:

- The *Fiesta de Reyes* generally marks the beginning of the end of the Christmas season.
- Although schools reopen and work resumes on January 7, the Puerto Rican festive spirit lingers on with *fiestas* held from January 6–8 to continue celebrating.
- This last set of *fiestas* are the *Octavas* (En. eighths), liturgical celebrations in remembrance of the Virgin Mary.
- The Octavas close Christmas–season celebrations; however, Octavas used to be followed by a lost practice known as *Octavitas* (En., Little Octavas), an additional eight-day celebration that connects Christmas season and Lent.

Slide 14: Season of Celebrations: Food!

Share Information:

- Like music, food is central to fiestas throughout the entire Christmas season in Puerto Rico.
 - Perhaps the most traditional dish associated with the season is the *lechón asado*, a piglet roasted on a spit over an open flame.
 - *Lechón asado* is served on *Nochebuena* (Christmas Eve), *Navidad* (Christmas Day), or *Fiesta de Reyes*.

Slide 15.1: Food and Fiestas: Popular Puerto Rican Cuisine

Share Information:

- Other examples of Puerto Rican cuisine include *arroz con gandules* (rice with pigeon peas), *arroz con dulce* (a kind of rice pudding), and *pasteles* (mashed plantains filled with meat and wrapped in boiled banana tree leaves).
 - Optional: Find out if any of your students have tried any of these dishes! Find some recipes [here](#).
- Common beverages include, rum, *pitorro* (a homemade and very potent liquor made from sugar cane), and *coquito* (made from coconut milk, rum, milk, and cinnamon).
- Additional context from author Cecilia Peterson (Consider reading to your students):
 - *As for the traditional Christmas Eve and Christmas feasts, my family would usually go to a friend’s house for Christmas Eve, where they had Puerto Rican food—coquito (eggnog made with coconut milk and rum), pasteles (like tamales, but with masa made with plantain and malanga root), arroz con gandules (rice and pigeon peas), plantains, and, of course, roast pork. For dessert, maybe some tembleque (“wobbly,” a panna-cotta-like coconut pudding).*
- **Food is so essential to fiestas that many songs have been written about Puerto Rican dishes.**
 - Optional: If time allows, click the down arrow to listen to aguinaldo about pasteles!

Slide 15.2: Food and Fiestas: “Si Me Dan Pasteles”

Attentive Listening (Optional):

- [Listen to this recording of a Puerto Rican aguinaldo about pasteles](#) (from the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Culture). The lyrics say:
 - “If you give me *pasteles* they’d better be hot, because cold pasteles give people stomachache!”
 - Note: Puerto Rican pasteles are a cornmeal–like food made of yucca root or banana, and one of the many African gastronomic influences introduced to Puerto Rico.

- [In her article](#), author Cecilia Peterson has this to say about the connection between food, and *aguinaldos* as forms of gifts and songs (read to students):
 - *The primary meaning of the word aguinaldo in Spanish is "Christmas present or gift." It is customary in most Spanish countries for people (especially children) to go from house to house on Christmas Eve, asking for sweets or gifts of any kind, and singing Christmas carols. As we see in many of the carols now published from Puerto Rico, the requests for sweets and other gifts are frequently incorporated in the carols which they sing. Here we see, then, the transition of the meaning 'present' or 'gift' to the song which asks it.*

Slide 16: Season of Celebration: Christmas Caroling

Share Information:

- The terms *parranda* (En., party, spree), *trulla* (En., fuss; pron. “TROO-yah”), and *asalto navideño* (En., Christmas assault; pron. “Ah-S AHL-toh nah-vee-DAYN-yo”) are used interchangeably. They refer to **Puerto Rican Christmas caroling**.
 - Aguinaldos are a very important part of this repertoire.
 - Parrandas happen throughout the six-week Christmas season in Puerto Rico.
 - **Advance to the next slide to learn more.**

Slide 17: Parranda!

A. Share Information:

- **The term *parranda* can also refer to the group of Christmas carolers** who perform spontaneous, raucous, late-night visits to friends’ homes during Christmas holidays.
- Importantly, *parranda* can be understood as a complex practice that creates social bonds and collective identity through partying, singing, eating, and drinking.
- Note: Learn more about the term *trulla*, which is, for the most part, synonymous with the term *parranda* (and actively participate in this tradition yourself), in Lesson 10.

B. Attentive Listening:

- Return to the audio recording that was introduced at the very beginning of this Path (“Christmas Carol”).
 - This time, have students close their eyes as they listen, imagining they have been awakened by a *parranda* singing this song at their door in the middle of the night.

Slide 18: “La Parranda Más Grande”

Watch Video:

- Watch approximately the first minute of the embedded video, “Parranda Más Grande de Puerto Rico.”
 - Performed in the town of Trujillo (pron. "Troo-HEE-yo"), Puerto Rico, **this is an example of a large parranda.**
- Remind students that the word parranda can describe the group, the activity, and the performance.
 - This parranda is taking place in the street of local neighborhood and has over 100 participants! They are performing the type of Christmas song we have been learning about - known as *aguinaldo puertorriqueño* (En. Puerto Rican aguinaldo).

