



Smithsonian Folkways

Jíbaro to the Bone! **Puerto Rican Music for the Classroom** **A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson**

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Summary:

This lesson is intended to develop musical and literary skills using *jíbaro* music from Puerto Rico. In a series of three lessons, students will learn typical instrumentation and forms, augment their vocabulary, and listen to the lyrics in *jíbaro* as a means of understanding modern Puerto Rican culture.

Suggested Grade Levels: 9–12, college/university

Country: Puerto Rico

Region: Latin Caribbean

Culture Group: *Jíbaro*

Genre: *Jíbaro* vocal and instrumental music

Instruments: Voices, *cuatro*, *güiro*, guitar

Language: Spanish and English

Co-curricular Areas: Social studies, language arts

National Standards: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Prerequisites: None

Objectives:

- Name the instruments that are commonly used in *jíbaro* music and explain their tuning systems and basic technique
- Be able to identify melodic contour within *jíbaro* pieces
- Understand the rhyme scheme and structure of the *décima* poetry form
- Be able to explain the relationship between *jíbaro* music and Puerto Rican culture and be able to describe how the role of *jíbaro* music has changed over time

Materials:

1. **Pictures of *cuatro* and *güiro*** (Appendix 1)
2. **Maps of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean** (Appendix 2; use Google Maps for specific locations)
3. From ***Jíbaro Hasta el Hueso* by Ecos de Borinquen** (www.folkways.si.edu/ecos-de-borinquen/jibaro-hasta-el-hueso-mountain-music-of-puerto-rico/latin-world/album/smithsonian):
 - a. **Liner notes**
(media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/smithsonian_folkways/SFW40506.pdf)
 - b. “A Mi Dulce Amada”
 - c. “Y Amo la Libertad”
 - d. “En mi Estrofa Decimal”

- e. “Trova con Sabor”
- 4. From [Boricua Roots/Raíces Boricuas: Sings Puerto Rican Songs](http://www.folkways.si.edu/sandra-roldan/boricua-roots/raices-boricuas-sings-puerto-rican-songs/caribbean-latin-world/music/album/smithsonian) by Sandra Roldan (www.folkways.si.edu/sandra-roldan/boricua-roots/raices-boricuas-sings-puerto-rican-songs/caribbean-latin-world/music/album/smithsonian):
 - a. [Liner notes](http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/folkways/FW05446.pdf) (media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/folkways/FW05446.pdf)
 - b. “I Was a Ghetto Child”
 - c. “Exodo Boricua”
 - d. “Seis de Andino”
- 5. From [Folk Songs of Puerto Rico](http://www.folkways.si.edu/folk-songs-of-puerto-rico/caribbean-latin-world/music/album/smithsonian) (www.folkways.si.edu/folk-songs-of-puerto-rico/caribbean-latin-world/music/album/smithsonian):
 - a. “Decima” by Luis Marcano, José Miguel Velez, Francisco Cruz
 - b. “Aguinaldo” by Luis Marcano, José Miguel Velez, Francisco Cruz
- 6. From [Songs and Dances of Puerto Rico](http://www.folkways.si.edu/songs-and-dances-of-puerto-rico/caribbean-latin-world/music/album/smithsonian) (www.folkways.si.edu/songs-and-dances-of-puerto-rico/caribbean-latin-world/music/album/smithsonian):
 - a. “Aguinaldo Cagueño”
- 7. [Videos](#) (or on YouTube):
 - a. Ecos de Borinquen, “Musica Jíbara”
 - b. Ecos de Borinquen, “Mujer Borinqueña”

Lessons:

1. **Jíbaro Instrumentation and Instrumental Roles** (National Standards 2, 6, 9)
2. **Exploring Form: Strophes and Decimas** (National Standards 1, 4, 5, 6, 7)
3. **Jíbaro Music: Tracing Puerto Rican History** (National Standards 6, 7, 8, 9)

