

ChocQuibTown: Embracing Cultural Identity through Colombian Rap

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can the music of ChocQuibTown, from the Pacific Coast of Colombia, help students express and celebrate their cultural identity through Rap?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students explore Afro-Colombian cultural identity from the Pacific Coast by examining the music and lyrics of ChocQuibTown, one of the most influential modern bands in Colombia. They will investigate how ChocQuibTown uses Rap and Hip Hop culture to celebrate where they are from, and learn what it means to rapear (rap) and freestalear (freestyle) in Colombia. Students then write their own verses in Spanish after familiarizing themselves with ChocQuibTown's original song, "Somos Pacífico," an anthem of the Pacific Coastal Region of Colombia.



Illustration: Henrique Gomes

Nominated for several Latin Grammys, ChocQuibTown is one of the most innovative bands to emerge in recent years from Colombia. Hailing from El Chocó, ChocQuibTown fuses Rap, Hip Hop, Salsa, and marimba-infused rhythms to captivate fans with a unique sound that is “part social inclusion, part digital innovation, and parts roots music that originated from the Afro-Colombian traditions of the Pacific Coast.” Winners of a Latin Grammy for the 2010 song “De Donde Vengo Yo,” ChocQuibTown have also collaborated with Latin American pop titans Diego Torres and Ivete Sangalo in performing the anthem of the Fútbol (soccer) championship Copa América: “Creo En América”/“Believe in America.” ChocQuibTown's two most recent albums, *Eso Es Lo Que Hay* and *Behind The Machine*, went gold in Colombia, and the group continues to be a driving cultural force in Latin America and beyond.

ChocQuibTown's place of origin is El Chocó, a state in the Pacific Coastal Region that borders the Caribbean Sea. Its inhabitants are mostly of African and/or Indigenous descent. *Chocoanos* (people from Chocó) are the inheritors of a rich cultural heritage, stemming partly from the rare gatherings of enslaved Africans who, during fleeting moments of freedom, were able to preserve their rituals and history through the act of making music. Many of the genres of music, songs, and rhythms in El Chocó—such as *abozao*, *juga*, *jota*, and *contradanza*—have been passed down through generations and mixed with other styles of music. Cali, the capital of the Pacific Region, is known for its salsa rhythms and has a profound legacy worldwide in the now ubiquitous genre, represented by renowned groups such as Grupo Niche and Orquesta Guayacán. In Valle del Cauca you will find Currulao, the flagship rhythm of the Pacific coast. It features instruments such as marimba (traditional xylophone made of wood and gourds),

bombo, guasá, and cununo, and is played daily in all parts of the region, retaining centrality to the traditions of this area.

ChocQuibTown weaves these rich traditions together, while using their music as a way to fight for social justice and empower the community in El Chocó and the greater Pacific Coastal region of Colombia, which has often been neglected due to the policy of *mestizaje*. *Mestizaje* (miscegenation) is a term promoted by the Colombian state since 1851, with the aim of “whitening” the black population and erasing racial differences. A national identity was thus formed in the pride of a tri-ethnic heritage: White, Black and Indigenous. But the idea that Colombia was built on the concept of *mestizaje*, with no separate ethnic populations or races, is one of the reasons the Black and Indigenous populations tend to be geographically segregated. They are targets of continued displacement from their lands as powerful groups (coffee, banana, sugar cane, oil palm, and coca plantations) appropriate their regional resources. The Pacific Coastal Region is one such place: it shares a border with Panama and Ecuador. It is one of the resource-richest in Colombia and, as a result, is bitterly contested by competing corporate and governmental agencies.

