

Aguinaldos: Venezuelan Songs for the Holiday Season

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What are Aguinaldos, and how do children in Venezuela celebrate the winter holiday season known as *La Navidad*?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson students will learn how to sing a traditional Aguinaldo in Spanish and familiarize themselves with the ways in which children celebrate the winter holiday season, or La Navidad, in Venezuela.



Aguinaldos are songs that celebrate *La Navidad* in all parts of Venezuela. They evolved from the European Christmas carol that was used by the Spanish to evangelize African and Indigenous people during colonial times in Venezuela. Originally, Aguinaldos were sung at Mass and during special *misas navideñas* (Christmas masses). Eventually, they also became a celebratory, secular tradition, evolving musically over time with the introduction of African and Indigenous cultural contributions.

In Venezuela, *La Navidad* is celebrated for up to three months of the year. Beginning in the middle of November with the construction of nativity scenes in houses of community members and public places, *La Navidad* extends into the following year, ending on January 6th with the arrival and visit of the Three Wise Men. During these three months of festivities, the community celebrates by singing Aguinaldos (secular and religious), Parrandas (secular) and Villancicos (secular and religious). Aguinaldos are sung specifically in front of public nativity scenes, during religious processions, in people's homes, and at *misas de gallo* (5 am church services).

During a special Aguinaldo mass, held every night during *La Navidad*, hymns that would be sung during a normal mass are reinterpreted in the style of the Aguinaldo. Aguinaldo style is defined by the inclusion of instruments excluded from mass the rest of the year, such as the cuatro (a 4-stringed lute), furro and tambora (types of drums), and maracas (a shaken percussion instrument).

Another aspect of Aguinaldo style is the change in meter (or time signature) — hymns that would normally be sung in 4/4 time are now played in 6/8 and 2/4 and accompanied by the addition of polyrhythms played on drums. Creole rhythms, such as Merengue and Guasa, heavily influence the Aguinaldo style and can vary in style regionally. Aguinaldos possess musical characteristics of diverse, local, Venezuelan culture, reaffirming cultural identity through song. They are composed in both major or minor keys, with verses sung in unison or led by a soloist.

The choruses, or *estribillos*, are sung by all, sometimes in unison and sometimes with harmony. Some Aguinaldos are non-religious and are sung as accompaniment to less sacred activities. Additionally, there are Aguinaldos that are composed for and sung only during *La Navidad*.

It is common for children to learn Aguinaldos in primary and secondary schools in preparation for performing them in public spaces. When groups of young Aguinaldo singers travel to multiple locations to perform, they are called *Las Paraduras* and activities often involve singing while making collections of food and clothing for the community. In turn, they present these gifts to members of the community during the *Misas de Aguinaldos* (Aguinaldo Masses). In fact, the word “Aguinaldo” also refers to a gift that is asked for and then given during the time of *La Navidad*. Each community can also organize their own Aguinaldo groups, composed of both children and adults, with the intention of visiting each home in their neighborhood. Each home receives the singers and gives thanks by cooking traditional foods, served only during *La Navidad*, such as *ensalada de gallina* (chicken salad), *hallacas* (a Venezuelan tamale), and *pan de jamón*, a savory pastry or bread with ham and raisins inside. Sacred Aguinaldo themes include the birth of Jesus Christ (December 25th) and *El Abrazo* (The Embrace) celebrated on New Year’s Eve when members of the community embrace each other. Secular themes include celebrating the culinary traditions and decorations in houses in the community during *La Navidad*.

During the 1940s and 50s, it was common for schools and colleges to organize Aguinaldos and Christmas Carols groups in preparation for *La Navidad* and the celebration of family and community. Los Tucusitos, one of the most famous children’s choirs in Venezuela, formed in 1959 and continues performing to this day. With 30 albums of music and 50 years of live performances, its members span twelve generations of children. To this day, Los Tucusitos remains one of the only children groups with a strong media presence and involvement in local communities. Other groups, such as Los Navideñitos, promote music for the December holidays in December as well, popularizing Aguinaldos that today remain a part of the collective imagination. In 2011, Aguinaldos was pronounced *Patrimonio Nacional* — or, Heritage of Venezuelan National Folklore.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- How to sing the lyrics of “Fuego al Cañón” in Spanish
- How musical traditions contribute to cultural celebrations and create community in Venezuela
- That children actively participate in performing music of the winter holiday season
- How cultural identity is reaffirmed through food and music

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to perform a traditional Venezuelan Aguinaldo song by learning the Spanish lyrics, melodies, and rhythms of the song.

