



# MARIACHI HERENCIA DE MÉXICO

**CURRICULUM  
GUIDE**

Researched and designed by



Used with permission from Des Moines Performing Arts

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Mariachi Herencia de México, an ensemble of students from Chicago's immigrant barrios, is breathing new life into the traditional music. The group aims to preserve the tradition of mariachi music while innovating for a new generation of listeners.

## HOW IT BEGAN

The unlikely story started with an idea that came to Chicago resident César Maldonado. Born in Chicago, Maldonado's parents were immigrants from Durango, Mexico. His parents were factory workers and did not know English. Maldonado excelled in school and at 33 was a successful investment banker living in Chicago.

Maldonado wanted to give back, and he remembered that his elementary school never offered music or arts classes. He decided this is where he could make a difference for the next generation of young Mexican Americans. Maldonado did not have a music background, except for a deep appreciation for mariachi music — his parents played it constantly on the radio while he was growing up. So he decided to found the **Mariachi Heritage Foundation** in 2013. Since then, the foundation has grown to incorporate mariachi music education in the curriculum of eight of Chicago's public schools, involving 2,100 students in grades 3 through 8. The foundation also supports Mariachi Herencia de México, an audition group for advanced students.



Watch a newsclip about the program and Maldonado [here](#)

## PRESERVING HERITAGE

According to the U.S. Census, there are over 54 million Latinos in the U.S. today and Latinos represent nearly a third of Chicago's total population of 2.7 million residents. Maldonado hopes that through the integration of mariachi into the schools' curriculums, it will help the students form a connection to their roots and thus increase their pride and self-esteem. The preservation of cultural traditions through the arts is critical both for Latino students and those who want to learn more about the traditions of their neighbors and friends.

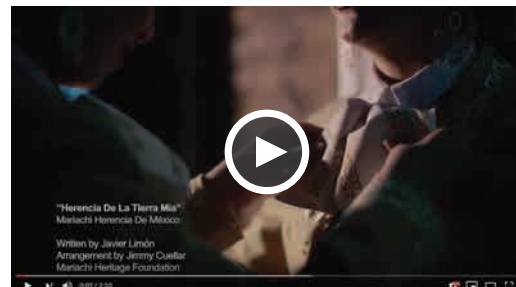
## VIDEOS



Mariachi Herencia de México in studio



Kennedy Center Performance



Music Video

Read the article from *Billboard* magazine ([page i-iii](#)) to learn more about what the group has to say about their success and how playing mariachi music gives them pride in their Mexican heritage.

# ABOUT MARIACHI

Mexican mariachi music is made to move you! It is designed to express emotion and to move the listener. Joyful, sad, proud, angry, lonely, romantic, and dramatic—all these feelings and more can be found in the soul of mariachi.



## DEFINING MARIACHI

Mariachi is a certain repertoire of music, a special grouping of instruments, and a distinctive style of singing. It has special meaning for many Mexican Americans as an emblem of their cultural heritage and a source of pride and community connections. Since the days of the Chicano Movement beginning in the 1960s, it has become a *movimiento* of its own throughout the United States, attracting millions of fans and music makers across the Americas.

## THE HISTORY OF MARIACHI

The music that was called mariachi as early as the 1850s emerged from the ranches and small towns of western Mexico, particularly in the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, Colima, and Aguascalientes.

When the Spanish invaded Mexico the traditional instruments gave way to instruments imported by the Spanish: violins, guitars and harps, brass horns, and woodwinds. The Indian and mestizo (of mixed race) musicians not only learned to play European instruments, but also to build their own, sometimes giving them shapes and tunings of their own invention to create a style of their own.



Although the roots of mariachi go back hundreds of years, there are few well known musicians from its early history because mariachi music was the music of country people. Until the early 1930's mariachi groups were local and semi-professional. They were almost entirely unknown outside their own region.

## MARIACHI MUSIC IN THE UNITED STATES (and beyond!)

When big-city radio stations, movie studios, and record companies took mariachi music to new audiences throughout Mexico and abroad beginning in the mid-1930s, mariachi music (and its singers) became popular outside of the communities it was born. Watch the video of legendary mariachi singer and actor Pedro Infante in the movie *Cuidado Con El Amor* (1954).



Today, mariachi ensembles are part of musical life in every country of the Americas. The United States is home to many musicians and mariachi music is just as likely to be performed in major concert halls by concert groups as it is at birthday parties, wedding receptions, baptism celebrations, and restaurants.

