

Tool Kit II

Cultural Diffusion and Ethnomusicology: Latin America – Yaqui Indians and Mexican Banda

Objective

Discover the study of music in its cultural context (also known as **ethnomusicology**) and learn to distinguish some of the **musical** and **cultural characteristics** of a people. Explore the concept of **cultural diffusion** through two musical cultures represented in MIM’s exhibits: “Yaqui” in the United States / Canada Gallery and “Mexico: Banda” in the Latin America Gallery. Each of these distinct musical traditions represents the transmission of ideas, instruments, and beliefs from one place to another, alongside the new traditions and musical cultures that resulted. Finally, interpret the significance of **oral history** by comparing two stories of the same historical event—that of the first contact with the Spanish by the Yaqui Indians.

Background Information for Educators

Ethnomusicology

Cultural characteristics include the ideas, beliefs, symbols, music, food, and technologies that define the culture of a group of people. Cultural characteristics can exist on a global scale, such as the practice of drinking carbonated soft drinks, or on a local scale, such as the use of different words to describe these drinks (e.g., English: soda, pop, Coke; Spanish: *coca*, *gaseosa*, *refresco*). As part of studying the different cultural characteristics of a place or people, **ethnomusicologists** study the **musical traits** that define a people; these include specific musical practices and sounds. Studying the cultural and musical characteristics of different places and people can illuminate how one group influences another, and vice versa.

Cultural Diffusion

As people move around the world, **cultural diffusion** occurs as their **cultural characteristics** (i.e., ideas,

beliefs, symbols, music, food, technologies, etc.) change in response to the new people and cultures they encounter. Examples of cultural diffusion are all around us. Drinking a carbonated soft drink is an example. Carbonated soft drinks were first developed in England in the late eighteenth century when they were initially thought to be medicinal. By the 1850s, carbonated lemonade became a popular English export. Over 150 years later, a common German word for *any* type of carbonated soft drink is *limonade*. Businesses such as Coca-Cola created new flavors that they promoted globally. Their efforts were so successful that in many places, the generic word for any type of carbonated soft drink is “Coke.” As carbonated soft drinks spread throughout the world, new flavors emerged to suit local tastes.

Cultural diffusion has profoundly influenced music around the world. For example, Mexican banda music can be traced to the influence of Spanish and French military bands in the nineteenth century. Since then, banda has developed into a variety of distinctly Mexican and Mexican American **genres** (i.e., styles) of music. Similarly, the lifeways of Yaqui Indians living in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico today reveal the influence of Jesuit missionaries who first arrived in the early seventeenth century. Contemporary Yaqui music reflects the influence of both European and ancestral traditions and practices. The music of the Yaquis and the Mexican banda are only two of an infinite number of examples of how cultural diffusion has impacted music around the world.



Figure 1. Eighteenth-century map of Jesuit missions in Sinaloa and Sonora, Mexico (Banda and Yaqui territories)



Figure 2. Students on a MIM field trip

Banda

Mexican banda music developed from wind and brass bands that were brought to Mexico by European colonists. Before the advent of recorded music, every town or military base had its own banda ensemble that performed music for both private and public events, including weddings, religious processions, political rallies, public holidays, and bullfights. Initially, these bandas played the music that was popular in Europe: selections from operas, patriotic marches, and dance tunes, such as the polka, mazurka, and paso doble.

Following a series of revolutions against European political control during the nineteenth century, bandas developed musical genres that were distinctly Mexican, such as *rancheras* and *corridos*. *Bandas del pueblo* (village bands) often took on the names of their place of origin. *Banda de Sinaloa*, for example, is a band from the Mexican state of Sinaloa, which welcomed many German immigrants during the nineteenth century. As a result, music by a *banda sinaloense* sounds like German polka music mixed with Spanish, French, and local folk



Figure 3. Mexican banda exhibit at MIM

music. *Bandas* also named themselves after a specific characteristic of their local style. *Banda tamborazo* refers to a band from the Mexican state of Zacatecas. The *tamborazo*, or bass drumbeat, is a unique feature of Zacatecan banda music.

Banda music has consistently shifted with changing tastes in music. During the 1920s, the *banda orquesta* (orchestral band) arose from a desire to perform jazz music from the United States. It incorporated instruments such as the saxophone, which was not traditionally used in bandas up until that time. Further innovations in banda music occurred when Mexican immigrants brought it to the United States. *Technobanda*, also known as *banda sintetizada*, *banda contemporánea*, *banda moderna*, or *neobanda*, is an outgrowth of *banda sinaloense* that developed in Los Angeles, California, during the 1990s. In a *technobanda*, electronic keyboard synthesizers, electric basses, and computers may replace the traditional clarinets, tubas, or trumpets. In addition, *technobandas* make use of amplified vocalists.

