

Quitiplás: Deep Listening and Rhythm Building with Afro-Venezuelan Bamboo Drums From Barlovento

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is Quitiplás, how does it incorporate the natural world, and how is it an example of polyrhythm?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will investigate the meaning of rhythm and the importance of polyrhythm (the presence of multiple, patterned rhythms) in the cultural life of the people of Barlovento, Venezuela. They will discover how Quitiplás, traditional bamboo drums, are idiophones (instruments that resonate on their own by being struck) and how Quitiplás were constructed from materials found in Venezuela's natural environment as a way to emulate the rhythms and songs of enslaved people brought from Africa. Students will also examine how music is a tool used to celebrate and preserve cultural heritage by vocalizing polyrhythmic patterns and conversing with each other in song. Finally, they will discover Spanish vocabulary words related to Venezuelan culture and Quitiplás.



Illustration: Henrique Gomes

Quitiplás is the name of a family of bamboo drums, a dance, and a rhythm of Afro-Indigenous origin, born in coastal Barlovento, Venezuela during the colonial period.

The first enslaved Africans made landfall in Venezuela in the 16th century, but it was not until the 18th century that a large group from Congo and Angola arrived in Barlovento to aid the burgeoning cocoa industry. These enslaved people were forced into labor on large *haciendas* (ranch-like plantations), and it was in this specific environment that Quitiplás was born.

The bamboo drums unique to Quitiplás were developed after traditional drums with skin heads were destroyed and banned by the enslavers in Barlovento. Because the Quitiplás were made from bamboo, enslaved people could hide them in their bags and under their clothes and pass them off as work tools.

Often, these drums were, and continue to be used as, part of Afro-Catholic celebrations, syncretic ceremonies that mix Catholic and traditional Yoruba religious ideas and practices. In fact, the most important festival in Barlovento is that of San Juan, in which the Quitiplás are a predominant musical expression.

The celebration and reverence for nature has also been an important part of Quitiplás. To construct their drums, Afro-Venezuleans would cut the bamboo plant at specific times of the year according to the seasons of the moon. Since bamboo is a hollow plant, when musicians

strike Quitiplás on the ground or against themselves, they resonate, making them part of the idiophone family of instruments (or instruments that create sound by vibrating when struck, plucked, or shaken). The word Quitiplás is itself an onomatopoeia, mimicking the way the bamboo's sounds are produced when played. The set of Quitiplás drums consists of four instruments, Quitiplás (a set of two drums), Prima, and Pujao.

Because the roots of Quitiplás are in African culture and memory, (and more specifically, Congo and Angola), polyrhythm is an important part of Quitiplás music-making. Polyrhythm – the presence of one or more rhythms in conversation with each other – is a natural act of communing in many African cultures. In polyphony, when one person sings, another person “finds” their voice, or their melody/harmony, in relation to the first. Polyrhythm follows the same process, but using rhythm, and is an important and unique contribution from Africans brought to the Americas. In African cultures in the New World, creating polyrhythms, or conversations, were, and still are, acts of freedom – freedom of expression, freedom of “musical conversation”, and freedom of celebration with fellow members of the community.

The Quitiplás are still used in the context of traditional Afro-Catholic celebrations. However, today there are Venezuelan musical ensembles that incorporate bamboo drums and polyphonic singing into their work. Mesticanto and Ensamble B11 are two Venezuelan groups that are presently adapting these instruments and singing-styles to express their African roots, taking them out of the context of religious ceremonies and bringing the music to more secular audiences.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- How recognize polyrhythm in music
- How bamboo and the influence of the natural environment is part of a symbiotic relationship for Afro-Venezuelan culture
- How to recognize an idiophone—an instrument that makes its own sound when “struck, shaken or scraped”
- How to play a polyrhythm and differentiate the sounds (tones) of the Quitiplás by using the voice

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to define **rhythm**, **polyrhythm**, and **idiophone**, be able to identify them in nature, and perform them by singing and clapping along to an Afro-Venezuelan Quitiplás drum ensemble.