[Audio files of some of the most renowned mariachi groups can be found here](#)

Content adapted from the Smithsonian Folkways and [Mariachi.org](#)

# CONNECTING TO LANGUAGE ARTS

## ACTIVITY 1: WRITING ABOUT HOME

**Objective:** Using the album *Herencia de la Tierra Mia (Heritage of my Homeland)* by Mariachi Herencia de México as inspiration, students will write their own lyrics to a song or poem about their neighborhood, tierra, or place in the world.

**Materials:** writing materials and paper or computer for drafting

**Directions:** Part of the mariachi tradition is in telling stories from life. Stories can be about love, or lost love, about a hometown, about nature, or about missing some place or someone.

Have students consider where they find “home” - is it the place that they currently live with their family or a place far away? Is “home” a neighborhood, a city, a country or a place that only happens when certain people gather together?

Have students complete a 5 minute free-writing using their 5 senses - what does home (in however they choose to define it) feel like, taste like, smell like, look like, and sound like.

After free-writing, have them begin to consider what from their list would make good additions for their song or poem.

They might find it useful to use a format of repeating:

My home feels like . . .

My home looks like . . . etc.

More experienced writers may chose to find a format that works for them.

Share with the class or in small groups or hold a performance of their work about home.

## ACTIVITY 2: RESEARCHING CONNECTIONS

**Objective:** Students will read an article and make connections with either text, self, or world.

Have students read in small groups, or independently, the *Billboard* magazine article about Mariachi Herencia de México ([page i-iii](#)) and use the graphic organizer ([page iv](#)) for guiding discussion.

### Extension into Research:

After reading the article (or a section of the article if working with younger students), students can choose explore a text-to-world connection using Newsela.

A Newsela ([www.newsela.com](http://www.newsela.com)) search on “mariachi” for example brings up a variety of related topics for students to connect and explore deeper understanding.

The screenshot shows the Newsela interface. On the left, there is a sidebar with 'Narrow Your Choices' (Lower Elementary School (2), Upper Elementary School (6), Middle School (13), High School (13)) and 'TEXT LEVEL' (2-12). The main area is titled 'Advanced Search' and 'Articles'. Four article cards are displayed:

- ARTS** 10.23.17: Meet the 12-year-old star of "Coco," Pixar's big fall movie
- ARTS** 11.13.16: "Party of 2,200, please." This longtime Mexican restaurant can handle it
- ARTS** 01.20.15: School music programs open their doors to mariachi
- MONEY** 10.31.18: In the U.S., Day of the Dead is becoming big business

# CONNECTING TO MUSIC

In a typical mariachi group there are as many as six to eight violins, two trumpets, and a guitar—all standard European instruments that students might already be familiar with. The vihuela (small guitar), and guitarrón (big bass guitar) make up the rest of the mariachi group. Some groups include a folk harp as well.



VIHUELA



GUITARRÓN

The high-pitched, round-backed guitar is called the **vihuela**. When strummed in the traditional manner this gives mariachi its typical rhythmic vitality.

A deep-voiced guitar called the **guitarrón** serves as the bass of the ensemble. While these instruments have European origins, in their present form they are strictly Mexican.

The sound that these instruments make when combined to make is unique. Mariachi uses sharply contrasting sounds: the sweet sounds of the violins against the brilliance of the trumpets: the deep sound of the guitarrón against the crisp, high voice of the vihuela; and the frequent shifting between syncopation and on-beat rhythm. The resulting sound is the heart and soul of Mexico.



Watch Mariachi Lindas Mexicanas - the all female mariachi group pictured here - and try to locate the instruments and their sounds in the group.



Mariachi music is not just music to be played and sung. Often it is music to be danced to. To learn more about the many regional dances connected with mariachi as well as a walk-through of each of the instruments check out this video.

# CONNECTING TO MUSIC (cont.)

**Objective:** To research an element of mariachi music or culture.

## OPTION 1: MEET THE INSTRUMENT

Students will research one of the instruments played by Mariachi groups and report their findings to the class.

Share the [google slide show](#) visual of instruments which lists instruments played by different members of the ensemble. Next, assign each small group a different instrument from the list and invite them to research.

## OPTION 2: MEET THE MUSICIAN

Student will research one of the artists Mariachi Herencia de México pays homage to on their album *Herencia de Tierra Mia*.