The development of *technobanda* in Los Angeles helped many Mexican American immigrants reconnect with their cultural roots. *Technobanda* introduced a new dance style known as the *quebradita*, which became popular among Mexican American youths and, later, among Mexican youths after *technobanda* and the *quebradita* gained popularity in Mexico itself. *Technobanda* is now a musical style that prevails in both the United States and Mexico.

Traditional Banda

Traditional Mexican bandas do not typically include vocalists or electronic instruments.



Technobanda

Technobandas replace traditional banda instruments with electronic instruments or computers.



European Influences on Mexican Banda

European influences on banda music include the military bands of European countries that ruled Mexico, such as Spain and France. In addition, immigrants from Germany as well as musicians working for the church each brought distinct styles of music that influenced banda and Yaqui music to varying degrees.



Yaqui Pascolas

In **oral histories**, people maintain and pass on cultural beliefs by telling stories. Like most good stories, oral histories can be a mixture of myth and fact, or they can simply reflect the honest point of view of the person telling the story. Oral histories can reveal things that mere facts do not, such as cultural beliefs or personal feelings. Fisherfolk who catch tiny minnows may exaggerate their size in order to communicate their excitement at having caught fish for the first time! Parents may summarize their childhood struggles by claiming to have walked many miles to school in the snow despite having lived in Phoenix, Arizona, their whole life. Regardless of the factual details, with a mixture of myth, fancy, and even comedy, **oral histories** can help us understand important cultural beliefs and feelings.

The oral history of the Yaqui Indians tells of a division among the people that occurred with the arrival of the first Spanish settlers in their ancestral lands. Some of the people refused to embrace the culture, music, and religion of the Christian newcomers and went into hiding. These “enchanted ones,” as they are sometimes called, are now said to occupy an unseen parallel world. Among the rest of the Yaqui people, ancestral practices and new European cultural, musical, and religious practices commingled.

Following the arrival of the Spanish, the Yaquis began using musical instruments of European origin, such as the violin and harp, along with their traditional drums, flutes, and singing, to tell stories of both an ancient and a newly evolving Yaqui culture. **Yaqui pascola** dances are performed in native dress but represent religious stories surrounding the Easter celebrations



Figure 4. Yaqui exhibit at MIM

of Christianity. The Yaqui Deer Dance reflects a more distant past, however. It honors a deer for sacrificing its life to feed the Yaqui people. Accompanied by a traditional drum, flute, and singer, a male dancer dresses as a deer who frolics through its natural habitat before being slain by a group of hunters.

The culture of the Yaqui predates the arrival of European culture, music, and religion to their ancestral lands. Despite adopting Christian beliefs, the Yaquis still believe that the “enchanted ones” live among

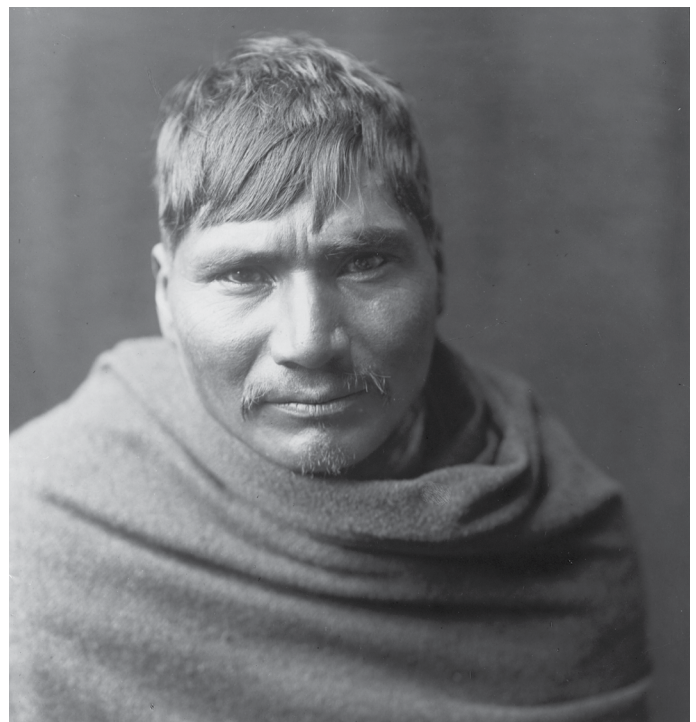


Figure 5. Portrait of a Yaqui Man, Arizona, c. 1907. Photograph by Edward S. Curtis

them in the music they perform, whether on a traditional drum or a European violin. In 1942, an elderly Yaqui musician named Juan Valenzuela related the following story:

These people who became enchanted remained here but no one knows where they are exactly because they cannot be seen. Sometimes a person hears a drum or a violin, and it is probable that this is the music of the enchanted people. Sometimes when a *pascola* musician is a very good musician it is said that he learned his music from the enchanted people. (Quoted in Edward H. Spicer, "Excerpts from the 'Preliminary Report on Potam'," *Journal of the Southwest* 34, no. 1 [1992]: 128)

Yaqui Music



European Influences on Yaqui Music



Classroom Activity: Cultural Diffusion and Museum Exhibit Design

Objective

Create a museum exhibit proposal (or actual exhibit) that highlights the **diffusion** of one culture into another.