Slide 19: Surprise! Asalto Navideño

Share Information:

- **Surprise is an essential element in parranda performance. That is why the unexpected act of strolling from house to house is known as *asalto* (assault).**
 - Note: Although the word “assault” has a negative connotation, in this context it means an unexpected positive event.
- To illustrate, read this short story to your students, within which, author Cecilia Peterson describes a Puerto Rican *asalto* scene:
 - *When my mom was growing up, no one was safe from a late-night asalto throughout these six weeks of celebration. Several times during the never-ending holiday, family, and friends—usually a cross-generational group—would grab a guitar, pile into cars, drive to a sleeping friend’s house, bang on the door, and start singing songs about roast pork and waking people up to dance. (This is not an exaggeration. One song titled “Pobre Lechón” is a jaunty song expressing remorse for a poor pig that was roasted). The victims would wake up and let the group in for more music and drinks. The hosts, now thoroughly partied out of their slumber, would then join the group in the next asalto of another unsuspecting household. This would continue all night, with the last house providing breakfast—often asopao de pollo, a soupy rice and chicken dish. If someone woke you up with an asalto, you would have to get them back another night. ‘There was definitely a payback element,’ my mom says. ‘By New Year’s, I was exhausted.’ One family friend would drive out of his way after every Christmas party to stand outside their house and sing aguinaldos under my grandparents’ bedroom window until the whole house woke up. Then he would jump back into his car and leave. Once he convinced a police officer to knock on the door, red lights flashing, and when the door finally*

opened, he made his escape. One late night, the only way my grandfather could get people out of the house was to lead a conga line right out of it.

Slide 20: Connections: Fiesta, Food, Family, and Friends

Discuss:

- According to author Cecilia Peterson, “There’s a reason so many aguinaldos mention food: it’s what keeps everyone upright when they’re being dragged out of their beds for a month and a half!”
- *Does your family have any special holiday traditions you would like to share about?*
 - Depending on the time you have available, students could share their thoughts with a partner, in small groups, as a whole class group, or even through writing or visual artwork.

Slide 21: Learning Checkpoint

- *What is an aguinaldo and how is it related to the Christmas season?*
 - **The term aguinaldo literally means “gift.” Puerto Ricans sing aguinaldos (songs) as musical gifts, which they often perform during Christmas season – which in Puerto Rico, lasts six weeks.**
- *What is parranda/trulla/asalto navideño and what is the social significance of this tradition?*
 - **Puerto Rican Christmas Caroling, with an added element of surprise. Parranda is a term that can describes the group, the activity, and the performance. Trulla means "noise/fuss". Asalto (assault) refers to the element of surprise. Importantly, parranda / trulla / asalto navideño can be understood as a complex practice that creates social bonds and collective identity through gathering, singing, eating, socializing, and celebrating.**
- *Why are so many aguinaldos written about food?*
 - **In Puerto Rico, food is central to Christmas season fiestas. Food is also related to the idea that sweets are often requested as gifts during parrandas.**

Slide 22: Lesson Navigation Slide

2. Path 2: Experiencing Aguinaldo



To prepare:

- Read through the path.
- Preview the **Lesson 3, Path 2 Slideshow** (slides 23–39).
 - 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 23: Path 2 Introduction Slide – Experiencing Aguinaldo

Slide 24: A Quick Review: Aguinaldos

Share Information:

- In Path 1 we learned that an *aguinaldo* (pron. “ah-ghee-NAHL-doh”) is a type of song that is very common during the Christmas season in Puerto Rico.
- They are sometimes performed in the context of *parranda* (this term can refer to a group, the activity, and / or the performance of Christmas caroling in Puerto Rico).
- The aguinaldo is one of the two most popular song types of *música jíbara* (“MOO-see-kah HEE-bah-rah,” folk music).
 - Note: Learn more about *música jíbara* in general and *seis*: the other important song form associated with *música jíbara* in Lesson 2.
- Some additional contextual information: In Puerto Rico, Christmas (Navidad) season is celebrated from the first week of December to January 13 (six weeks!). Some people say Puerto Rico has the longest Christmas Season in the world!
 - Although aguinaldo is one of the most important song forms associated with *música jíbara*, it is not exclusive to *música jíbara*. For example, aguinaldos are also played in the plena genre (learn more about plena in Lesson 4).

Slide 25: Experiencing Aguinaldo

Share Information:

- Tell students that in Path 2, they will learn more about the history and structure of aguinaldos. Afterwards, they will use this structure to write their own song lyrics!