## THINK ABOUT IT!

Students might consider the following questions:

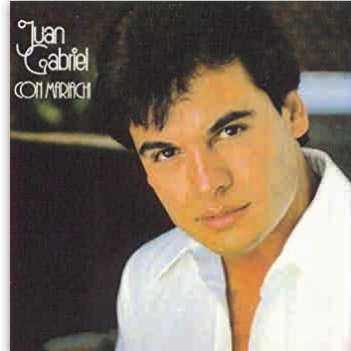
- What is the instrument made from?
- Where did it originate?
- How is it played?
- What does it sound like?
- Is it used for any special purposes?



Pedro Infante



Lucha Villa



Juan Gabriel



Selena

## PRESENTING RESEARCH

Have students report their findings in a format of their choice - a google slideshow, a paragraph or more of reporting, a short video or [www.padlet.com](http://www.padlet.com)

Students may present their research to the class. If students found audio clips of their instrument being played or music of the selected artists allow them to share with the class as part of their report.

# CONNECTING TO SELF

---

Members of Mariachi Herencia de México live in Chicago—but many members of the group have Mexican heritage. Heritage means a tradition or something that is passed down from one generation to another. Mariachi music is a part of the tradition that is passed down in their Mexican American community.

**Objective:** Students consider a traditional practice in their family or community and create a short explanation of the tradition’s origin and how it is practiced in their experience.

**Note:** There is a challenge inherent in celebrating heritage between honoring tradition and embracing differences in the ways students connect to the various facets of their identities. Giving students space to share about their personal, familial, religious, ethnic, geographic or cultural heritage celebrates where each of us come from as individuals but also how we contribute to the classroom, school and communities of which we are a part. It’s important to provide multiple contexts for students to engage. If individuals aren’t as excited about connecting with their familial heritage, a community or school culture might be an easier entry into the topic!

## **ACTIVITY:**

### **Discussion with students:**

“We all have traditions in our families or communities. Sometimes families might eat a certain kind of food together every year to celebrate a holiday. Other communities might come together to dance or sing. Everything from the kind of music your family plays to certain clothing that you wear, to a language you speak might be part of your heritage. What examples do you have in your life that may be part of your tradition or your heritage?”

Give students time to jot down and brainstorm some possibilities. Discuss in small groups for feedback and narrow down their list to one or two ideas.

### **Consider the following research strategies to dig deeper:**

- Interview a family or community member about how a tradition was started or how it was changed through the years.
- Try to imagine explaining the tradition to someone who has never heard of it before. What details might feel familiar and ordinary to you but might be interesting to others? Try to tell the story of celebrating the tradition from beginning to end—including all the details you can remember.
- Look up the history of the tradition on [www.kiddle.co](http://www.kiddle.co). Remind students that the more specific you can be the better! For example, looking up “History of Easter Egg Hunt” gets better results than “Easter” or “Easter Egg Hunt”

Compile research results into a google slide, one for each student, or have each student a create poster about their heritage practice that can be displayed or compiled into a class book.

For more information on the value of exploring heritage, follow the link below to an article from Emory University researchers:

“Family stories provide a sense of identity through time, and help children understand who they are in the world,” **the researchers reported** in their paper titled **“Do You Know? The power of family history in adolescent identity and well-being.”**

# AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

QUESTIONS TO ENGAGE & CONNECT

## CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSS AS A CLASS OR IN SMALL GROUPS:

1. Which song was your favorite and why?
2. Do you remember any of the rhythms that were played during the show? Can you recreate them?
3. Do you remember the different instruments used? How did each instrument sound? How did their unique sounds contribute to the overall feeling of the piece?
4. What did you notice about the clothing worn by the performers?
5. Did the performance remind you of anything you have seen, heard or experienced before? If so, how?
6. The mariachi performance was bilingual, as some of it was presented in English and some of it was presented in Spanish. Do you or someone in your family speak more than one language?

## CREATE AN ALBUM COVER

Ask students to imagine that Mariachi Herencia de México wants to invite them to help design their new album cover. First, ask students to consider what elements are included and choices are being made in their first two albums covers.

### Share the design criteria:

They want the new album cover to celebrate the music and culture of mariachi and Mexican American identity.

Ask students to identify several important ideas and images that come to mind when they think about the concert and what they learned.

