

Joropo: Music Inspired by Nature from the High Plains of Venezuela

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is Joropo, and how is it inspired by nature?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson students will dance, sing in Spanish, and learn the basic rhythm of Joropo music. They will investigate how Joropo culture is inspired by the people of the high western plains of Venezuela and their relationship to the animals, plants, and geography of their natural environment. Students will also learn how oral tradition preserves and celebrates the unique history of the Venezuelan people.



Photo: Marco.sierra35

Joropo Llanero is a cultural expression from the western high plains (*llanos*) of Venezuela. Like many dance and music styles in South America, it is a mixture of Indigenous, African, and Spanish traditions. During colonialism in Venezuela, enslaved Indigenous and African peoples would watch their Spanish enslavers dance waltzes inside their mansions. As a joke, they created their own dance mocking the waltz by exaggerating its movements. Thus, Joropo was born as a genre of resistance against the oppression of enslavers.

But Joropo is not only a genre of music or dance, it is an event where people come to dance and celebrate. It is a party. Historically, people of the *llanos* might say that they are “going to the Joropo.” In fact, the word “Joropo” replaced the original Spanish word for these festivities, Fandango. Fandango, like Joropo, is not only a genre of music, it is an event of African origin, made popular in Spain, where people gathered to dance and celebrate.

The music of Joropo is also intimately related to the animals, flowers, and landscapes of the region. Its lyrics, chord shapes (the placement of fingers on a stringed-instrument to create music), and themes take inspiration from the natural world, and are an integral part in understanding the culture of the people of the Venezuelan *llanos*. Joropo chord shapes originally had the nomenclature of the animal’s footprint, such as that of a dog, duck, or tapir, and the lyrics of the songs are poems describing the flora, fauna, and daily life of *llaneros* (“people of the plains”) as they interact with their livestock on their farms. The *llaneros* tend to have great knowledge of the behavior of flora and fauna during the cycles of dry and rainy seasons in Venezuela, as it is integral to their survival.

Joropo dance movements have been inspired by the movements of the animals in their natural habitat as well. During the second half of the 20th century, an influential Venezuelan dancer

named Jovita Nieto created new steps from her observation of animals of the *llanos*, such as the heron, the *tuqueque* (salamander), the *danta* (tapir), and the *picure* (large rodent). Each new step has its own name such as “*tutequeao* step,” “the *picurera* returns,” and “the return of the *picurera*.”

Though it is an oral tradition, Joropo has been incorporated into classical music and played in symphonic spaces. El Sistema, a famous program in Venezuela that seeks to systematize classical music training for at-risk youth, has a project called “Alma Llanera,” where children and young people perform traditional songs in the context of classical music. Joropo Llanero is also heard in eclectic contemporary settings by young artists such as the C4 Trío ensemble, an ensemble of three *cuatro* players who perform percussion, complex harmonies and unpredictable, energetic breaks on their *cuatros* (a Venezuelan 4-stringed lute) while innovating within the Joropo genre.

Presently, Venezuela is experiencing one of the most massive mobilizations in the history of South America. Due to the economic, political, and social crisis, many Venezuelans have gone to other countries, and the Venezuelan diaspora is now one of the most significant in modern history. Joropo Llanero continues to be a music of Venezuelans the world over. As they listen, play, and innovate within the genre, they feel closer to home while preserving the culture of the high plains. When Venezuelans miss home they might say, “I miss the Joropo,” because they miss the opportunity to come together and play, commune, dance and eat with friends and loved ones. It is a form of resistance in the face of adversity, inside and outside their country, through the act of playing music.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- How to play the rhythms of Joropo
- How to sing the lyrics of traditional Joropo song and dance
- How the flora and fauna of the High Plains region of Venezuela informs the musical oral traditions of its people

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to draw connections between the natural environment of the Venezuelan High Plains and Joropo by learning the rhythms, dances, and lyrics of the musical style.

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Tell students that in class today they will be learning about a style of music called Joropo. Ask students:
 - Have you ever heard of Joropo music? If so, where have you heard about it?
 - Have you ever listened to Joropo music? If so, can you describe what it sounds like?
2. Explain to students that Joropo comes from Venezuela and is inspired by nature. Pass out **Handout 1 - Your Natural Environment** to students. Ask them to take a moment to complete the student handout, and share their responses with the class. Then ask students:
 - Do you know any songs about animals, or songs inspired by animals?

