Calidanza Mexican Dance and Music
Study Guide
Recommended for grades K–6

Mondavi Center
UCDAVIS
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California Arts Standards (2019)
Responding—Anchor Standard 7:
Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work
K-6.DA:Re7; K-6.MU:Re7.1; K-6.MU:Re7.2

Responding—Anchor Standard 9:
Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work
K-6.DA:Re9; K-6.MU:Re9

Connecting—Anchor Standard 10:
Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art
K-6.DA:Cn10; K-6.MU:Cn10

Connecting—Anchor Standard 11:
Relate Artistic Ideas and Works with Societal, Cultural, and Historical Context to Deepen Understanding
K-6DA:Cn11; K-6.MU:Cn11

Common Core Standards
Common Core broadens the definition of a “text,” viewing performance as a form of text, so students are experiencing and interacting with a text when they attend a performance. Seeing a performance provides rich opportunities to write reflections, narratives, arguments etc.
RL.K-6.2; RL.K-6.3; RL.K-6.5; RL.K-6.6; SL.K-6.2

About Calidanza
Calidanza Dance Company’s mission is to promote artistic excellence in Mexican folk and contemporary dance. Calidanza makes dance accessible to both audiences and participants and educates through quality productions, innovative choreographies and engaging programs. Calidanza offers performances for students and families, in theaters, schools, and now in a modular, virtual, education series with performances, artistic insights, and activities.

This program was filmed at the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts in, Santa Rosa, California using COVID safety precautions on stage and throughout the theaters. The colorful masks worn by the Calidanza performers come from México!

Dancers:
Gaby Gonzalez
Julie Flores
Jae Navarro
Mitali Zúñiga
Raul Villano
Ismael Villano
Carlos Gonzalez
Cezar Gonzalez

Singer:
Alejandro Hernández

Musicians:
Grupo Experimental de Música Folklórica Viníc-Kay (La Gente y El Canto)
Fernanda Bustamante

Calidanza Dance Company
Steven Valencia, Director
Vina Gonzales, Assistant Director
www.calidanza.org
La Rama de Veracruz: The state of Veracruz has some of the most festive celebrations for Christmas including La Rama! People get together in plazas of Veracruz, the streets and around their communities. A decorative branch (rama), carried by celebrants, is followed by a procession; songs are sung celebrating Christmas while the traditional *conjunto jarocho* (Mexican folk ensemble) serenades the celebration.

Veracruz: Veracruz has an extensive history. After the Spanish conquest in México, the Spanish continued their slave trade in the new world. Africans, mostly from Conga and Angola, were brought to México via the slave trade. The African people brought much of their culture with them including their dances and music. Much of the culture of Veracruz is based on a combination of African, Spanish, and indigenous cultures. One particular dance performed in this set is *La Bamba*; this is traditionally performed at weddings in Veracruz.

How we make music! Calidanza’s host musicians, Viníc-Kày, guide you through the distinct instruments used in this performance. Master Artist José Roberto Hernández explains the type of instruments used, history of the musicians and how the instruments relate to the program.

La Piñata: A favorite part of Mexican celebrations, especially at birthdays and Christmas. The piñata is a colorful, decorated container, in the shape of a star or other shape, made out of papier-mâché, cardboard, pottery, or cloth, and suspended over the heads of the people at the party. The piñata is usually filled with candy and treats. When a person at the party breaks the piñata, with a stick, the treats spill out to be enjoyed by everyone.
Video Performance # 2: 
Aztec Dances

The Aztecs were one of the last remaining native groups in central México; the empire was eventually conquered by the Spanish. The Aztecs had a remarkable culture with a proud tradition of respecting and honoring their gods and their people. Many of the traditions involved paying homage to their gods, and asking for rain, a good harvest, health, or love. This dance represents a peace accord between tribes; the people would gather in a festive environment to celebrate peace between tribes, offering good will and friendship. The drums were used, in ritual, to signify the presence of deities, either the Huéhuétl (represented by the large drum) or Teponaztli (represented by the side drum); these were often linked to gods of war. The shells are used to mimic wind, connecting the danzante (dancers) with nature; the shells are often used as a percussion.
Video Performance # 2, con’t:

Dances from Michoacán Azteca

Sones Antiguos de Michoacán & Danza de los Viejitos: Sones Antiguos de Michoacán was created by Amalia Hernández of the Ballet Folklórico de México. This award-winning choreography, based on the traditional music of the P’urhépecha region of Michoacán, was said to have been inspired by children playing in the park.