Lesson 1: Jíbaro Instrumentation and Instrumental Roles

- a. Watch the first thirty seconds of the video “Mujer Borinqueña” by Ecos de Borinquen ([available on YouTube](#) or on the Smithsonian Folkways website).
 - i. Ask students if they are able to identify the instruments they see. (*Cuatro*, guitar, *güiro*, and singer.)
 - ii. While students might identify the guitar and “scraper,” explain the *cuatro*, the ten-stringed *jíbaro* guitar (which has five matched pairs of strings), and *güiro* gourd rasp, and provide pictures or instruments to pass around.
 - 1. Note: The name *cuatro* (“four”) refers to the tuning. It is tuned in fourths.
 - iii. Explain that the standard name for the ensemble is the *conjunto jíbaro*, which ordinarily consists of two cuatros playing in harmony, a six-stringed guitar, a *güiro*, and bongos.
- b. Watch to 1:05 of the video “Ecos de Borinquen demonstrate *Musica Jíbara*” ([available on Youtube](#) or on the Smithsonian Folkways website).
 - i. Ask the students what instruments they see or hear. (Answers?)
 - ii. Ask students if they can identify where this song might be from, based on its lyrics.
 - 1. Do students recognize the language?
 - 2. Do students hear the name of a country they recognize?
 - a. The lyricist sings “Puertorriqueño” at the end of the verse.
 - iii. Ask if any students can find Puerto Rico on the map. Invite one student to show others.
 - 1. Inform students that the native Taíno name for Puerto Rico is “Borinquen.”
 - 2. Explain that the name of the group is Ecos de Borinquen (“Echoes of Puerto Rico”).
 - a. Optional: Listen to the song “Borinquen” by Pepe y Flora to show that many singers pay homage to their country by using its endearing, native name.

3. Explain that the *jíbaro* is a rural person in Puerto Rico’s highlands.
 4. Connect this name to jíbaro music as one of Puerto Rico’s national music traditions, a country music originating in rural areas.
- c. Listen to the first thirty seconds of “Y Amo la Libertad” by Ecos de Borinquen (*Jíbaro Hasta el Hueso*).
- i. Explain that jíbaro music is often based on short, repeated rhythmic riffs.
 - ii. Ask students to listen carefully to the repeated rhythm of the cuatro. Be sure they’re paying attention when the repeated pattern stops at the ends of phrases.
 - iii. Stop the recording, and ask students to practice tapping the rhythm using two hands:



- iv. Ask students to tap the cuatro rhythm along with the recording from 0:00-1:12 and to stop playing the repeated rhythm when the cuatro player stops.
- v. Divide the class in half, asking some students to clap the main pulse while the others clap the cuatro rhythm. Use this as an opportunity to explore syncopation and polyrhythm.

Lesson 2: Exploring Form: Strophes and Decimas

- a. Listening for Strophic form: Display the lyrics and play through the whole recording of “Y Amo la Libertad” by Ecos de Borinquen.
 - i. Ask students to listen carefully to the sung melody, tracing its contours with their finger in the air. Tell them to listen for patterns in the overall form of the song. Listen through the whole song.
 - ii. Ask students if they noticed any repeated melodies, instrumental solos, etc. Write observations on the board.
 - iii. Provide a writing utensil and paper. Ask students to trace the contour of the vocal melody on paper (it can be very rough) during the first verse. On the second verse, ask students to follow their rough “transcription” to observe whether the second verse follows the same melody or a different one. (The same melody.) Have them follow along with their “transcription” on the final sung verse, and observe whether it follows the same melody or a different one. (The same melody.)
 - iv. If the students already possess a vocabulary for form, ask them to identify the song’s formal structure. Give options between strophic form, verse-chorus form, and sectional form.
 1. Explain that the song is in strophic form, with a series of verses sung to a more or less set melody (perhaps with a short refrain, as “*y amo la libertad*” is repeated once at the end of the form).
 - v. Ask for students to listen for the strophic form in several other jíbaro songs, including:
 1. “A Mi Dulce Amada” by Ecos de Borinquen (*Jíbaro Hasta el Hueso*)
 2. “Exodo Boricua” by Sandra Roldan (*Boricua Roots/Raices Boricuas*)
 3. “Seis de Andina” by Sandra Roldan (*Boricua Roots/Raices Boricuas*)
 - vi. Ask students to listen for variations on the strophic form in jíbaro songs with the characteristic vocables *lai le lo lai* between verses. Have students listen carefully to the *lai le lo lai* vocables, and try to sing with the lead vocalist during this part of the song.