Goyo (Gloria Martinez), the female lead singer of ChocQuibTown, is emphatic in her desire to make her region of the country visible. She states, “People don’t know that the Pacific exists. Many people did not know, and now, with us, they know that our music can be mixed with other rhythms that are not from here, because our music is rich and multiple with many rhythms and sonorities.” The group’s support of the region is perhaps most pronounced in the hit single “Somos Pacífico (We are Pacific),” an anthem to the group’s roots and its cultural identity.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- That Rap and Hip Hop are a form of universal cultural expression
- That Colombia is a country with traditions from Africa
- The importance of sharing and celebrating cultural identity
- How to play a ChocQuibTown beat using body percussion
- The definition of cypher and how to cypher in a circle
- How to sing the chorus of “Somos Pacífico” by ChocQuibTown in Spanish

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to draw connections between music, cultural identity, and community empowerment by exploring the Colombian Hip Hop group ChocQuibTown and composing their own rap lyrics.

ACTIVITIES

VOCABULARY INTRODUCTION

1. Distribute to students **Handout - ChocQuibTown Vocabulary Flashcards** (*you may need to cut the flashcards out beforehand*).
2. Introduce students to the Spanish vocabulary used in this lesson by going through the **ChocQuibTown Vocabulary Slideshow**.
3. Explore the document **Suggested Activities for LADAMA Vocabulary Flash Cards** for suggestions on ways students can practice Spanish using the flash cards either before the lesson or as homework.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Show **Image 1, ChocQuibTown**. Tell students that in class they will be learning about the group ChocQuibTown, and the way they use music to celebrate their cultural identity.
2. Explain that one of Chocquibtown's most well-known songs is called "De Donde Vengo Yo." If possible, ask Spanish-speaking students in the class to try to provide an English translation of the phrase "*de donde vengo yo*." Otherwise, inform students that the phrase is translated as "Where I come from."
3. As a class practice pronouncing "De donde vengo yo." Then ask students:
 - What do you think a song titled "Where I Come From" could be about? (*Encourage students to think about the places a person might come from – either a country, neighborhood, or even family*.)
4. Inform students they will be playing a "complete the sentence" game. Go around the class in a circle asking each student to first say "*de donde vengo yo*" and then describe something about where they come from. Provide the first example for yourself (for example, "*de donde vengo yo* people love baseball.")
5. Explain to students that being proud of where you come from is part of your **cultural identity**, or how you think about yourself and your background.

PROCEDURE

1. Display **Image 2, Colombia Illustration**, and point out the Pacific Coastal Region in the west of the country. Tell students that ChocQuibTown formed in this area out of a shared desire to celebrate "*de donde vengo yo*," or where they come from.
2. Tell students they will continue to think about what they feel makes "where they come from" special by drawing a picture. Pass out **Handout - Celebrating Cultural Identity**, and ask students to complete the questions instructions on the handout.

3. Inform students they will now be listening to a song by ChocQuibTown. Play **this video clip of ChocQuibTown performing their song, “Somos Pacífico” live on KEXP** (*Please note that the video is offsite, so it may need to be loaded prior to class.*) Then ask students:

- Have you ever heard music sung in a different language before? If so, where did you hear it? Do you remember anything else about the music?

4. Ask students to recall the beginning of the class, when each student went in a circle to describe where they come from. Explain that this is called a cypher, and it is something groups of rappers do as well. Ask students:

- What did you see ChocQuibTown do in the video that is like a cypher?

5. Tell students that they will be performing their own cypher by learning how to rap and sing in Spanish. Ask students to stand up, and explain that they will be performing along with an interactive video. Play and perform along with **Clip 1, LADAMA - Learning the ChocQuibTown Beat**. Assist students throughout while they learn a Colombian Hip-Hop rhythm using body percussion. Pause the video as needed to help students work on the rhythms, or use the below excerpted sections of the clip. Feel free to use **Handout - ChocQuibTown Teacher’s Guide** as needed. Excerpted sections:

- Learning the ChocQuibtown Beat
Excerpt: Introduction
- Learning the ChocQuibtown Beat
Excerpt: ChocQuibtown Beat
- Learning the ChocQuibtown Beat
Excerpt: Adding a Clap
- Learning the ChocQuibtown Beat
Excerpt: Play along with LADAMA