The sonajas represent the rattles kids use while playing and the jarabes represent kids running and joyfully playing in the park. The dance of the “old men” has pre-Hispanic roots traced to the P’urhépecha tribe in México. The dance originated to honor the “old God” or “God of Fire” (Tata Huriata) in order to receive favor from the god such as good harvest and health. The dance was reserved for the elders, originally using a mask of a child. The music is from the P’urhépecha tribe called pirekuas. Viejitos has a comedic side and shows the ability of the elders to move and dance as swiftly and precisely as younger dancers could.

Video Performance # 3

Dances from Oaxaca

La Guelaguetza: One of México’s largest cultural celebrations is the Guelaguetza in the state of Oaxaca. Celebrated the last two Mondays of July, 16 different ethnic groups represent their cultural regions by bringing their music, dances and costumes to the celebration. The celebration culminates with the presentation of the famous Jarabe Mixteco piece from the Mixteca Oaxaqueña region (Huajuapan de León).

Por los Caminos del Sur: (Along the Southern Roads)
Interpreted by our host musicians Vinic-Kay, Por los Caminos del Sur is a popular regional song.
Video Performance # 3, con’t:

Dances from Guerrero

Guerrero: Heavily influenced by the Spanish, African and indigenous roots, Guerrero is a mixture of cultures that make up the folk life in Guerrero. Aside from the 3 main roots, the dances of Guerrero are heavily influenced by the folk dances from South America, starting with the Zamacueca. South Americans migrated through Guerrero making their way up North for the gold rush. Many stayed and brought their cultural traditions with them. The melting pot of cultures brings the beauty of the dances from Guerrero.
Video Performance # 4

Dances from Sinaloa

Carnaval en Sinaloa: Sinaloa is located in the northwestern part of México, where dance traditions represent the beauty and elegance of the women of Sinaloa. The movements of the men in these dances are influenced by the dance movements and traditions of the Pascolas, derived from the ethnic group, Los Mayos. Carnaval in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, is one of the largest in México; its roots can be traced back to the Christian religious observance of Lent that calls for self-denial. People would converge to have large feasts in order to dispose of food they would be giving up for Lent.
**Jalisco:** Defined by the Mariachi music, dances from the state of Jalisco are the most known and widely danced throughout the world. Dances are typically courtship dances between the men and women; the sones (songs) tell a story about the daily life and adventures in Jalisco. Women’s movements are graceful and pleasant while the men use strong movements to capture the women’s attention. Jalisco has been the region that has most influenced the development and evolution of folklórico today. Mariachi has made the music of México known throughout the world and has become known as México’s national music. Mariachi’s repertoire consists of songs, but their skills also allow them to play anything from waltzes to romantic songs. The women are known for their elaborate ribbon skirts that they move elegantly while dancing; the men are known for their “charra” or cowboy attire, complete with a sombrero. The charra was first known during the Spanish conquest when wealthy ranch owners would attire their cowboys to denote status and wealth.
History of Regions of México

The Olmec people, México’s first complex society, emerged in the southeastern part of the country around 1200 B.C.E. They were followed by the Maya, the Toltec and the Aztec peoples. These ancient societies built cities and pyramids that were marvels of architectural design, created remarkable works of art, and even studied the stars and planets to determine when to plant crops and hold ceremonies. In the early 1500s, the Spanish arrived in México. Their colonization of the land introduced diseases like smallpox which killed many of the Aztec people. The Spaniards also seized and destroyed the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán. The Spanish ruled México until 1821 when the Treaty of Córdoba was signed that recognized México’s independence.

The following are regions of México that Calidanza’s dances are from.

Veracruz
Considered by many to be México’s center of music and dance, the state of Veracruz is located along the eastern coast of the Gulf of México and named by the Spanish explorer Hernán Cortés, who landed at the beach of Chalchihuecan in 1519 on the day of the Vera Cruz or True Cross. Granted statehood in 1823, Veracruz is well known for its mixed ethnic diversity and a considerable population of groups indigenous to the region. During the pre-Hispanic period, the region that now constitutes modern-day Veracruz was inhabited by four indigenous cultures. The Huastecos and Otomíes occupied the north, the Totonacas resided in the north-center, and the Olmecs, one of the oldest cultures in all the Americas, dominated the south between 1300 and 400 B.C. During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), Veracruz became a battleground for different factions, but at the end of the revolution, peace and stability returned to the region. Veracruz has since grown to be one of the most populated and economically active Mexican states with a rich dance history.