Slide 26: Engaged Listening: Aguinaldo

Engaged Listening:

- Play the embedded track, which provides a sonic example of aguinaldo — a type of song that is very common during the Christmas season in Puerto Rico. This one is

called "Christmas Carol," and might be sung during parranda (Puerto Rican Christmas caroling).

- Help students get familiar with the sounds of aguinaldo by leading them through a variety of engaged listening experiences.
 - Consider a "pass the beat" activity ... one student stands in the middle of the circle and chooses a way to keep the steady beat on their body (e.g., clap, walk, tiptoe, wave, etc...). Everyone on the outside of the circle copies their action. The student in the middle then chooses another student to take their place - who chooses another motion/way to keep the steady beat. This pattern continues until everyone has had a turn.

Slide 27: Attentive Listening: Spanish *Villancicos*

Attentive Listening:

- Tell students that the type of music they just experienced, aguinaldos, have their origins in 15th century *villancicos* (pron. "bee-yawn-SEE-kohs"), songs and dance forms that developed in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain).
- Play excerpts from the two embedded audio examples (*villancicos*). As students listen, they can think about these questions:
 - *Do the titles give you any clues about what the songs are about?*
 - The titles of the songs are "Canto de Aguinaldo" and "Esta Noche es Nochebuena". Remind students that in Spanish, aguinaldo means "gift/present" and "Nochebuena" means Christmas Eve. **Like many aguinaldos, these villancicos are about Christmas.**
 - *What do you notice about the structure/form of each song.*
 - The musical structure of these *villancicos* is coplas (En., stanzas) and estribillos (En., refrains). **Students might label this a verse/chorus song structure (AB).**
 - Additional context for the teacher: The musical structure of a *villancico* consists of several coplas (En., stanzas, a four-verse poetic form from Spain), each framed by estribillos (En., refrains), usually producing an AB or ABA organizational scheme. The number of stanzas was up to the composer and affected the number of refrain repetitions.
- **Advance to the next slide for more guided listening activities.**

Slide 28: Attentive and Engaged Listening: Spanish *Villancicos*

Attentive and Engaged Listening:

- The questions shown below (and on the slide) demonstrate different ways you could engage your students in attentive and engaged listening experiences related to these tracks. (There are many possibilities for extension—depending on the time you have available—so feel free to customize these experiences to meet your needs.)

- *What instruments do you hear?*
 - **The guitar and castanet are used in these recordings.**
- *Can you keep the beat?*
 - Prompt students to tap or step the beat to determine the meter of each example.
- *What do you notice about the meter?*
 - **The first example is in triple meter, the second is in duple.**
- *What do you notice about the voices?*
 - **Female voices are present in both recordings. The second example has a vocal harmony line.**
- *Can you hum along with the melody?*
- Suggestions for taking this activity to the next level (performance):
 - Especially in the context of a vocal music class, review the lyrics/translation and encourage students to sing along! (The tunes are catchy and fun to sing.)
 - You can find the lyrics and translations in the [liner notes for this album](#).
 - You could even perform one of these songs for a holiday concert!

Slide 29: Before Aguinaldos: Spanish Villancicos

Share Information:

- Although villancicos have secular (non-religious) roots in Spain, they started to be incorporated into the Catholic liturgy during the 16th and 17th centuries.
- They were sung in churches and cathedrals, especially during important celebrations like Christmas, Epiphany (Three Kings Day) and saints' days.
- More detailed historical/contextual information for teachers:
 - Villancicos were originally secular forms of polyphonic music (two or more independent melodies played at the same time) that addressed rustic and popular themes, but in the mid- and late-16th century, they became prominent among composers of sacred music.
 - Charged with devotional and religious themes, villancicos were then introduced into liturgical services on feast days, sung in cathedrals, monasteries, and other religious institutions.

Slide 30: Villancicos Arrive in Latin America

Share Information:

- The earliest performance on record of villancicos in Latin America was in 1539, when they were performed in Catholic cathedrals in Mexico, Peru, Argentina, and Colombia.
- Over time, villancicos also became a part of popular culture in Latin America - outside of religious contexts.
- More detailed historical/contextual information for teachers:

- The earliest performance on record of villancicos in Latin America dates to 1539, when they were performed in Catholic cathedrals in Mexico City and Puebla (Mexico), Lima (Perú), La Plata (Argentina), and Bogotá (Colombia). Outside of its strict religious context, over time, villancicos also became part of popular culture. Its secular themes included characters from popular theater (e.g., cowardly peasants, foolish government officials) and stereotypical representations of minority groups.
- Although this song form has fallen into religious disuse since the 19th century, the villancico has remained important in both Spain and Latin America as a secular form of religious expression ... most commonly as "Christmas" songs.