- Learning the ChocQuibtown Beat
Excerpt: Play along with LADAMA

6. Next, inform students that they will be learning to sing the chorus of “Somos Pacífico.” Play and perform along with **Clip 2, LADAMA - Learning The Lyrics to “Somos Pacífico.”** Assist students throughout while they learn the lyrics. Pause the video as needed to help students work on the rhythms, or use the below excerpted sections of the clip. Feel free to use **Handout - ChocQuibTown Teacher’s Guide** as needed. Excerpted sections:

- Learning the Lyrics to Somos Pacífico
Excerpt: Introduction
- Learning the Lyrics to Somos Pacífico
Excerpt: Learning the Lyrics and Translation
- Learning the Lyrics to Somos Pacífico
Excerpt: Singing the Lyrics
- Learning the Lyrics to Somos Pacífico
Excerpt: Sing along with LADAMA
- Learning the Lyrics to Somos Pacífico
Excerpt: Combining the Beat and the Singing

7. **Activity for General Music Class:** Use the transcription in **Handout - ChocQuibTown Teacher’s Guide** to have your modern band class perform perform “Somos Pacífico.”

8. Play and perform along with **Clip 3, LADAMA - Rapping and Flow**. In this video, students will learn how to cypher by singing along with and watching LADAMA sing their handwritten verses in between the “Somos Pacífico” choruses. (*Note to teacher: while the video mentions a written handout, use the drawing students made in Step 2 as inspiration for their rap.*)



SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Inform students that it's now their turn to cypher as a class. Use **Clip 4, LADAMA Hand Clap Beat for Cypher Activity** as a beat to rap over.
 - Do you know another artist that celebrates their cultural roots or their hometown? If so, who?
2. Ask students:
 - Ask students to stand in a circle. Then lead them in their own cypher, singing the chorus of “Somos Pacífico” in between taking turns rapping their own original verses (as written in the handout). Students should be encouraged to freestyle if they'd like.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Write your own anthemic chorus as a class! The students have already written down original lyrics so now they just need a chorus to make the song complete.
2. Make your own class beat!
3. Use handout **Extension Activity - Cultural Identity Self Portraits** to create a self portrait that represents your cultural identity.

STANDARDS

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

Core Music Standard: Creating

Plan and Make: Select and develop musical ideas for defined purposes and contexts.

Evaluate and Refine: Evaluate and refine selected musical ideas to create musical work(s) that meet appropriate criteria.

Present: Share creative musical work that conveys intent, demonstrates craftsmanship, and exhibits originality.

Core Music Standard: Performing

Analyze: Analyze the structure and context of varied musical works and their implications for performance.

Interpret: Develop personal interpretations that consider creators' intent.

Rehearse, Evaluate, and Refine: Evaluate and refine personal and ensemble performances, individually or in collaboration with others.

Present: Perform expressively, with appropriate interpretation and technical accuracy, and in a manner appropriate to the audience and context.

Core Music Standard: Responding

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

Core Music Standard: Connecting

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



NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.

Performing/Presenting/Producing

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Responding

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Core Music Standard: Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

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

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

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

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.

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.

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

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

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 Writing (K-12)

Text Types and Purposes 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Production and Distribution of Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, 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.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

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 9 : Global Connections



RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- *LADAMA* - Learning the ChocQuibTown Beat
- *LADAMA* - Learning the Lyrics to “Somos Pacífico.”
- *LADAMA* - Rapping and Flow
- *LADAMA* - Hand Clap Beat for Cypher

HANDOUTS

- Handout - ChocQuibTown Vocabulary Flashcards
- ChocQuibTown Vocabulary Slideshow
- Suggested Activities for LADAMA Vocabulary Flash Cards
- Handout - Celebrating Cultural Identity
- ChocQuibTown Teacher’s Guide