



## Lydia Mendoza: Tejano Life and Music on the Mexico/ Texas Border

### OVERVIEW

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does Lydia Mendoza's Tejano music connect to the history of Texas and the influence Mexico has had on that state?

#### OVERVIEW

*In this lesson, students will explore the life of Tejano music pioneer Lydia Mendoza and identify how her music connects to Mexican heritage, Tejano culture and Texas identity. Students will examine Texas' unique history and identify the "six flags" that have flown over it.*



Lydia Mendoza recording at the Texas Hotel in San Antonio, TX, 1936 / Credit: UTSA (Zuma Press)

The border that currently separates Texas from Mexico has not always been an international line. For more than 10,000 years before Spanish colonization began in 1519, the territory now known as Texas was home to numerous Native American Tribal Nations, including the Apache, Cherokee, Comanche, and Wichita. The region was briefly part of French colonial territory in 1685, only to be reclaimed by Spain in 1690. Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, and the Texas region went with it. Texas then became an independent republic in 1836 before it was annexed by the United States in 1845. During the American Civil War from 1861-1865, Texas joined the rebelling Confederate States of America but returned to the Union at the war's end. The southern border of Texas even shifted at times, causing the region's land mass to expand or shrink.

Spanish colonial domination and Mexico's influence significantly shaped the current identity of the area. Residents with ethnic ties to Spanish-speaking colonists, a family history in the region, and valued local traditions began to refer to themselves as *Tejanos* - Texans with Mexican roots. A cultural byproduct of this synthesis was music composed of Mexican, American, and European musical traditions, resulting in a vibrant sonic hybrid known as Tejano music.

A trailblazer in the development and popularization of Tejano music was the singer and guitarist Lydia Mendoza. Born in Houston, Texas in 1916 to Mexican parents, Mendoza performed music along the southern border of Texas as a member of her family's traveling music group. In 1934, Mendoza recorded the ballad "Mal Hombre" as a solo artist. The recording was a regional and national hit, lifting Mendoza's burgeoning career and introducing Tejano music to a much wider audience.

Mendoza championed regional music that mixed Mexican folk styles with European dance rhythms while also challenging and expanding the image of a female leader in Tejano culture. She flaunted instrumental customs by solely accompanying herself on 12-string guitar, foregoing the typical Tejano ensemble and establishing exclusive artistic command of her live performances. Although she prioritized family responsibilities and lightened her performing and recording schedule later in life, Mendoza was always revered. The numerous honorific titles bestowed upon her include: the Queen of Tejano music, the Spanish Songbird, *La Alondra de la Frontera* (“The Lark of the Border”), and *La Cancionera de los Pobres* (“The Songstress of the Poor”).

In 1982, Mendoza became the first Texan to be awarded the National Heritage Fellowship Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Endowment for the Arts. She was honored by President Bill Clinton with the National Medal of Arts in 1999 and received the Folk Alliance International Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001. Her life and career was celebrated with a United States Postal Service stamp in 2013.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- How Lydia Mendoza was fundamental in developing and popularizing Tejano music
- What Tejano identity is and the people, culture, and history connected to it
- The unique history of Texas
- The phrase “six flags over Texas” and what it signifies

### 2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to articulate who Lydia Mendoza was and how she pioneered Tejano music by analyzing images, discussing terms, and viewing a video.

## ACTIVITIES

### ENTRY TICKET ACTIVITY

1. Distribute **Handout - Texas KWL Chart** (*Teacher’s Guide*). Explain to students that there are three topics on the chart, and throughout the class they will be making notes on what they already know, would like to know, and what they learned about each topic. Provide time for students to make notes in the first two columns of the chart. Then ask students to share their notes.

### MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Display **Image 1, U.S. Map** and remind students to make notes on their KWL charts of what they discover during the discussion. Then ask students:
  - Where is the state of Texas on this map?

- What region of the United States is Texas located in? (*South, Southwest, or another option is the Census Bureau's classification: West South Central region.*)
- Which U.S. states share a border with Texas?
- What country shares an international border with Texas?
- Are you familiar with the phrase, “six flags over Texas”? If so, what does it mean?

2. Display **Image 2, Six Flags Over Texas** Quote and ask students:

- According to the quote, what countries “have ruled over Texas”?

