

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 rpear (rap) and freestear (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.



Screenshot from "De Donde Vengo Yo"

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 Afro-traditions
- 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

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Ask students:
 - What is cultural identity?
 - How might someone express their cultural identity?
2. Display **Image 1, Cultural Identity Definition and Example**. Read the definition aloud as a class, and then ask students:
 - How would you define your community?
 - Can you give an example of a way somebody might display their cultural identity?
 - How might music be a way to display someone's cultural identity?

PROCEDURE

1. Show **Image 2, 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. Display **Image 3, "South America"** and ask students to locate the country of Colombia on the map.
3. Point out the country of Colombia in the northwest region of South America. Then, point out the Pacific Coastal Region in the far west area of the country. Tell students that ChocQuibTown formed in this area out of a shared desire to celebrate their cultural roots and empower their community through music.
4. Play the official music video, "De Donde Vengo Yo" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMS4J6Gp6e4>) by ChocQuibTown, and explain that the title of the song can be translated as "Where I Come From." (*Please note that the video is offsite, so it may need to be loaded prior to class.*) Reassure students that while they don't need to understand the lyrics, they do need to pay close attention to the images the video is presenting. After watching the video, ask students:
 - How are these musicians celebrating their cultural identity in this video?
 - What are some of the images you saw in the video? Do you think they live in a city, a small town, or a village?
 - What did you see that might describe where these musicians are from?
5. Tell students they will be brainstorming what they feel makes "where they come from" special. Pass out **Handout - Celebrating Cultural Identity**, and ask students to complete the questions on the handout.
6. Play this clip of ChocQuibTown performing their song, "Somos Pacifico" live on KEXP (<https://youtu.be/ehTLCjP7Ut4>). (*Please note that the video is offsite, so it may need to be loaded prior to class.*) Pass out **Handout -**

ChocQuibTown “Somos Pacífico” Lyrics to each student and read through the lyrics as a class. Then ask students:

- What might ChocQuibTown mean when they say “we are joined by a region”? What region might they be describing?
- How does ChocQuibTown describe their homeland? Do they seem proud of where they come from? How do you know?
- For ChocQuibTown, what might it mean to be from the Pacific, according to the lyrics?

7. Display **Image 5, Cypher Definition and Example**. Read the definition aloud as a class, then ask students:

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

8. 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 this interactive video.

9. 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 and sing the chorus of “Somos Pacífico” (*feel free to pause the video as needed to work with students, and use **Handout - ChocQuibTown Teacher’s Guide** as needed*). After the video, ask students:

- Is the beat to “Somos Pacífico” similar to any beats you have heard before? If so, which ones?
- Have you ever sung in Spanish before? If

so, when? What song did you sing?

10. Play and perform along with **Clip 2, 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. After the video, ask students:

- How would you rap your verses differently?

11. Tell students that it’s now their turn to cypher as a class. Like the example of LADAMA in the video, students will take turns rapping the original lyrics they wrote on the **Handout - Celebrating Cultural Identity** (both in Spanish and English). Students will cypher while in a circle and without the aid of the videos. If students do not feel comfortable (sometimes it’s hard to rap and play a beat at the same time), they can use **Clip 3, LADAMA Hand Clap Beat for Cypher Activity** as a beat to rap over.

12. 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.



SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Remind students that ChocQuibTown was formed from a shared desire to celebrate their cultural roots and empower their community through music. Ask students:
 - Do you know another artist that celebrates their cultural roots or their hometown? If so, who?
2. Ask students:
 - Now that you have learned a Colombian Pacific song and participated in a cypher that shows off who you are, can you name an important issue that might be facing your community?
3. Ask students to write a line of lyrics that states an important issue that affects their community, as well as a recommendation of how to address the issue positively.

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* - Rapping and Flow
- *LADAMA* - Hand Clap Beat for Cypher

HANDOUTS

- Handout - ChocQuibTown “Somos Pacífico” Lyrics
- Handout - Celebrating Cultural Identity
- ChocQuibTown Teacher’s Guide