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Inform students that in class they will be learning how people in Venezuela celebrate the winter holidays with food and music. Ask students:
 - What holidays do you celebrate in Winter?
 - Who do you celebrate the holiday with?
 - Are there special types of food you eat during the holiday?
 - Are there special activities that happen during the holiday?
 - Are there any special songs you sing during the holiday? What are they?
2. Tell students that one of the most popular winter holidays in Venezuela is *La Navidad* - a three month celebration at the end of the year to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Show **Image 1, Food for La Navidad**. Inform students that the image shows the types of food Venezuelan people traditionally cook and share with their neighbors during *La Navidad*. Ask students:
 - Do any of these dishes look similar to something you have eaten? If so, which one(s)?
 - Have you ever helped cook a dish similar to what is shown in the picture? If so, explain how it is cooked.

PROCEDURE

1. Inform students that in addition to food, Venezuelan kids sing traditional songs for *La Navidad* called Aguinaldos. Ask students:
 - Have you ever heard of Aguinaldos? If so, where have you heard about them?
 - Have you ever sung an Aguinaldo? If so, what was the song about?
2. Show **Image 2, Map of South America** and ask students to raise their hand as soon as they see the country of Venezuela. (If needed, sound out “Venezuela” together so students realize it starts with a “V”). Once all or most of the hands are raised, ask a student volunteer to point out where the country is on the map.
3. Inform students that there are many different ways people celebrate *La Navidad* in Venezuela. Show **Image 3, Celebrating La Navidad**. Ask students:
 - Do any of these images look familiar? Does *La Navidad* remind you of a holiday you might celebrate where you are from?
4. Inform students that one of the ways Venezuelans celebrate *La Navidad* is by singing Aguinaldos. Traditionally, Aguinalderos (groups of caroling children), travel to the homes of members of their community where they sing, bring gifts, and enjoy special dishes, such as ensalada de gallina, hallacas, and pan de jamón, that their neighbors cook for them. Ask students:
 - Is the traditional way Aguinaldos are sung familiar to you? Do you have any similar traditions of singing for people in your neighborhood? What is that tradition called?
5. Inform students that they will now listen to what an Aguinaldo sounds like. Play the Youtube video “Popurri navideño de los Tucusitos” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TghagbSMjjc> (2:30-3:15.) After the clip, ask students:
 - What stood out to you about the clip?
 - What kind of instruments do you see in the video?
 - Are the rhythms slow or fast?
 - How does this music make you feel?
 - How does the music compare to the songs you sing during winter holidays?
6. Inform students that they will now learn how to sing “Fuego al Cañón,” a famous Aguinaldo from Venezuela. Explain that they will learn the lyrics in Spanish as they sing along with an interactive video. Play **Clip 1, “Fuego al Cañón” Singing and Lyrics**. (See **Teacher Guide: “Fuego al Cañón” Lyrics** for lyrics in Spanish and English. (*Note to teacher: feel free to pause and review at any point in the video to help guide students during the activities*). After the video, ask students:
 - Have you heard this melody before? Is it similar to another melody you are familiar with?
 - How does singing the music feel different than just listening to the music in the previous video?
 - Have you ever sung in Spanish before?
6. Tell students they will now sing the song with instruments. Ask students to stand up and play and perform along with **Clip 2, LADAMA Plays “Fuego al Cañón”** (Note to teacher: feel

free to pause and review at any point in the video). Tell students that if they want to they can clap and move their bodies along with the music. After the video, ask students:

- What instruments are the musicians playing?

- Was it easier or harder to sing along with the instruments?

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Display **Image 4, Definition of Custom**. Tell students that Aguinaldo music is one of the customs of local communities in Venezuela. Ask students:

- Do you, your family, or your community have any special customs? What are they and when are they practiced?
- Why do you think music is an important custom to celebrate holidays?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Spend one class making maracas and shakers from recycled materials or plastic eggs and spoons. Students can use them to play along with “Fuego al Cañon” or other holiday songs.
2. Have a holiday potluck! Ask students to bring a favorite family dessert or main course to share with the class. Allow students to present their food to the class and tell a story of why their dish is a holiday tradition in their family.

STANDARDS

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

Core Music Standard: Performing

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

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

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* - “Fuego al Cañón” Singing and Lyrics
- *LADAMA* - *LADAMA* Plays “Fuego al Cañón”

HANDOUTS

- Teacher Guide: “Fuego al Cañón” Lyrics