Slide 31: The Puerto Rican Aguinaldo Develops

Share Information:

- **What we now recognize as the Puerto Rican aguinaldo developed from Spanish villancicos during the colonial period (16th–17th century).**
 - Note: You might want to explain that the Spanish colonial period in Puerto Rico began in the early 1500s and ended in 1898. During this time, Puerto Rico was a colony of Spain.
- Puerto Rican aguinaldos are sometimes referred to as "Christmas carols" because they are very popular during the Christmas season.
 - However (also like villancicos), they are not always religious or related to holidays. For example, many aguinaldos have been written about secular (non-religious topics).
 - Although they are no longer used in strictly religious contexts, they are often sung to celebrate religious calendric occasions, such as Christmas and Advent.
- Additional context for the teacher: Although the texts of aguinaldos are mostly written in Spanish, they may also incorporate Taíno- (indigenous people of Puerto Rico) and African- influenced linguistic expressions. For example, the Taíno name for Puerto Rico (Borinquen) or the aspirated “s” sound (African).

Slide 32: More Spanish Connections!

Share Information:

- Arguably, the most significant Spanish influence reflected in aguinaldos (other than the use of the Spanish language) is the use of poetic forms of Spanish origin.
- Like villancicos, aguinaldos often incorporate *decimilla* (pron. “day-see-MEE-ya”) as a guiding structure for verses in a musical composition.
 - This is a variant of *décima* (pron. “DAY-see-mah”), a ten-line, octosyllabic poetic form used in several musical traditions in Latin America (learn much more about *décima* in Lesson 2).

- In contrast to *décima*, **the decimilla is a hexasyllabic stanza** (10 lines of approximately six syllables each). Sometimes, other poetic forms (such as *copla*) are used to structure the compositions.
 - Additional context for teachers: Hexasyllabic meters were widely used in Spain after the 17th century among composers of *villancicos* and other similar popular forms of the period.
- Optional Activity: If you (or your students) speak Spanish, count the lines and syllables for the decimilla shown on the slide.
- **Then, advance to the next slide to listen to an aguinaldo, read the lyrics, and analyze the rhyming structure.**

Slide 33: Listening for Decimilla: “Fiesta en el Batey”

Attentive Listening:

- Listen to the first decimilla from “Fiesta en el Batey” (several times if necessary), while following along with the chart shown below (also shown on the slide).
 - As a reminder, the decimilla is hexasyllabic stanza (it consists of ten lines of six syllables each), in contrast to the octasyllabic (ten lines of eight syllables) *décima* (a poetic form that is covered in Lesson 2). It is associated with the rhyming scheme shown on this slide (ABBAACCDDC).
 - Note that there is an extra line that occurs at the end of each decimilla, which emphasizes line 10 (and the title of this song, “fiesta en el Batey,”) before the catchy chorus section begins.

Decimilla	Rhyme Scheme	Translation
Se des-ga-rra(el) pe-lo	A	It lets its hair down
Y sa-le(en) es-ce-na	B	And gets on stage
La Ma-ña-na lle-na	B	The morning full
De luz en mi sue-lo	A	Of light on my country
De pron-to(en) el cie-lo	A	Suddenly upon the sky
El sol as-tro rey	C	The sun, the king of stars
Des-pier-tan el rey	C	Awakening the king
Pá-ja-ros y flo-res	D	Birds and flowers
Ya(es)-tan los can-to-res	D	The singers are here
(Entonces) fies-ta(en) el Ba-tey	C	So, party at the Batey
Excerpt from “Fiesta en el Batey” by Ecos de Borinquen		

- Note: Although this track captures the festive nature of the aguinaldo, the students might notice that the lyrics of this aguinaldo are NOT related to the Christmas season. This song is about people in a community who are gathering to celebrate at the "batey" (Pronunciation: "bah-TAYE"). Batey is a word used by the pre-Columbian Taíno Indigenous people to mean a ceremonial gathering space. For jíbaros today, the batey is a patio area in which they gather to dance and play music.
 - Optional: Click the down arrow (slide 33.2) to learn more and view an image of a contemporary batey.

Slide 34: Listening for Melody: “Fiesta en el Batey”

Engaged Listening:

- Later in this Path, students will be using this melody to compose their own decimillas. The melody for the verses (and the choruses) remains pretty much the same throughout the track.
- Use engaged listening experiences to help students become familiar with the melody.
 - At first, encourage them to hum along.
 - As students get comfortable with the melody, consider singing along with the lyrics shown on this slide (the first decimilla).
 - Note: After the first decimilla, the lyrics leading into the chorus are (after line 10): "desde Puerto Rico, fiesta en el batey" (from Puerto Rico, party at the Batey).
 - The repeated chorus section is particularly fun for students to sing. The lyrics for the repeated chorus section are: “Desde mi batey / con amor profundo, / Puerto Rico canta / saludando al mundo” (From my batey with profound love, Puerto Rico sings, saluting the world).

Slide 35: Listening for Rhythm: “Fiesta en el Batey”

Engaged Listening:

- In a similar way, encourage students to engage with the track by patting along with the rhythm (especially during the decimilla sections).
 - Developing this familiarity with the rhythmic structure now will help them as it comes time to compose their own lyrics later.