Ask students to sketch a few design ideas on scratch paper. When they have settled on a final design, have them create their final rendition! Provide opportunity for peer response and ask students to consider their answer to the following:

- What elements did you include in your design and why?
- Are there other elements that you considered but did not use?
- Why did you use the colors you chose?
- Why should the group choose your design?
- What does your design tell a people about the musician's music or culture?



We'd love to hear about your experience at the performance. Write a letter to Des Moines Performing Arts.

Once completed, mail the letters to us and we'll make sure they get to the right people.

Des Moines Performing Arts  
Attn: Education Department  
221 Walnut Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309

If you'd prefer to email us a batch of letters, that'd be great too! Our email address is: [education@desmoinesperformingarts.org](mailto:education@desmoinesperformingarts.org)

We'll do our best to send your class a reply!





# RESOURCES AND SOURCES

## WEBSITES

**Video of Mariachi group**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUEnStCqdmM>

**Mariachi Heritage Foundation**

<https://www.mariachiheritagefoundation.org>

**NBC newsclip**

[https://www.nbcchicago.com/blogs/making-a-difference/WEB-430P-MARIACHI-SCHOOL\\_Chicago-373142001.html](https://www.nbcchicago.com/blogs/making-a-difference/WEB-430P-MARIACHI-SCHOOL_Chicago-373142001.html)

**Kennedy Center Performance**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7w91z67BcL8>

**Herencia de Tierra Mia Video**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmAuceVf6UU&list=RD7w91z67BcL8&index=2>

## Books

**Mariachi by Patricia Greathouse**

<https://www.amazon.com/Mariachi-Patricia-Greathouse/dp/1423602811>

**Canta, Mariachi, Canta by Jose Hernandez**

<https://www.amazon.com/Canta-mariachi-canta-Traditional.../dp/1495062406>

**Mariachi Music In America by Daniel Sheehy**

<https://www.amazon.com/Mariachi-Music-America-Experiencing-Expressing/dp/0195141466>

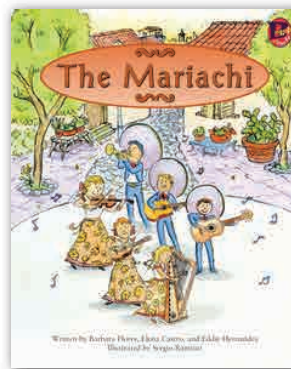
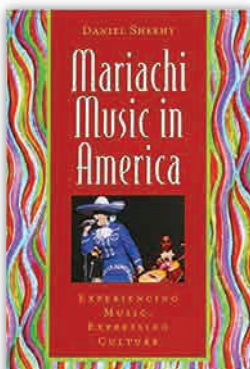
**The Mariachi by Elena Castro, Barbara M. Flores, Eddie Hernández**

[https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-mariachi/teachers\\_guide](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-mariachi/teachers_guide)

## Movies

**Coco**

**Book of Life**



# BILLBOARD MAGAZINE ARTICLE

CONNECTING TO LANGUAGE ARTS (PAGE 9)

## Mariachi Herencia de México on Bringing Mariachi Music to the Charts While Staying True to Their Mexican Roots

6/14/2018 by Griselda Flores



“We are the future,” said 16-year-old ZullyDiana Gomez, who is one of Mariachi Herencia de Mexico’s violin players. “We don’t want our culture to die and we want to keep celebrating it through music.”

Mariachi Herencia de México is composed of teenagers, ages 11 to 19, from Chicago, whose new album—titled *Herencia de la Tierra Mía* -- debuted at No. 2 on *Billboard*’s Latin Album Sales chart and No. 5 on the Regional Mexican Albums chart (dated June 9).

“To be on the *Billboard* charts is a great honor because we’re city kids, we’re students and we’re coming from such humble roots,” said violinist Angelica Perez, 19. “So, to be placed in such a nationwide publication, that’s amazing and it gives me so much pride.”

What started out as a music program for students enrolled in Chicago Public Schools, the third largest district in the nation, in 2014 has become much more than he could ever envision, said Cesar Maldonado, founder of the education program.

# BILLBOARD MAGAZINE ARTICLE

CONNECTING TO LANGUAGE ARTS (PAGE 9)

---

“It’s a group of kids, but it’s impressive to see their playing level, where they’re at musically and how much they have evolved,” Maldonado told *Billboard*. “It’s them being trailblazers, leading the genre.”