PROCEDURE

1. Show **Image 1, Map of South America**, and ask students to locate the country of Venezuela. Then, point out the region on the map where the Venezuelan High Plains are located. (*The Plains is a vast tropical grassland that covers the southern and eastern parts of Venezuela*).
2. Tell students that Joropo originated in this region. The music is an oral tradition that celebrates the lives and culture of the people of the High Plains of Venezuela. This group of people are known as *llanos*, which means “people of the High Plains” in English. Ask students:
 - Have you ever heard the term “oral tradition” before?
 - Individually, what do the words “oral” and “tradition” mean?
 - When you put the two words together, what could that mean?
3. Display **Image 1, Oral Tradition Definition**. Read the definition together as a class. Then ask:
 - Are there songs that you have learned through oral tradition? What are some songs that your parents, friends, or family members have sung to you?
4. Tell students that Joropo is a kind of music that mixes African, Indigenous, and Spanish influences. But it’s more than just music, it’s also an event that brings people together to dance, sing, play, and eat. Joropo can be played anywhere and at any moment because many of its traditional instruments are small, and made from the trees and the plants of the high plains. Joropo is also inspired by the natural environment of the high plains region. Its lyrics, stories, and dance movements are influenced by the animals and plants of the region.
5. Tell students they will now listen to Joropo. Play **Clip 1, Mafer Bandola - Joropo Performance**. Then ask students:

- What do you notice when Mafer plays the bandola?
 - What does the instrument sound like to you?
 - Are the rhythms slow or fast?
 - How does this music make you feel?
6. Tell students that they will now learn how to play Joropo. First, they will be learning to play the rhythms of Joropo. Ask students to stand up, and explain that they will be performing along with this interactive video. Play and perform along with **Clip 2, Joropo Rhythm and Chords**. (*Note to teacher: feel free to pause and review at any point in the video. To help guide students during the activities, refer to **Teachers Guide: Joropo** as needed*). After the video, ask students:
- Have you heard this rhythm before? Is it similar to another rhythm you are familiar with?
 - How does playing the music feel different than just listening to the music in the previous video?
 - How do you play music? Do you read it from paper or do you think about shapes and images?
7. Tell students that they will now be learning to sing Joropo. Ask students to stand up, and explain that they will be performing along with this interactive video. Play and perform along with **Clip 3, Joropo Song**. (*Note to teacher: feel free to pause and review at any point in the video*). After the video, ask students:
- Have you ever sung in Spanish before?
 - Do you know a song that describes your environment that might remind you of home?
8. Tell students that they will now be learning to dance Joropo. Ask students to stand up, and explain that they will be performing along with this interactive video. Play and perform along with **Clip 4, Joropo Dance** (*Note to teacher: feel free to pause and review at any point in the video*). After the video, ask students:
- Have you ever sung in Spanish before?
 - Do you know a song that describes your environment that might remind you of home?
9. Free form dance and rhythm playing! Play **Clip 5, “Pajarillo”**. Encourage students to listen to the song and move around and dance in the room using the tools they have just learned - clapping, singing in Spanish, dance movement. After the activity, ask students how it felt to explore the space with their new tools.

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Ask students:

- What did you notice is important for staying on beat with your classmates when playing body percussion? Which senses did you use?
- Which part did you like doing better? Singing, dancing, body percussion? Why?



- How might dancing, singing, and playing music together create a bond with your classmates? How did you feel after? How does moving and singing with your classmates feel different than doing other classwork?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Create a song inspired by the nature around you! Use all the tools you have - singing, dance, rhythm, language, and your imagination.
2. Teach Joropo to your family and friends!

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 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* - Mafer Bandola Joropo Performance
- *LADAMA* - Joropo Rhythm and Chords
- *LADAMA* - Joropo Song
- *LADAMA* - Joropo Dance
- *LADAMA* - "Pajarillo"

HANDOUTS

- Handout - Your Natural Environment
- Teachers Guide: Joropo