Slide 35: Engaged Listening: “Fiesta en el Batey”

Engaged Listening:

- Listen to the beginning of “Fiesta en el Batey” once more.
- *Can you identify the chord progression? (a simplified interpretation for students could be: IV - I - V - I. A slightly more nuanced version (if*

students have experience with minor chords and chord progressions): IV - I - ii - V - I.

- Consider asking students to lift one finger when they hear the tonic, three fingers for the subdominant, and two for the dominant chord.
 - Note: Students might be used to raising one finger for I, four fingers for IV, and five fingers for V. However, in Puerto Rico, the chords are marked with one finger for the tonic, two fingers for the dominant, and three fingers for the subdominant.
 - Note: The phrase begins on IV (not I).

Slide 36 (Optional): Play the Chord Progression

Engaged and Enactive Listening:

- If your students are already learning about chords and progressions, you can listen for and try to play the chord progression from “Fiesta en el Batey”.
 - Note: A simplified interpretation of this chord progression is shown on this slide (I - V - I - IV). You could use a slightly more nuanced version if your students have experience with minor chords and chord progressions (I - ii - V - I - IV).
- While listening, they could lift one finger when they hear the tonic, three fingers for the subdominant, and two for the dominant chord. (Students might be used to raising one finger for I, four fingers for IV, and five fingers for V. However, in Puerto Rico, the chords are marked with one finger for the tonic, two fingers for the dominant, and three fingers for the subdominant.)
- If students play a chordal instrument (piano, guitar, ukulele, Orff, etc.), they can practice this chord progression in the key of G (with and without the recording): G, D, G, C - two beats per chord. For a version that is slightly more difficult, try: G – am – D – G – C.
 - Note: If you decide to have the students hum or sing along with the melody of the decimilla they have been listening to while playing the chords, it is important to remember the decimilla actually begins on the IV chord and ends on the I chord.

Slide 37: Put it All Together!

Create and Perform:

- Depending on time and the experience level of your students, you can **use our example of decimilla structure (the rhythm, melody, rhyming scheme, and/or chords for "Fiesta en el Batey") to encourage your students to write their own decimillas.**
- As always, customize this creative activity to meet the needs of your students.

Consider these ideas/steps:

 - Choose a topic.

- Write your lyrics: Choose any language and use the decimilla structure (10 lines, approximately 6 syllables per line, adhere to the rhyming scheme).
- Sing your lyrics using the melody from "Fiesta en el Batey" (start slowly).
- Practice, refine, and perform.
- Adaptations/Extensions:
 - Write a decimilla together as a class (to demonstrate the composition process). You could add instruments and perhaps even perform it at a school music program/concert.
 - Add a chorus section to your compositions - using the melody from the chorus section of "Fiesta en el Batey". (Repeat line 10 of your decimilla to lead into your chorus section.)
 - Add more stanzas of decimilla to your composition.
 - Add percussion instruments and play the steady beat while singing your decimilla.
 - Add chordal instruments (play the chords and sing your decimilla at the same time).
 - Encourage students to practice and perform their compositions for each other.
 - Make up your own melody and chord progression for your decimilla (an original composition).

Slide 38: Learning Checkpoint

- *How are villancicos related to aguinaldos?*
 - **Alguinaldos have their origins in 15th century villancicos: songs and dance forms that originated in Spain. The Puerto Rican aguinaldo developed within the villancico genre of the colonial period. Both are associated with Spanish poetic forms and are often about Christmas (or other festive topics).**
- *What are some characteristics of decimilla (a common poetic form used to structure aguinaldos)?*
 - **The decimilla (a variant of décima) is a hexasyllabic stanza – it has ten lines of six syllables each. Decimilla is associated with a certain rhyming structure (ABBAACDDC).**
- *What were the most rewarding and challenging parts of composing and performing your own decimilla? (Answers will vary.)*

Slide 39: Lesson Navigation Slide

3. Path Three: Instruments of Aguinaldo



To prepare:

- Read through the path.
- Preview the **Lesson 3, Path 3 Slideshow** (slides 40–53).
 - 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 40: Path 3 Introduction Slide – Instruments of Aguinaldo

Slide 41: A Quick Review: Aguinaldos

Share Information:

- In Path 1 we learned that an *aguinaldo* (pron. “ah-ghee-NAHL-doh”) is a type of song that is very common during the Christmas season in Puerto Rico.
- In Path 2, we learned that aguinaldos have deep historical connections to *villancicos* - another type of festive song that developed long ago in Spain.
- They are sometimes performed in the context of *parranda* (this term can refer to a group, the activity, and / or the performance of Christmas caroling in Puerto Rico).
- The structure of aguinaldos is often based on a Spanish poetic form called *decimilla*.

Slide 42: Instruments of Aguinaldo

Share Information:

- In Path 3, you will learn more about the instruments that are used in performances of aguinaldos.