Maldonado also runs the Mariachi Heritage Foundation, a nonprofit organization that seeks to preserve the cultural heritage of mariachi music and other Mexican heritage arts.

Since the band’s inception in 2016, Mariachi Herencia de México, managed by IMG Artists, was nominated for a Latin Grammy in 2017 for their debut album *Nuestra Herencia*, and the young musicians have already shared the stage with singers like Aída Cuevas and Lila Downs.

It’s safe to say that when we think of mariachi music, icons like Pedro Infante, José Alfredo Jiménez and Vicente Fernández come to mind, not teenagers from Chicago.

Aware that they’re stepping into a music genre that has years of history and tradition behind it with big names attached to it, the band members hope to reach a new generation of listeners while respecting the music and its authenticity.

“Our philosophy is that first, you have to love and respect the music because there’s hundreds of years of culture with this music,” said Maldonado. “We’re making the music relevant to a new generation but also respecting it for people that have worked so hard on it.”

Aside from reaching a new generation, Maldonado wants to see mariachi music in a world music genre next to flamenco and Latin jazz instead of being placed in the regional Mexican music space.

“We’re not on the radio. If the radio has Banda El Recodo and narcocorridos and all of this other music that is completely different music, we might as well be moved to the more sophisticated side of music and expand the audience because mariachi hasn’t reached its potential.”

Hoping to help mariachi music reach its potential and attract new listeners, their new album features covers of classical mariachi tunes while adding their own twist and recording some of Selena Quintanilla’s songs.

The band members also co-wrote their very first song titled “Herencia de la Tierra Mía.” They partnered with producer and songwriter Javier Limón for the song where they pay homage to their hometown of Chicago. Limón also produced the new album.

The **video** was recorded in the neighborhoods where they grew up, which are all predominantly Hispanic and immigrant communities.

It’s because of their upbringing in Chicago and living in a moment when an anti-immigrant sentiment seems to thrive across the country that makes them realize how important it is to wear the traje de charro (mariachi suit) and represent this music with pride and dignity.

“I go to a Catholic school and there aren’t many Mexican students so every time when I walk through the halls in my traje, many people stare at me and say, ‘nice costume.’ I tell them it’s not a costume,” said Bryana Martínez, 15-year-old violinist. “It makes me proud to wear my traje in that school and represent my culture, my heritage and show people that I am proud of who I am.”

# BILLBOARD MAGAZINE ARTICLE

CONNECTING TO LANGUAGE ARTS (PAGE 9)

---

“We’re also trying to give a message of hope by recording this music,” Gomez said. “This is who we are. We’re honoring Mexico, our tierra (land) and it’s important that in times like these...to give our people a sense of hope.”

Chicago pride also plays an important role in these teens’ lives, said Maldonado.

“For it to be kids from the ‘hood,’ we’re not embarrassed of that, we’re proud of it and if we can teach people a little bit more about where we come from through this music, great. That’s what music is supposed to do. Inspire emotions, evolution of culture and push forward.”

While school’s out for summer break, Mariachi Herencia de México members will be busy touring the U.S. and Mexico. And they wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I’m usually always with the group,” said Gomez. “Maybe we’re not practicing or in gigs but we go to the movies together because we can basically call each other family.”

# GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

CONNECTING TO LANGUAGE ARTS (PAGE 9)

---

## Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World Handout

*Use the copy of the text provided by your teacher to make any notes. Read the text once, and then read it again to find ideas that you can use to answer the following questions.*

### 1. **Text-to-Text:** How do the ideas in this text remind you of another text (story, book, movie, song, etc)?

Complete one of the following statements:

What I just read reminds me of \_\_\_\_\_ (story/book/movie/song) because...

The ideas in this text are similar to the ideas in \_\_\_\_\_ because...

The ideas in this text are different than the ideas in \_\_\_\_\_ because...

### 2. **Text-to-Self:** How do the ideas in this text relate to your own life, ideas, and experiences?

Complete one of the following statements:

What I just read reminds me of the time when I...

I agree with/understand what I just read because in my own life...

I don't agree with what I just read because in my own life...

### 3. **Text-to-World:** How do the ideas in this text reading relate to the larger world—past, present and future. Complete one of the following statements:

What I just read makes me think about \_\_\_\_\_ (event from the past) because...

What I just read makes me think about \_\_\_\_\_ (event from today related to my own community, nation or world) because...

What I just read makes me wonder about the future because...