## PROCEDURE

1. Inform students that they will be examining the history of Texas and how that history has influenced the development of Texas culture and identity.
  - influence of all of the countries whose flags have flown over it?
2. Organize students into small groups for the Texas Timeline activity and distribute to each group **Document Set - Texas Timeline**. Instruct student groups to view each map, read its description, and then match the flag of the country that ruled over the territory now known as Texas with the corresponding historical map. Remind students to make notes on their KWL charts of what they discover during the activity. Then ask students:
  - Can you describe the history of Texas chronologically, in terms of which nation claimed the area? (*Spain [1519-1685, 1690-1821], France [1685-1690], Mexico [1821-1836], Texas sovereignty (1836-1846), Confederate States of America [1861-1865], The United States of America [1845-Present].*)
  - What was one thing you noticed about one of the maps that you found interesting?
  - Considering what you have just examined in the activity, how might the people of Texas, and their culture, reflect the
3. Display **Image 3, Tejano Quote** and ask students:
  - What might the quote mean by “cultural manifestations”?
  - Are you familiar with any of the “cultural manifestations in language, literature, art, music, and cuisine” that the term *Tejana/o* is connected to? If so, what are you familiar with?
4. Display **Image 4, Tejano Culture Collage** (*see this image for an annotated collage*) and ask students:
  - What do you see in the collage? Are you familiar with any of the “cultural manifestations” seen in the collage?
  - How are the images representative of Tejano culture?
5. Explain to students that they will now explore one of Tejano’s cultural manifestations - music. Distribute either **Handout - Lydia Mendoza Comprehension Questions (Long)**, or **Handout - Lydia Mendoza Comprehension Questions (Short)**, pending time (*the short handout covers less of the clip than the long*).

Inform students that they will be watching a video about the Tejano music pioneer, Lydia Mendoza, and there will be pauses throughout to give them time to answer questions on the handout.

6. Play the YouTube video “‘Mother of Tejano Music’ | The lasting legacy of Lydia Mendoza” (<https://youtu.be/zqI5atiTUCg>). While watching, follow along the timecode listed in the handout, pausing at the appropriate moments to give students time to answer questions. Then ask students:

- How would you describe Lydia Mendoza’s contributions to Tejano history? What are some explanations, opinions, and facts about her contributions that inform your description?
- How might you relate Lydia Mendoza’s life and music to the Texas Timeline activity? (*Encourage students to recall the countries that occupied the territory of Texas.*)

### SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Ask students to complete their KWL Charts. Then create a “Big Paper” silent classroom conversation activity (*an example of a Big Paper activity can be found here: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/big-paper-building-silent-conversation>*). First, attach the images from **Big Paper Activity - Tejano Culture** onto the center of three large sheets, and then hang the sheets around the classroom. Distribute markers to students and ask them to share on the big paper what they learned about the three topics by referencing their KWL charts, and to share any thoughts or opinions they might have. Have students circle the classroom multiple times, and encourage them to respond to other students’ comments to create a silent conversation. While conducting the activity, feel free to play this Lydia Mendoza playlist in the background: [https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy\\_mHmMXoqC40Ltlg7D5PXotmP4AqkrfT0w4](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_mHmMXoqC40Ltlg7D5PXotmP4AqkrfT0w4).
2. Once completed, bring students back together as a class and have them share about what they wrote on each Big Paper.

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Watch the one-hour documentary *Chulas Fronteras* (<https://lesblank.com/films/chulas-fronteras-1976-2/>), which features Lydia Mendoza and celebrates Tejano culture, via Kanopy (<https://www.kanopy.com/en>).
2. Discover more about Lydia Mendoza and her famous song, “Mal Hombre” with this Library of Congress document: <https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/MalHombre.pdf>
3. Examine the life of Selena, another Tejano music pioneer, with the following TeachRock resources:
  - Selena - Trace It Back biography: <https://teachrock.org/traceitback/selena/>
  - Women’s Perspectives in Country and Tejano Music: <https://teachrock.org/lesson/womens-perspectives-in-country-and-tejano-music/>

- Third Wave: Women's Rights and Music in the 1990s: <https://teachrock.org/lesson/womens-perspectives-in-country-and-tejano-music/>
- 4. Read about the history of the Texas Flag and the Rules Governing the Use of the Texas Flag here: <https://house.texas.gov/about-us/state-of-texas-flag/#:~:text=A%20flag%20consisting%20of%20a,the%20Republic%20from%201836%2D1839>
- 5. Make a Tejano dish in class, if possible: <https://adanmedrano.com/cookbook-truly-texas-mexican>
- 6. Identify what region of the U.S. your state is in according to the Census Bureau and research its historic origins and cultural legacy: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1or1G-xHW78uV4kKfvFhvv5n9Z4by3dEM/view?usp=sharing>

## STANDARDS

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

#### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)*

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Craft and Structure 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Craft and Structure 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

#### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)*

Text Types and Purposes 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

#### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)*

Comprehension & Collaboration 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Comprehension & Collaboration 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Comprehension & Collaboration 3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (K-12)*

Language 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Language 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

### **SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)**

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

### **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION – NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (NAFME)**

#### *Core Music Standard: Connecting*

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

### **NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS**

#### *Connecting*

Anchor Standards 11: Relate artistic ideas and work with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.



## RESOURCES

### HANDOUTS

- Handout - Texas KWL Chart
- Handout - Texas KWL Chart (Teacher's Guide)
- Document Set - Texas Timeline
- Handout - Lydia Mendoza Comprehension Questions (Long)
- Handout - Lydia Mendoza Comprehension Questions (Short)
- Big Paper Activity - Tejano Culture