

# Musical Instruments and Parrandas of Puerto Rico

**Description**     **This lesson is designed for:**

- 40 – 50 minutes
  - 25-30 students
  - Spanish or Social Studies class
  - Grade 1-3
  - Country of Origin: Puerto Rico (part of the United States)
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**Objectives**     **As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:**

- Identify Latin American musical instruments.
  - Discuss what *parrandas* are, as well as where and when they take place.
  - Learn new Spanish vocabulary related to Puerto Rican music.
  - Create replicas of an instrument.
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**Vocabulary**

- Parranda     a group of musicians and singers who play special holiday music
  - Jíbaro        the type of music derived from the rural areas of Puerto Rico
  - Maraca       rattle
  - Cuatro        a small guitar with four strings
  - Pandereta    tambourine
  - Tambor       drum
  - Güiro         an instrument native to the Taíno instrument
  - Aguinaldos   Christmas songs
  - Dulces        sweets
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**Materials**

**Related Files Provided with this Lesson**

- Pictures from Puerto Rico
- Puerto Rican music such as can be found at <http://www.musicofpuertorico.com/index.php/audio/danza/> and on the Musicanto, Song #3, “El Pajarito,” Disco Club Venezolano, Caracas 1995

- Instruments such as a cuatro, guitar, maracas, tambor, güiro,

pandereta. If the actual instruments are not available, use pictures such as those from

<http://www.musicofpuertorico.com/index.php/instruments/>

- Instrument worksheet

### Teachers Need to Provide

- Map of Puerto Rico

To make *maracas*

- Toilet paper roll or cardstock that is rolled and taped (prepare ahead of time)
- Plastic eggs
- Beans or rice
- Colored Markers
- Tape

To make *güiros*:

- Empty metal soup-type cans with no labels
  - Forks
  - Permanent markers
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### Activities

#### 8 min. Introduction

- Identify Puerto Rico on a map.
- Give basic facts about the country and its culture.
- Explain what a *parranda* is.

#### 13 min. Vocabulary Activity

- Give students flashcards with the new Spanish words (one word per card). Review the pronunciations and meanings together.
- As the lesson continues, students will hold up their word whenever it is used in the lesson. (Some reminding may be needed for young children.)
- Complete the worksheet matching instrument pictures and names.

#### 12 min. Make an Instrument

- Have students decide if they want to make a *güiro* or a maraca. Have them sit in groups according to the one they chose.
- To make a maraca:  
Give each student a toilet paper roll or cardstock tube. As they decorate it, put some beans or rice in the egg.  
Tape the egg shut and attach it to the roll. Shake!
- To make a *güiro*:

Make sure the metal can does not have a label or sharp edges.  
Decorate it with permanent markers.  
Strike and/or rub the ribs of the can with a fork!

7 min. **Create your Own *Parranda!***

- After the students make an instrument, ask them to image the classroom as a neighborhood. Each group of tables (or areas of the room) can be a house.
- Students can take turns pretending to visit neighbors and playing their instruments along with the music. A possible song could be from the CD *Musicanto*, Song #3, "El Pajarito," Disco Club Venezolano, Caracas, 1995.

2 min. **Wrap Up**

- Ask students to summarize what a parranda is and make comments about Puerto Rico and its instruments.
  - Allow for any final questions students have.
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**Developed for Classroom Presentations  
by the Center for Latin American Studies Graduate Students  
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## **Background Information**

- Puerto Rico is an island in the Caribbean located to the south of Florida and to the east of the Dominican Republic.
- It is surrounded by the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.
- It is a commonwealth of the United States which means that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, but they do not pay federal taxes and cannot vote for the U.S. president.
- Many Puerto Ricans are of Spanish descent and many have some Indian and/or African ancestry, making them *mestizos*.
- African Americans and Asians also live there.
- Puerto Ricans speak Spanish and English.
- The climate is warm and mild all year round. It is humid in the summer.