Slide 43: Aguinaldo and Música Jíbara

A. Share Information:

- The *aguinaldo* (pron. “ah-ghee-NAHL-doh”) is one of the most important types of *música jíbara* (“MOO-see-kah HEE-bah-rah”).
 - *Música jíbara* is a type of folk music that is generally associated with mountain regions and rural areas in Puerto Rico.

B. Attentive Listening:

- To begin this Path, listen to an excerpt from the embedded audio track (“Un sol de Esperanza” by Ecos de Borinquen), which provides a sonic example of *música jíbara* in general and *aguinaldo* specifically.
- **Then, advance to the next slide to start learning more about these musical sounds.**

Slide 44: Jíbaro Culture

Share Information:

- Originally, the term *jibaros* referred to Puerto Rican rural farmers.
- They were born from the racial mixing of the Indigenous Taíno, European, and African groups that coexisted on the island.
- Like the jíbaros themselves, the aguinaldo is a cultural fusion of African, Indigenous, and European elements.
- Additional context for the teacher: The word “jíbaro” is a native Taíno word meaning “people of the forest” and has become a marker of identity in connection to Puerto Rican history and culture.
 - Long ago, the term referred to Puerto Rican rural farmers, white or mix-race peasants, 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 (see Lesson 2 for more about jíbaro culture).

Slide 45: Aguinaldo: Listening for Instruments

Attentive Listening:

- As students will discover in this Path, the cultural blend of European, Indigenous, and African influences, is visible in the instruments that are often used to perform this music.
- Play “Un sol de Esperanza” again, prompting students to think about (and see if they can identify) the possible cultural influences of the musical sounds they are hearing.
- Consider leading a short discussion with students based on their ideas before moving on with the Path.
 - **In general, the stringed instruments heard on this recording have Spanish/European influences.)**
 - As we learned in Path 2, **the songs are sung in the Spanish language and their structure is based on Spanish poetic forms.**
 - Additionally, the **song topics are often related to Christian holidays** (e.g., Christmas and the nativity scene, Three Kings Day, etc.)
 - **The bongo drums originated on the African continent, while the güiro (scraper) has Indigenous/Taíno origins.**
- Additional context for teachers: Seis and aguinaldo are the two most important song forms of música jíbara. Therefore, some of the information in this Path was also presented in Lesson 2 (which focused on seis music in the context of música jíbara). If you already did Lesson 2 with your students, this Path will be a great review and will provide opportunities to listen different examples of música jíbara (aguinaldos this time).

- It is also important to remember that aguinaldos are not exclusive to música jíbara (for example, some aguinaldos are in the plena genre). You can learn more about plena music in Lesson 4.

Slide 46: Aguinaldo Instruments: The Voice

A. Share Information:

- Broadly speaking, aguinaldos emphasize the voice as the central instrument to sing about nativity-inspired themes and all kinds of everyday topics.
- In fact, the singers sometimes perform *a cappella* (i.e., without instrumental accompaniment); however, they are quite often accompanied by any combination of chordophones (i.e., “string” instruments), membranophones (i.e., drums), idiophones (i.e., percussions), and/or aerophones (i.e., “wind” instruments).

B. Attentive Listening:

- To illustrate, play the first minute of another aguinaldo that was recorded in a very different context (“New Year’s Carol,” sung by Sofia and Ana Iris Parilla de Falu.)
 - *What cultural influences can be heard in this recording? (Many African influences are present* - such as the use of drums, a beat keeping instrument that sounds like a bell of some sort, syncopated rhythms, and call and response form. Students might also notice the use of the Spanish language.)
 - More about the track: Neighborhood children in the coastal town of Loiza accompanied Sofia and Ana Iris Parilla de Falu when this track was recorded in 1967. The liner notes that accompany this album state: "All the children of Loiza Aldea know the songs and play the familiar rhythms. If the homemade conga drums the adults use are not available, they beat the rhythm on anything that is handy. The afternoon these songs were recorded, the children played on rusty paint pails, bashed-in beer cans, iron automobile parts, and on top of the table."

Slide 47.1: The Voice: African and Indigenous Influences

Share Information:

- While it is true that aguinaldos are mostly sung in Spanish, African and Indigenous influences are also present.
 - For example, some songs incorporate Taíno-influenced words and expressions - such as the Taíno name for Puerto Rico: *Borinquen* and the Taíno concept of a community gathering space: *Batey*.
 - Other songs incorporate an aspirated “s” sound (which is an African influence.)

- It is also important to remember that although the word aguinaldo has become synonymous with "Christmas carol," its repertoire has expanded far beyond nativity-related themes (a European influence) to include many secular subjects.
 - Note: To learn a song about a fiesta in the batey - travel down Path 2!
- Optional Listening Activity: Click the down arrow (slide 47.2) to listen to an example of how the aspirated "s" sound (a linguistic influence from African communities) is sometimes used in aguinaldos.