Standards

Academic Standards for the Arts: Create, Present/Perform, Respond, Connect

Social Studies – Geography: Examining Human Population and Movement

Social Studies – History: The Development of Civilizations, Societies, Cultures, and Innovations

Social Studies – Historical Thinking and Analyzing Relationships

English Language Arts – Reading and Writing Standards

Background

When an exhibit is planned at MIM, **ethnomusicologists** and designers first decide what kinds of **cultural characteristics, symbols, or oral histories** they want to showcase. Since it is impossible to communicate everything about a place or a culture, they must decide what to include or exclude, and how to visually arrange everything. Additionally, they have to select the best video to accompany the exhibit. Finally, they write the text that accompanies the exhibit, what we at MIM call a "graphic rail." To make graphic rails accessible to the general public, MIM tries to limit them to 125 words. All of this information is plotted onto an exhibit template that is used to propose and plan exhibit installations.

Cultural Diffusion: How can I represent the diffusion of one culture into another?

Understanding **cultural diffusion** begins with a basic understanding of historical timelines and an eye for cultural similarities. For either Mexican banda or Yaqui pascolas, use the resources provided below at any stage of this process.

1. Choose two cultures or cultural traditions to represent. Research examples of each culture, making a list of the similar cultural characteristics.
 - What cultural characteristics appear to exist in both cultures?
 - Are similar musical instruments used?
 - What cultural characteristics seem unique to each culture?
2. Research the history of both cultures and their interactions, if known. Use the "Know – Wonder – Learned" resource provided to help organize information.
 - How does it appear that the cultural characteristics of one culture have been altered by another culture?
 - What are the circumstances of the interaction between the two cultures? Was the interaction violent, peaceful, or both?
3. Gather images, videos, or other objects that represent this example of cultural diffusion.
 - What do you feel are the most iconic symbols of each culture?

- What is the story you are trying to tell?
- Using the provided exhibit template, arrange the images or objects in such a way as to tell the story of cultural diffusion.
 - Write a graphic rail of 150 words or less that encapsulates the interaction of the cultures.
 - EXTEND THE LEARNING:** Students create a physical exhibit based on the template they have just created.
 - This can include printed photographs, physical objects, and a laptop playing videos like the ones students would see at MIM.

Reflect and Discuss

What does this activity help us understand about culture? What are some aspects of cultural diffusion that we can control? What are some aspects of cultural diffusion that we cannot control?

Classroom Resources

Audio/Video Playlists

- [Yaqui Native American \(United States and Mexico\)](#)
- [European Influences on Yaqui Music](#)
- [Mexican Banda](#)
- [Mexican Technobanda](#)
- [European Influences on Mexican Banda Music](#)

Images (Google Image Search)

Please ensure “**Safe Search**” is activated on all browsers.

- [Yaqui Native American \(United States and Mexico\)](#)
- [Yaqui Musicians](#)
- [Mexican Banda](#)
- [Mexican Technobanda](#)

Classroom Activity: Cultural Diffusion and Ethnomusicology

Objective

Identify the distinguishing musical characteristics of a culture or place.

Create a song, beat, or other piece of music that incorporates imitations of these characteristics.

Experience cultural diffusion by creating, disseminating, and altering musical characteristics from different places and cultures.

Standards

Academic Standards for the Arts: Create, Perform,

Respond, Connect

Social Studies – Geography: Examining Human Population and Movement

Social Studies – History: The Development of Civilizations, Societies, Cultures, and Innovations

Background

All musical cultures use sound in different ways to create music. The unique ways that a culture creates, manipulates, and organizes these sounds are what we call **musical characteristics**, which might include the following:

Vocals. *Are people making sounds with their voices? How would you describe those sounds?*

Instruments. *What instruments are being played? What does each instrument sound like? Are the instruments electronic, or are the sounds of the instruments being amplified or altered in some way with electronics?*

Parts. *Are multiple instruments or sounds occurring at the same time? Are they all doing the exact same thing or playing distinct parts? Identify some of those parts.*

Volume or Dynamics. *Is the music meant to be loud or soft? Does the volume change over the course of the song? Is there a particular reason why it changes?*

Beat. *Does it have one? Could you dance to it? Does it sound steady like a march, or irregular?*

Organization or Form. *Is the music divided into distinct sections where different things happen? Can you describe those different sections?*

Timbre. *Are the sounds sharp and nasal, or broad and open? Are the sounds harmonious or distorted?*

Part A: Musical Characteristics – What is my music? What are some musical characteristics that distinguish my music?

