

Teacher Guide

Cue Sheet

Mariachi Christmas

Monday, December 14, 2026
10:15am & 12:15pm

Questions to ask students **BEFORE** the performance

- What holiday traditions do you know of or celebrate? What do you do during those celebrations?
- Have you heard mariachi music played before? What are some of its characteristics?

Questions to ask students **AFTER** the performance

- What holiday traditions did you see in the performance? Were any familiar?
- What musical instruments did you see or hear the band playing onstage?
- How is mariachi music like or unlike other music you've heard?



About the Performance

Mariachi is more than just a style of music. It emerged out of a cultural revolution in Mexico and has come to represent the essence of Mexican heritage. Mariachi music is composed of sharply contrasting musical voices; the sweet sounds of the violins stand out against the brilliance of the trumpets and the deep strum of the guitarrón. The mariachis in this performance are accompanied by ballet folklórico dancers, who move to the music and rhythms played.

During the Schooltime Series Mariachi Christmas performance, students may sing along, clap, and have fun with the musicians and dancers onstage. However, during solos, the audience should wait to join until the rest of the performers begin singing again. While not all students celebrate Christmas, this performance showcases many of the cultural traditions of Mexico during the holiday season. It provides a useful starting point for discussions about the diversity of family traditions from home to home and culture to culture, particularly during this festive season.



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Vocabulary

Aztlán (*ahs-TLAHN*) - the Aztec peoples' ancestral homeland

bolero (*buh-LEH-row*) - moderate dance/popular song type in 4/4 time

corrido (*coh-REE-doh*) - a ballad that usually includes facts about historical events

ensemble (*AAN-sahm-bl*) - a small musical group of voices or instruments

guitarron (*gee-tah-RROHN*) - large, portable acoustic bass instrument and member of the guitar family, with a V-shaped back, short neck, and six strings

juvenil (*who-vuh-NEEL*) - the Spanish word for "a young person" or "youth"

Nochebuena (*noh-cheh-BWAY-nuh*) - Christmas Eve

poinsettia (*poyn-SEH-tee-uh*) - a popular tropical plant noted for its red and green foliage. In Mexico, art is called Flor de Nochebuena, meaning Christmas Eve Flower

polka (*POHL-kuh*) - a lively dance originally from Eastern Europe

ranchera (*rahn-CHEH-rah*) - a popular song type, with texts dealing with emotions such as love, or nostalgia for the land or people

son (*sohn*) - a lively instrumental/ vocal/dance piece, characterized by the alteration of fast and slow rhythms

sone (*soh-NEH*) - the Spanish word for "sound"

vihuela (*vee-HWAY-lah*) - a small member of the guitar family, with five strings, a V-shaped back, and short neck. The vihuela produces a higher pitched sound.

villancico (*ee-yahn-SEE-kos*) - songs or poems sung by peasants in Latin America, often carrying a religious message or connected to Catholic feasts

waltz (*waalts*) - a slow or moderate dance originally from Western Europe



Interactive PDF
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Additional Resources

Click here to learn more about the history of mariachi.

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Beyond the Show

Use these activities before or after the performance to extend the production's themes and concepts into the classroom.

Musical Instruments

Play an excerpt of mariachi music for your class. Ask students if they can identify the instruments being played in the excerpt. Introduce the instruments played by mariachi musicians and explain that violins frequently establish the melody, trumpets might repeat the melody or add energy, and the guitarrón and vihuela keep the rhythm.

Music of the Season

Mexicans often celebrate Christmas with music, from villancicos to lively mariachi tunes that tell stories of family, faith, and togetherness. Select and play a short festive mariachi song and instruct students to close their eyes when listening. What emotions, sights, or other senses does the music invoke?

The Meaning of Poinsettias

Tell students that the poinsettia plant, known in Spanish as La Flor de Noche Buena, originates from Mexico. According to legend, a poor child who had no gift to bring to church gathered green weeds instead. Miraculously, those weeds turned into beautiful red flowers. In the wild, a poinsettia can grow to 15 feet high. To bloom at Christmas, growers keep poinsettias in the dark for 14 hours a day starting in October.