1. “Decima” by Luis Marcano, José Miguel Velez, y Francisco Cruz (*Folk Songs of Puerto Rico*)
 2. “Aguinaldo” by Luis Marcano, José Miguel Velez, y Francisco Cruz (*Folk Songs of Puerto Rico*)
- b. Hearing the *decima*: The decima is a ten-line poetry form, often with an ABBA AC CDDC rhyme scheme, typical to many jíbaro songs. The decima originated in Spain and came to Puerto Rico with Spanish settlers. More information about the different kinds of decima forms can be found in the liner notes to *Jíbaro Hasta el Hueso*.
- i. Display the words to the first verse of “Y Amo la Libertad” by Ecos de Borinquen. [Lyrics are available from Smithsonian Folkways \(www.folkways.si.edu/resources/pdf/405061yrics.pdf\)](http://www.folkways.si.edu/resources/pdf/405061yrics.pdf).

A. Cual los pájaros del **monte**
 B. Los nómadas del *espacio*
 B. Entré ligero y *despacio*
 A. Sin fronteras ni **horizonte**.

A. Como el parlero **sinsonte**
 C. Que ofrece a la humanidad

C. Cofre de tonalidad
 D. En pentagrama *divino* D. Así pinto mi *camino* C. Y amo la libertad.

Translation:

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.

- ii. Syllable count: If you’re able, speak the words to the first four lines, asking students to count the number of syllables in every line. (Preparatory note: Listen in the recording where syllables are elided. All lines should have eight syllables.) Point this out to students, and speak the words again, with appropriate elisions, as students count the syllables.
- iii. Rhyme scheme: Speak the words again, asking students to join you on the last word of every line. Show how the rhyme scheme follows the ABBA AC CDDC form.
- iv. Applied listening: Listen to the music, singing the last word of every line.
 1. Explain that *decimas* are often improvised on the spot by expert singers.
- v. Listen for the decima form in other examples, including:
 1. “Seis de Andino” by Sandra Roldan
 2. “En mi Estrofa Decimal” by Ecos de Borinquen (*Jibaro Hasta el Hueso*)
 3. “Decima” by Luis Marcano, José Miguel Velez, Francisco Cruz
 4. “Aguinaldo Cagueño” (*Songs and Dances of Puerto Rico*)

- vi. Optional: Listen for the *decimilla*, or “little decima” in “Trova con Sabor” by Ecos de Borinquen (*Jíbaro Hasta el Hueso*). The *decimilla* follows the same rhyme scheme but features six-syllable lines.

Assessment: Ask students to write a decima or *decimilla* poem as a homework assignment. Brave students might consider singing their decima for the class!