## **Instruments**

- The Spanish guitar with six strings was brought to Puerto Rico in 1516 and underwent several changes, because of the lack of native materials and craftsmen to produce authentic instruments, the people created the requinto, bordonua, tripe, and cuatro. Only the cuatro is used today.
- A *güiro* is an instrument native to Puerto Rico from the Taíno Indians. It is a hollowed gourd with ridges cut into one side. A wire fork is rhythmically dragged over the ridges to produce an unusual percussion sound.<sup>1</sup>

## **Parrandas**

- *Parrandas* are a caroling party that occurs in Puerto Rico (and several other Latin American countries) at Christmas time. They may be any time between the middle of December and the middle of January, but often take place on Christmas Eve.
- Puerto Rico is made up of three main groups: Spanish, Africans, and Taíno Indians. The *parrandas* come from the music developed by the Africans and those who lived in the rural areas of Puerto Rico during the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This music is called *jíbara*. *Parrandas* originated when the Puerto Ricans who sang and

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<sup>1</sup>El Jibaro Puertorriqueño, El Boricua: un poquito de todo, <http://www.elboricua.com/jibaro.html> (visited 2/18/07).

played *jíbara* began to travel from town to town, imitating the military bands that marched around the country.<sup>2</sup>

- *Parrandas* are also said to have come the Christian religious tradition replicating Mary and Joseph's search for a place to stay in Bethlehem.
- During a *parranda*, one family decides to visit a neighbor or friends' house to surprise them. They sing a Christmas songs called aguinaldos. They sing very loudly to get their neighbors and friends to come to the door and let them in. They do this even if everyone is already asleep!
- Often the carolers are accompanied by friends who play Puerto Rican musical instruments. Some popular instruments are the *güiro* (an instrument made from a gourd), the triangle, and *maracas*. They also sometimes play *panderetas*, *cuartos*, and *tambores*.
- Next, the people inside come to the door and happily let the carolers in. (People do not get angry or upset because this is a tradition that happens every year. People enjoy it.) They give the carolers some treats. Some dulces (sweets) that are very popular in Puerto Rico include rice with coconut, papaya sweets, donuts, marzipan, and nougat from Spain.<sup>3</sup>
- After the carolers have eaten their fill of treats, they move on to another house. Guess who goes along! The people who live in the house where the *parranda* just occurred! The group is now bigger as it moves on to another house. So, the party gets bigger and bigger lasting long into the night, or even until the next morning! At the very end of the *parranda* party, all of the carolers go to one house where that person serves them a traditional Puerto Rican Christmas Day breakfast, el sopón, a thick chicken and rice stew.<sup>4</sup>

## References

Morales, Luis F. Rodriguez. (2001). *Folk Instruments of Puerto Rico: Their Origins, Roots, and Influence in Puerto Rican Culture*. Princeton, NJ. Or <http://www.teoria.com/articles/inst.htm>. (visited 2/18/2007).

Menard, Valerie. (2000). *The Latino Holiday Book*. New York: Marlowe & Co.

## Websites

El Jibaro Puertorriqueño, El Boricua: un poquito de todo, <http://www.elboricua.com/jibaro.html> (visited 2/18/2007).

Map of Puerto Rico. [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia04/puerto\\_rico\\_sm04.gif](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia04/puerto_rico_sm04.gif) (visited 5/7/2007).

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<sup>2</sup> Morales, Luis F. Rodriguez. (2001). *Folk Instruments of Puerto Rico: Their Origins, Roots, and Influence in Puerto Rican Culture*. Princeton, NJ. Or <http://www.teoria.com/articulos/varios/folk-inst-PR.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Menard, Valerie. (2000). *The Latino Holiday Book*. New York: Marlowe & Co., pp. 142-3.

<sup>4</sup> Menard, Valerie. (2000). *The Latino Holiday Book*. New York: Marlowe & Co., pp. 142-3.

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Pennsylvania Legacies, *Parranda on a Trolley*. November 2003, volume 3(2), 25. [http://www.hsp.org/files/parranda\\_trolley.jpg](http://www.hsp.org/files/parranda_trolley.jpg) (visited 5/7/2007).

Puerto Rican Instruments, <http://www.musicofpuertorico.com/index.php/instruments/> (visited 2/18/2007)

Nombre \_\_\_\_\_

Match the instruments and their names.

El Güiro



El Tambor



Los Cuatros



Las Panderetas



Las Maracas

