

# MUSIC OF PUERTO RICO

**Summary:** Student will learn about the musical rhythms and instruments of Puerto Rico. They will construct their own instruments using recycled products.

**Grade Level:** 7<sup>th</sup> grade Exploratory Spanish class

**Goal:** Students will become familiar with the rhythms of merengue, salsa and Bomba/Plena. They will also become familiar with the maracas, guiro, cuatro. They will learn how to use recycled materials to make instruments.

**Key Concepts:** Musical rhythms  
Use of recycled materials

**Objectives:** Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. be able to identify and describe the musical rhythms
2. be able to identify typical musical instruments in Puerto Rico.
3. create a musical instrument from recycled materials

**Teaching Location:** classroom

**Lesson time:** Three class periods of 46 minutes

**Subject area for Infusion:**

Music

Spanish

Environmental Education

**Standards:**

Environmental Education

D.8.5 Explain how personal actions can impact an environmental issue, e.g., reusing items destined for the dump.

Foreign Language Standards

Beginning (Receptive-Imitative)

D.2. Cultural Activities: Students will participate in and learn about age-appropriate cultural activities (such as games, songs, and holiday celebrations)

E.1. Objects and symbols: Students will identify objects and symbols that are used day-to-day and represent other cultures.

F.1. Speaking and writing: Students will use topics and skills from other school subjects to discuss and/or write in the language studied.

**Background Information:**

The musical rhythms associated with Puerto Rico are the Salsa and Bomba and Plena. Merengue is said to originate from the Dominican Republic but is heard readily throughout Puerto Rico. For this reason I am including it in the lesson.

Bomba and Plena are rhythms of African origin.

Plena is a narrative song that relates the pains and ironies of people and life in their communities. Often called the “periódico cantado”, it is a kind of living newspaper. Current topics and happenings are included in the lyrics.

Plena uses 2/4 time and the following instruments: panderetas(tambourine without the metal shakers), guiro, cuatro, conga drum and a single maraca.

The music usually has a soloist and a chorus. It is said to have originated in Ponce. Dancers are not typically linked with the music.

Bomba usually has a soloist as well and a chorus. It uses 2/4 or 6/8 rhythm. Dancers are essential to Bomba. This music genre has African roots and is said to have originated in Loiza. Often the dancers are accompanied by other dancers wearing the typical vejigante mask that was typically worn to ward away evil spirits and pirates.

The instrumentation includes two drums that call to each other, palitos and one maraca.

Salsa literally means sauce in Spanish...it spices and enlivens things. The music and dance of Salsa does spice things up. The salsa is comprised of two sections. The first of these is called the body of the song while the second section is called the “montuno”. During the montuno section the solo vocalist and chorus alternate phrases. Percussion plays an extremely important role in a salsa song. In the body section the pace is usually slower to allow the vocalist freedom of expression as needed. In the montuno section the rhythm is somewhat more aggressive. Instruments used in the salsa are congas, timbales, bass, guiro, bells and bongos.

Merengue origins are not certain but one theory says it originated in Cuba and Puerto Rico. The rhythm is a 2/4 or 4/4 beat. The song is made up of a paseo(walk), body and jaleo (rowdy clapping).

The dance is a simple two step pattern.

### **Materials:**

Examples of music genres on CD or downloads from the internet

As many examples of typical Latin instruments: Guiro, maraca, conga, cuatro etc.

Recycled products to make instruments: plastic soda bottles, coffee cans, oatmeal containers, toilet paper or paper towel tubes

Craft supplies to decorate instruments

**Set-up:** A week or so in advance ask the students to begin to collect some recycled items that can be used in this project.

Procedure:

**Introduction:** Play examples of a variety of Latin music. Give the students time to listen and enjoy the music.

**Lesson 1:** Introduce each genre of music and give a basic description. Play music randomly and encourage students to guess which genre you are playing. Focus on the rhythms. Depending on time and available space, teach the basic steps to the salsa and the merengue. Have the students practice and see if they can dance the right steps with the correct music.

**Lesson 2:** Have the students listen carefully to the music and identify the instruments they hear. Introduce the typical instruments in Latin music. Use the actual instrument when possible and use pictures for those you cannot attain. Have the students decide which instrument they would like to make encouraging variety so you have a balance band. Give suggestions and handouts with instructions for making a guitar, a maraca, a guiro and drums. Use the remainder of the period for construction.

**Lesson 3:** Use additional classtime to finish instruments if necessary. When instruments are constructed students will use them to accompany the music. Time for a jam session.

**Conclusion:** Answer any additional questions and enjoy making music with the new instruments.

**Assessment:** Students will be able to identify the instruments and recognize the music genres introduced. This will be accomplished through an identification activity in which the students hold up a picture of the instrument or the name of the music genre. Another option would be a matching section on a written exam for the instruments and a listening activity where the student writes down the name of the music played.

**Adaptations:** A student with special needs would be able to accomplish these activities. If need be only the identification of instruments could be assessed.

**References:**

- ¿Y tú? , Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1989, pg 261
- Spanish for Mastery, Valette y Valette, 1984, pg 300
- Hispanic American Music Workshop: A Reference and Activity Book for Teachers and Students, Hilda Luisa Diaz Perera, 1996
- Cómo ser un experto en Reciclaje, Editorial LUMEN, 1996, pg 36-39