Lesson 3: *Jíbaro* Music: Tracing Puerto Rican History

- a. Integrating World Music: Review maps, instruments, and forms in *jíbaro* music.
 - i. Explain to students that *jíbaros* live in the interior mountain regions of Puerto Rico. *Jíbaro* culture has antecedents in pre-Colombian Taíno culture, native to Puerto Rico, and the Spanish European culture.
 1. Point out the towns of Cidra, Milonga, Andino, Comerío, and Vega Alta on a map of Puerto Rico. These are several towns where *jíbaro* people live. If possible, provide pictures.
- b. Attentive Listening: Listen to “Aguinaldo” by Luis Marcano, José Miguel Velez, Francisco Cruz (*Folk Songs of Puerto Rico*). This song was recorded in Cidra in 1961. Display the words in Spanish and English for students to follow.
 - i. Explain that this is an *aguinaldo*, literally “Christmas present,” a type of song sung at Christmas. According to the liner notes: “the *aguinaldo* on this recording has nothing to do with Christmas yet it is sung during that season. It is a lyric outburst in praise of nature and womankind. Often, *aguinaldos* are sung as an improvised contest between two singer-poets called a *contraversia*”
 - ii. Ask students to follow the text along with the recording. What images of Puerto Rico do the lyrics express? How is the life of the *jíbaro* portrayed?
 - iii. Optional: Building on the last lesson, do students recognize the form? It is a *decimilla*.
- c. Attentive Listening: Listen to “Seis de Andino” sung by Sandra Roldan (*Boricua Roots/ Raices Boricuas*). Display the words in Spanish and English for students to follow. [Lyrics are available in the liner notes](http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/folkways/FW05446.pdf) (media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/folkways/FW05446.pdf).
 - i. Explain that this song is called “Seis de Andino,” which describes the song’s form as a *seis*, and also where it is from. Ask if students know where this song might be from. (Andino.) Show Andino on a map.
 - ii. Ask students to carefully follow the lyrics. This song describes life for a *jíbaro*. How is the *jíbaro*’s life portrayed in this song? Is it a romantic and easy life, or one of struggle and suffering? How does it compare to the previous song?
 - iii. Ask: How does the poet describe Puerto Rico?
 - iv. Ask: What is the *yautia* described in the third stanza? Why do you think the poet sings, “It is here, not in New York?” Based on this song, what do you think is happening to the *jíbaro* in Puerto Rico?
- d. Attentive Listening: Listen to “Exodo Boricua” sung by Sandra Roldan (*Boricua Roots/ Raices Boricuas*). Display the words in Spanish and English for students to follow.
 - i. Explain that this song is a *seis de Milonga*. Ask if students where this song might be from. (Milonga.) Show Milonga on a map.
 - ii. Ask students to carefully follow the lyrics again. Ask students to compare and contrast the themes in this song with the last song.

- iii. Explain that, according to the liner notes, “this song talks about the many Puerto Ricans who have had to move to the United States for economic reasons.”
- iv. Ask: What American cities are mentioned in the lyrics? Why are people moving there?
- v. Ask: What emotions does the singer express? What future does she want for the jíbaro?
- vi. Optional: Building on the last lesson, do students recognize the form? It is a typical decima.
- e. Attentive Listening: Listen to “I Was a Ghetto Child” sung by Sandra Roldan (*Boricua Roots/Raíces Boricuas*). Do not display the words.
 - i. Play the first stanza of the song. What language is this song in? (English.)
 - ii. Display the words for students to follow. Note that Los Sures is a Puerto Rican ghetto in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (New York). Note also the *le lo lais* and the *coquí*s mentioned in the text as references to Puerto Rico.
 - iii. Ask: What kind of life for the Puerto Rican expatriate does the singer describe in the text?
 - iv. Ask: Do you recognize any features from jíbaro music in this song? One important connection is the *le lo lais* mentioned in the second stanza.
- f. Optional Attentive Listening: Listen to “Traigo la Salsa” by Willie Colón and Ismael Rivera.
 - i. This is a song from a Christmas album, *Asalto Navideño*, by a *salsa* band based in New York City. Explain that the song’s form is a *son montuno*, an Afro-Cuban form.
 - 1. Optional: Explain the 2-3 *clave* pattern and clap along with the clave in this recording.
 - ii. Ask students: What instrumentation do you hear in this recording? How does it compare to the previous recordings? The recording features a big band with a plucked stringed instrument, the *cuatro*.
 - iii. Display the lyrics (as appropriate, as it does mention drinking rum). Ask students if they recognize the *lo le lo lai* lyrics at the beginning. Show how the aguinaldo, a Christmas song, uses these same vocables, very common in jíbaro music.
 - iv. Show how the vocalist mentions the *cuatro*, played for Christmas. Remind students that the *cuatro* is a typical jíbaro instrument.

Assessment: How do these songs show how life for Puerto Rican jíbaros has changed?





Map of the Caribbean



Map of Puerto Rico