- Working in groups of three or four, pick three songs, beats, or other pieces of music to explore.
 - If available, MP3 players or similar technologies can be used to support this step of the activity

2. Be ethnomusicologists and identify at least three musical characteristics found in the chosen songs, beats, and/or pieces.
 - A musical characteristic is anything that helps identify one song from another, or one musical style from another.
 - For convenience, refer to examples of some musical characteristics above.
3. Create an *approximation* of a musical characteristic of each of the songs, beats, or other pieces of music that you have chosen, using whatever materials you have on hand.
 - For example, you might imitate a beat using your hands and a table, use voices and hand gestures to imitate an instrument, imitate a vocal part, or learn to play a part of the song on another musical instrument or technology you have nearby.
 - *While the point of this activity is not to create an exact replica of the original, you should try to make your imitation as faithful as possible.*
 - Both “**beatboxing**” and “**mouth guitar**” are examples of how the voice can be used to imitate musical instruments.
4. Use the musical characteristics of each of these songs to create a new song, beat, or other piece of music.
 - This new music should incorporate the musical characteristics of each of the three original songs in a new way.
 - For example, approximations of both hip-hop and rock-and-roll beats might be played by two different individuals simultaneously on desks while a third individual imitates a pop vocal.
 - If available, technologies such as digital audio workstations can be used to support this step of the activity.
5. Share the new music that has been created.
 - Observe each performance for its distinguishing musical characteristics.

Reflect and Discuss

What are some distinguishing musical characteristics of each newly created piece of music? Are the influences for each new musical work clear? Why or why not?

Part B: Cultural Diffusion – What are some ways that my music might change as it moves around the world?

1. As people move around the world, they bring aspects of their culture with them. Reorganize yourselves into different groups of two or three as if you had all just moved to a different part of the world bringing a characteristic of your musical culture from Part A with you. Then, choose a foreign musical culture such as Yaqui pascolas or Mexican banda.
 - Feel free to use the list of suggested foreign cultures listed below or any other culture that might qualify to you as foreign.
2. Listen to the music of your new culture as ethnomusicologists, identifying at least three of its distinguishing musical characteristics.
3. As in Part A, create *approximations* of these new musical characteristics using whatever materials are readily available.
4. Create a new song, beat, or piece of music that incorporates at least one musical characteristic from the new culture you have chosen, together with musical characteristics from your groups in Part A.
 - For example, two individuals might contribute beats from Part A, while a third individual contributes an imitation of something from the new culture.
5. Share the new music they have created with others and observe each performance for its musical characteristics.

Reflect and Discuss

How has the adopted musical culture been incorporated by and/or changed by each group? In what ways have the music that the students originally chose changed during each part of this activity?

Selected Foreign Musical Cultures

Yaqui Native American (United States and Mexico)

Mexican Banda

Belgian Hip-Hop

Lebanese Pop

British Metal

Indian Classical

Chicago Blues

Australian Aboriginal

Discussion Questions and Writing Prompts

Grade Level	Social Studies and English Language Arts Standards	Activity	Discussion or Writing Prompt
Grade 3–12	<p>Geography: Examining human population and movement helps individuals understand past, present, and future conditions of Earth’s surface.</p>	Inquiry and Discussion	<p>From where do the musical instruments used by the Yaqui originate? Why did <i>technobanda</i> develop outside of Mexico in Los Angeles, CA? What aspect about Mexican banda or Yaqui pascola is similar to its European predecessors? What seems different?</p>
Grade 6–8	<p>Disciplinary Skills and Processes: Chronological reasoning requires understanding processes of change and continuity over time.</p> <p>Reading Standards for Informational Text: Cite textual evidence to support analysis.</p>	Inquiry	<p>How does the musical culture of banda, <i>technobanda</i>, or the Yaqui Indians appear to have adapted and/or changed in response to new technologies? Could you plot some of these changes onto a timeline?</p>
Grade 6–12	<p>Disciplinary Skills and Processes: Historical thinking involves the ability to identify, compare, and evaluate multiple perspectives about a given event.</p> <p>Reading Standards for Literature: Cite textual evidence.</p>	Inquiry and Discussion	<p>What are the similar themes found in each narrative? How does each author’s view of these themes differ? How do the musical practices and beliefs of the Yaqui reflect <i>both</i> their eventual acceptance of European culture and their continued opposition to it?</p>