ACTIVITIES

VOCABULARY INTRODUCTION

1. Distribute to students **Handout - Quitiplás 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 **Quitiplás 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. Play a simple call and response clapping game with your students: clap a rhythm and ask the class to clap the same rhythm. Start simply, and then grow more complex with your clapping patterns. After a few rounds of call and response, choose one clapping rhythm and perform it repetitively as a class.
2. Explain to students that they were clapping **rhythms**, which are patterns of sound. Ask students:
 - Can you name a rhythm that you hear in your natural environment? (Encourage them to think of sounds that follow a predictable pattern: for example, falling rain or the trot of horses.)
3. Inform students that they will now have the opportunity to clap any rhythm they like. Instruct them to all begin clapping their rhythms on the count of three. After the activity, ask students:
 - How many different rhythms do you think you heard in this activity?
4. Inform students that when many different rhythms are happening in conversation with each other, it is called **Polyrhythm**. Ask students:
 - Can you think of any other words with “Poly” in them? (*For instance, “polygon”*)
 - What might the “Poly” mean in “Polyrhythm”?
5. Pass out **Handout - Polyrhythm in Nature Activity** to students. Ask them to try to connect the pictures with the sounds they will be hearing in the video, and encourage them to listen carefully so that they can discuss what they hear. Play **Clip 1, Polyrhythm in Nature Sounds**.

6. After playing the video, ask students to answer the questions on the second page of the handout. Then ask students:

- Besides rhythm, what other elements or qualities exist in the sounds you heard?
- Which example sounded high-pitched? Which sounded low or medium-pitched?
- How long did the sounds last, were they long or short?
- How would you describe the intensity of each sound? Did some sound “harsher” than others?

PROCEDURE

1. Tell students that in class today they will be learning about Quitiplás, a family of bamboo drums, a dance, and a rhythm that are of African and Indigenous origin, and born in coastal Barlovento, Venezuela.

2. Show **Image 1, Venezuela Illustration**. Tell students that Quitiplás music comes from the country of Venezuela. Particularly, it comes from the Barlovento region east of the capital. Practice pronouncing the word “Venezuela,” “Barlovento,” and “Quitiplás” together as a class.

3. Show **Image 2, Quitiplás Illustration**. Tell students that Quitiplás is performed by drums made of bamboo. It is performed to celebrate and give thanks to nature’s gifts. Ask students:

- Do Quitiplás drums remind you of any instrument you have seen before? If so, which ones?

4. Tell students that the people who originally played this music in Venezuelan were people from Africa, who were enslaved in the 1500s. These enslaved people worked on large haciendas (ranch-like plantations). Their enslavers forbid the act of playing music and did not allow for freedom of expression. So, the enslaved people crafted Quitiplás to look like bamboo tools which they could hide in

their clothes and bags, out of sight from their enslavers as they traveled between houses.

5. Give students a chance to go around the classroom and look for an everyday item that could be easily hidden away, but also used to make music. Once students return, have them share the item they found with the class, and demonstrate how they could make music with it.

6. Tell students they will now be hearing what Quitiplás sound like. Play **Clip 1, Isolated Quitiplás Ensemble from LADAMA’s song, “María”**. Ask students:

- How would you describe the sound of the Quitiplás? Does it sound similar or different from other sounds you heard in class so far?

7. Tell students that they will now be learning the drums and rhythms of Quitiplás. Play **Clip 2, LADAMA - Quitiplás Polyrhythm**. Pause the video as needed, and as a class repeat the names of each drum, or use the below excerpted sections of the clip. See **Handout - Quitiplás Teacher’s Guide** as a guide for this activity.