Slide 47.2: Optional Activity: Listening for African Influences

Attentive Listening:

- Listen to the entire track of "Si me Dan Pasteles" ("If They Give Me Pastries"), an aguinaldo that references Puerto Rican *pasteles*, a cornmeal-like food made of yucca root or banana, and one of the many African gastronomic influences introduced to Puerto Rico.
 - Note: This example was also briefly introduced as an optional activity in in Path 1.
- As students listen, they should pay close attention to the aspirated "s" sound of the words pasteles and caliente(s) (En., hot), one of the linguistic influences of African communities. ("Aspirated" means: pronounced with an exhalation of breath.)
 - The lyrics to this song say: "If you give me pasteles they'd better be hot, because cold pasteles give people stomachache!"

Slide 48.1: Aguinaldo Instruments: Chordophones

Share Information:

- Chordophones (stringed instruments) used to accompany aguinaldos in modern jíbaro ensembles include **guitar** and **cuatro**, which have European/Spanish influences.
 - The cuatro (several varieties exist in Latin America) is considered the national instrument of Puerto Rico. Although the term cuatro means "four" in reference to early models, modern cuatros (plural form) have five courses of double strings.
 - Note: The recording of "Un sol de Esperanza" is included here again, in case you would like to listen specifically for chordophones (Ecos de Borinquen uses two cuatros and a guitar.)
- Optional: Click the down arrow (slide 48.2) to watch a member of Ecos de Borinquen play the cuatro.
- Additional contextual information: Sometimes other stringed instruments - such as **bordonúa** and **tiple** (shown on the slide) are also used. Historically, the combination of bordonúa, tiple, and cuatro were known collectively as the orquesta jíbara (pron. "or-KESS-tah HEE-ba-rah").

- The *bordonúa* (pron. “bore-doh-NOO-ah”) is a large instrument native to Puerto Rico with five courses of double strings. However, the scarcity of bordonúa players has resulted in the guitar often taking its place in modern ensembles.
- The *tiple* (pron. “TEE-play”) is a cousin to the cuatro. The term “tiple” refers to high-register sounds (e.g., soprano) and also to the smallest stringed instrument of the orquesta jíbara. The earliest mention of the tiple in Latin America dates to 1752.
- Optional: Advance to slide 48.3 (down arrow) to listen for a tiple.

Slide 48.2: Optional: “El Cuatro”

Watch Video:

- Remind students that the cuatro is the national instrument of Puerto Rico. Modern cuatros have five courses of double strings.
- Watch/listen to the embedded video example, recorded at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2005.
- Optional: Click the down arrow (slide 48.3) to listen for a tiple (cousin to the cuatro).

Slide 48.3: Optional: Listening for the Tiple: “Aguinaldo de Baquiné”

Attentive Listening:

- Listen to an excerpt from “Aguinaldo de Baquine.” (pron. “bah-kee-NAY”). This recording comes from Kacho Montalvo’s ethnographic recordings from southwestern Puerto Rico.
 - *Can you pick out the higher-pitched sounds of the tiple?*
 - *What other instruments do you hear? (Cuatro [middle instrument], guitar [lowest sound], and güiro [scraper])*
 - Note: Learn more about the güiro on the next slide.
- Additional information that could be shared with students: The instrument shown on this slide is a tiple. However, the instrument heard on this recording is more specifically called “tiple con macho.” The word “macho” refers to a pedal string attached to the top of the instrument (see image on slide). In this way, the “tiple con macho” is similar to the banjo. *Did you know that the origin of the banjo is African?* According to the latest research, the instrument first developed in the Caribbean.

Slide 49: Aguinaldo Percussion: Güiro and Maracas

Share Information:

- As we have heard throughout this Path, the most common idiophone used in the performance of aguinaldos is the **güiro** (pron. “GWEE-roh,” also known as the carracho). (An idiophone is an instrument that vibrates to produce a sound when struck, shaken, or scraped.)

- The güiro is a Pre-Columbian musical instrument of Taíno (Indigenous) origin. It is played by scraping its carved ridges with the tines of a special pick or scraper.
- Classified as rattles, **maracas** (also of Taíno origin) are also commonly used in the performance of aguinaldos. They are played in pairs and shaken by a handle. Modern versions are made of leather, wood, or plastic.

Slide 50: Other Aguinaldo Percussion

Share Information:

- Other instruments that might be used to accompany aguinaldos include:
- The **cowbell**, a hand-held, metal percussion instrument used in various popular music genres such as *salsa* music (see Lesson 9).
- **Panderos** are handheld jingle-less tambourines with stretched membranes (e.g., goat skin) over a wooden frame. This instrument is also frequently used in plena music (see Lesson 4).
- Sometimes, the aguinaldo is accompanied by other drums, such as the **barril de bomba** (En., *bomba* barrel), a single-headed wooden-cask drum. It is also used when *bomba* music is played (see Lessons 6 and 7).

