

Global Music Lesson Plans

Lesson 2: Odd One Out – Mexico and USA (Age range 7-11)

Time required: One 30 minute lesson

Activity:

Listening to three songs i.e. Mexican Mariachi, Mexican Norteno and American Tex-Mex and discussing which is the odd one out.

Aims:

- To explore how the musical traditions of neighbouring countries can influence each other, and even bring about a new, identifiable genre in its own right – a “fusion” style.
- To introduce Latin American rhythms and dance through teaching a basic Bolero dance step.

Pupils will learn:

- About timbre in the context of instruments found in Mariachi and Norteño ensembles.
- How to move in rhythm when learning a basic Bolero dance step.
- An ‘odd one out’ thinking skills approach to music.

Web links you will need:

- Audio file of the Northern Mexican Norteno song '[Ojos Negros](#)' by Cornelio Reyna (it's the last clip in the list).
- Audio file of the Mariachi song '[El Jilguerillo 1 Cobre](#)'.
- Mp3 file of the 'Tex-Mex' song '[He'll have to go](#)' by Ry Cooder (costs 54p to download - there is also a free 30 second sample), from his album 'Chicken Skin Music'.
- Map of [Mexico and Southern USA](#).

Useful Information

Music has no respect for borderlines. A good example is the way in which the popular and folk music of Northern Mexico (particularly norteño music) and southern Texas have cross-fertilised to create a fusion style known as Tex-Mex. This has been a gradual evolution rather than a rapid discovery by one or other cultures, and is a good example of the way in which music evolves over time, with musicians taking what they need from another culture in order to create something new.

Mariachi is a type of musical ensemble from Mexico. The group usually consists of at least two violins, two trumpets, a Spanish guitar, a vihuela (a high-pitched, five-string guitar) and a guitarrón (a small-scaled acoustic bass), but sometimes features more than twenty musicians in total.

Norteño is a genre of Mexican music. The accordion and the bajo sexto are norteño's most characteristic instruments. This genre of music is extremely popular in both the United States and Mexico. The use of the accordion is a direct influence of the French Cajun music that evolved in New Orleans and southern Texas.

Tex-Mex music is the music of southern Texas. Tex-Mex is a fusion style resulting from the mixing of Texan and Mexican folk and popular styles e.g. Norteño.

Lesson Plan	Odd one out – Mexico and the USA
Starter	<p>Introduce pupils to three typical Latin American dance rhythms by chanting them over and over again, and then transferring to instruments each of the phrases below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ma-ri-a-chi (play on a cow bell). 2. I wear Som-bre-ro (play on a hand drum such as a bongo). 3. Chi-hua-hua dog (play on Maracas). <p>When each rhythm is secure, combine them to create a Latin American percussion beat. Point out that Latin American rhythms are the basis of folk, popular, and dance music from the region.</p> <p>This activity can be enhanced by using a CD track of a Latin American dance that has a moderate tempo, and four beats in a bar as a backing track. Ask pupils to chant the rhythm of the words, clap or tap the rhythms or play the rhythms on instruments over the backing track.</p>
Main	<p>Ask pupils to listen to three excerpts from Mexican songs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Northern Mexican Norteño song 'Ojos Negros' by Cornelio Reyna. • A Mariachi song 'El Jilguerillo 1 Cobre' by Mariachi Cobre. • A Tex-Mex song 'He'll have to go' by Ry Cooder. <p>Discuss in groups which song they think is the odd one out and why. Each group should elect a spokesperson to report back to the rest of the class.</p> <p>Note: there are two possible correct answers:</p> <p>A) The Mariachi song has different instrumentation from the other two i.e. the inclusion of trumpets and strings, and a very different mood.</p> <p>B) 'He'll have to go' is from the USA and is a blend (or fusion) of Mexican and Texan music known as Tex-Mex.</p> <p>Both answers should be accepted. However, take this opportunity to point out that 'He'll have to go' is from Texas in the USA whilst the other two are Mexican. Display a map of Mexico and Southern USA and ask pupils why they think the Northern Mexican Norteño song 'Ojitos Negros' and the Texan song 'He'll have to go' sound similar.</p> <p>Point out that Mexico shares a border with the USA and that the music of both has crossed over and influenced the other culture. For example, Norteño music has adopted the accordion - an instrument that was introduced into the music of southern Texas by the French community in New Orleans. Similarly, Norteño songs have influenced musicians from Texas, resulting in a fusion style known as 'Tex-Mex' music.</p>

	Can pupils think of another style of music that has been influenced by the music of another culture? Can they think of classroom instruments that come from different cultures? (Maracca & Guiro = Mexico, Tambourine = Arabic countries, Agogo bells = Africa, bongos= Latin America).
Plenary	To apply their learning in another context, explain to pupils that a popular dance in Latin American countries is the Bolero, and that many Norteño and Tex-Mex songs are in bolero style. The Bolero dance step is characterised by a slow, graceful step sideways followed by two faster steps forwards (on beats 3 & 4 of the bar). Practice the dance in a line with everyone facing the same way. Finally, perform the Bolero dance step accompanied by the song 'He'll have to go'. Ask the pupils which song should accompany the dance?