- Quitiplás Polyrhythm Excerpt: Introduction

- Quitiplás Polyrhythm Excerpt: La Prima
- Quitiplás Polyrhythm Excerpt: Quitiplás
- Quitiplás Polyrhythm Excerpt: Pujao
- Quitiplás Polyrhythm Excerpt: All the Drums Together

8. Show **Image 3, Idiophone Definition**. Read the definition aloud as a class, then ask students:

- Based on what you saw in the previous clip, why are Quitiplás drums considered idiophones?
- Can you think of another instrument that is an idiophone? (*For example: maracas, claves, woodblocks, xylophone, bells, etc.*)

9. Inform students that they will now practice singing the Quitiplás rhythms as a class. Play **Clip 4, LADAMA - Vocalizing Quitiplás Polyrhythm**. Pause the video as needed to give the class the time to practice each vocalization, or use the below excerpted sections of the clip. For an additional challenge, try to split the students into groups to each perform one of the three vocalizations together. See **Handout - Quitiplás Teacher's Guide** as a guide for this activity.

- Vocalizing Quitiplás Polyrhythm Excerpt: Introduction
- Vocalizing Quitiplás Polyrhythm Excerpt: La Prima
- Vocalizing Quitiplás Polyrhythm Excerpt: Quitiplás
- Vocalizing Quitiplás Polyrhythm Excerpt: Pujao
- Vocalizing Quitiplás Polyrhythm Excerpt: All the Vocalizations Together

10. **Activity for General Music Class:** Have students now perform the vocalizations using Boomwhackers or a similar instrument that approximates the Quitiplás. Use clips from **LADAMA - Quitiplás Polyrhythm**, **LADAMA - Vocalizing Quitiplás Polyrhythm**, and **Handout - Quitiplás Teacher's Guide** as guides for this activity. together.

11. After the activity, ask students:

- Was performing this polyrhythm hard to do? Why?
- In what ways does your voice sound like the Quitiplás?
- How long do you think it takes kids in Venezuela to learn these rhythms? When might they practice?

12. Tell students that they will now be learning how to sing Quitiplás. Ask students to stand up, and explain that they will be performing along with this interactive video. In the video, students will learn a simple call and response phrase in Spanish (from the song, “María de Belén”) and sing it over the Quitiplás ensemble. Play and perform along with **Clip 5, LADAMA - Quitiplás Song**. Pause the video as needed to give the class the time to practice their parts, or use the below excerpted sections of the clip. See **Handout - Quitiplás Teacher's Guide** as a guide for this activity.

- Quitiplás Song Excerpt: Introduction and Pronunciation
- Quitiplás Song Excerpt: Learning the Melody
- Quitiplás Song Excerpt: Singing with LADAMA

13. After the activity, ask students:

- How did it feel to sing in Spanish?
- How did it feel to sing over the rhythms of the Quitiplás drum ensemble?
- How long do you think it takes kids in Venezuela to learn these rhythms? When might they practice?

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Pass out **Handout - Homemade Idiophones** to each student, and play Clip 6, **LADAMA – Quitiplás and Idiophones**.
2. After watching the video, ask students to search for materials in their homes or classrooms and consider what could be used similarly as an instrument. After finding something that would work as an idiophone, ask students to complete **Handout - Homemade Idiophones**.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Make your own instrument! Now that you know what an idiophone is, can you construct one using the drawing and description you made in class?
2. Create a sound diary. Each entry can describe a sound you hear using words and pictures.
3. Create a song of gratitude. Think of something you are grateful for, such as a sunny day during a long winter, your favorite food, or your favorite place to play outdoors, and create a song about it.
4. Play Quitiplás rhythms on Boomwhackers (<https://boomwhackers.com>) in your classroom!

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)

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.

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 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

- Polyrhythm in Nature Sounds
- *LADAMA* - Isolated Quitiplás Ensemble from *LADAMA*'s song "Maria"
- *LADAMA* - Quitiplás Polyrrhythm
- *LADAMA* - Quitiplás Song
- *LADAMA* - Quitiplás and Idiophones

HANDOUTS

- Handout - Polyrrhythm in Nature Activity
- Handout - Quitiplás Teacher's Guide
- Handout - Homemade Idiophones