Slide 51: Aguinaldo: Adding Context

Watch Video:

- Watch 1–2 minutes of a performance of aguinaldo in Puerto Rico (or more, if you have time).
 - The performance context of this video is a *parranda* (i.e., Puerto Rican Christmas caroling). Parrandas happen throughout the six-week Christmas season, and aguinaldos are a key part of the Christmas caroling repertoire. Learn much more about this tradition in Path 1.
- *What instruments can you identify? (most notably: trumpet, pandero, cowbell, trombone, güiro, voice).*
 - Note: Although these instruments were not featured on the previous slides, sometimes people play a variety of brass/wind instruments (e.g., trumpets and trombones) instead of stringed instruments when they perform aguinaldo in large spaces.

Slide 52: Learning Checkpoint

- *What instruments are associated with the performance of aguinaldos in Puerto Rico?*
 - **The voice is the primary instrument. Chordophones include guitar-like instruments (bordunúa, tiple, and cuatro). Percussion instruments include: güiro, maracas, cowbell, pandero, and other**

drums (e.g., bongos and barril de bomba). Sometimes, wind instruments like trumpet and trombone are also used.

- *What do these instruments tell us about the cultural influences of aguinaldos?*
 - **The instruments used in the performance of aguinaldos indicate Spanish, Indigenous, and African cultural influences: They are mostly sung in Spanish and are often associated with religious (Catholic) holidays and rituals but sometimes also incorporate Taino and African-influenced expressions and inflections. Chordophones (stringed instruments) indicate the influence of Spanish music traditions. Instruments like the güiro and maracas are of Taino (Indigenous) origin. Other instruments, such as various drums and cowbells reflect influences from African cultures.**

Slide 53: Lesson Navigation Slide

2014 National Music Standards Connections

MU:Cr1.1.5a Improvise rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic ideas, and explain connection to specific purpose and context (such as social, cultural, and historical).

- Can I identify the historical and cultural connections between aguinaldo and decimilla?
- Within specific guidelines, can I improvise ideas for creating my own decimilla?

MU:Cr1.1.5a Generate musical ideas (such as rhythms, melodies, and accompaniment patterns) within specific related tonalities, meters, and simple chord changes.

- Using the common structural characteristics of Puerto Rican aguinaldos, can I compose my own decimilla (10-lines, approx. 6 syllables per line, certain rhyming scheme)?

MU:Cr2.1.5a Demonstrate selected and developed musical ideas for improvisations, arrangements, or compositions to express intent, and explain connection to purpose and context.

- Can I demonstrate my decimilla and explain how it conforms to the common structural characteristics of Puerto Rican aguinaldos?

MU:Cr3.2.5a Present the final version of personal created music to others that demonstrates craftsmanship, and explain connection to expressive intent.

- Students will perform their personally developed decimillas for classmates.

MU:Pr4.2.5a Demonstrate understanding of the structure and the elements of music (such as rhythm, pitch, form, and harmony) in music selected for performance.

- Can I hum/sing along the melody while listening to an audio recording of an Aguinaldo (“Fiesta en el Batey”)?
- Can I pat along with the rhythm of the words as I listen to an audio recording of an Aguinaldo (“Fiesta en el Batey”)?
- Can I identify and perform the chord progression associated with an aguinaldo (“Fiesta en el Batey”)?

MU:Re7.1.5a Demonstrate and explain, citing evidence, how selected music connects to and is influenced by specific interests, experiences, purposes, or contexts.

- Can I explain the contexts within which aguinaldos are often performed in Puerto Rico (e.g., Christmas season, parrandas)?

MU:Re7.2.5a Demonstrate and explain, citing evidence, how responses to music are informed by the structure, the use of the elements of music, and context (such as social, cultural, and historical).

- Can I identify and describe the structural characteristics of a common poetic form used to organize aguinaldos (decimilla)?
- Can I identify important instruments used in aguinaldo performances (describe timbre)?
- Can I describe the parranda “scene” and explain how this context affects the performance of aguinaldos?

MU:Re8.1.5a 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.

- Can I explain how differences in the contexts within which aguinaldos are performed (e.g., parranda vs. church services) might affect how the elements of music are applied?

MU:Cn10.0.5a Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.

- Can I make personal choices as I create my own decimilla (and corresponding musical arrangement) for an aguinaldo?
- Can I discuss how music connects to my own cultural and/or holiday traditions?

MU:Cn11.0.5a Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

- Can I explain the relationship between aguinaldos and the Christmas season/Fiesta de Reyes?
- Can I explain how aguinaldos relate to música jíbara?
- Can I explain the relationship between aguinaldos and talla de santos?
- Can I describe several contexts within which aguinaldos are performed in Puerto Rico?
- Can I explain the relationship between aguinaldos and food?
- Can I explain the historical origins and development of aguinaldos in Puerto Rico?
- Can I identify and explain the three main cultural influences of aguinaldos?

Additional Readings and Resources

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