Aztec Empire - around México City
The Aztecs were a Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican people of central México in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries. They called themselves Mēxihcah (pronounced [meˈʃiːka]). The capital of the Aztec Empire was Tenochtitlán. During the empire, the city was built on a raised island in Lake Texcoco. México City, located in south-central México, was constructed on the ruins of Tenochtitlán. The Spanish colonization of the Americas reached modern-day México City during the reign of Montezuma II (1502–1520). In 1521, Hernán Cortés, along with an allied army of other Native Americans, conquered the Aztec peoples, who were already weakened by famine and a smallpox epidemic that killed over half of the population. The Aztecs were devastated by the superior warfare tactics of the Spanish, who used horses in battle, while the Aztec warriors fought on foot. México City, created in 1824, is the political, economic and social hub of México and the largest metropolitan area in the Western Hemisphere today.

Michoacán
Michoacán, located in western México, has a stretch of coastline on the Pacific Ocean to the southwest. The name Michoacán means “place of the fishermen” referring to those who fish on Lake Pátzcuaro. In pre-Hispanic times, the area was the home of the P’urhépecha Empire, which rivaled the Aztec Empire (1345–1521 CE) at the time of Spanish invasion. The state and its residents played a major role in the Mexican War of Independence (1810–1821) as well. The economy is based on agriculture, ranching, fishing, mining, and the arts. Known as the soul of México, Michoacán hosts Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations on November 1 that are considered to be the most elaborate and well-known in all of México. Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), which has ancient Aztec and Mesoamerican roots, remembers and honors the lives of the deceased while celebrating the continuation of life.

Oaxaca
Oaxaca, located in southwestern México, became a state in 1824. It is one of México’s most ethnically diverse states and nearly two-fifths of the state’s residents speak indigenous languages, notably Zapotec, Mixtec, Mazatec, Chinantec, and Mixé. Most live in the Central Valleys region, which is also an economically important area for tourism, with people attracted to its archeological sites such as Monte Alban, and Mitla, and its various native cultures and crafts. Oaxaca is also one of the most biologically diverse states in México, ranking in the top three, along with Chiapas and Veracruz, for numbers of reptiles, amphibians, mammals and plants.
Guerrero

Guerrero, located in southwestern México, is named after Vincente Guerrero, one of the most prominent leaders in the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821) and the second President of México. It became a state in 1849 and is home to a number of indigenous communities, including the Nahua, Mixtec, Tlapanec, Amuzgo, and Cuitlatec, as well as communities of Afro-Mexicans in the Costa Chica region. Geographically, the state is mountainous and rugged with flat areas limited to small mesas and the Pacific coastline. This coastline has been important economically for the area, first as the port of Acapulco and today for the tourist destinations of Acapulco, Zihuatanejo and Ixtapa. Tourism is the single most important economic factor of the state and Acapulco’s tourism is important to the nation’s economy as a whole.

Sinaloa – around Mazatlán

Sinaloa, located in northwestern México, became a state in 1830. Divided into 18 cities, its capital is Culiacán Rosales, known for its culture, luxuries and celebrations. The state includes the islands of Palmito Verde, Palmito de la Virgen, Altamira, Santa María, Saliaca, Macapule, and San Ignacio. In addition to its capital city, another important city is Mazatlán, located on the Pacific coast across from the southernmost tip of the Baja California Peninsula. Mazatlán has a rich culture and art community and is known for being the hometown of banda sinaloense, one of the most popular musical genres in México.

Jalisco

Jalisco, located in western México along the Pacific coast, is one of the most economically and culturally important states in México, owing to its natural resources as well as its long history and culture. Many of the characteristic traits of Mexican culture, particularly outside México City, are originally from Jalisco, such as mariachi, ranchera music, birria (a stew traditionally made from goat meat), tequila, and jaripeo (bull riding), hence the state’s motto: “Jalisco es México.” The state is home to two significant indigenous populations, the Huichols and the Nahua. There is also a significant foreign population, mostly from the United States and Canada, living in the Lake Chapala and Puerto Vallarta areas.

Vocabulary

Azteca - Aztecs from Tenochtitlán

Ballet Folklórico - Signifies groups that dance the folk dances of México, as opposed to groups that dance classical ballet, a French invention.

Banda - Marching band

Charro - Cowboy

Doble - A step in which the foot hits the ground twice.

Falda - A big skirt that women wear.

Gatillo - A step in which the front part of the foot remains on the ground and only the heel lifts and then strikes the ground.

Golpe - A basic foot stomp on the floor.

Guelaguetza - A traditional, festive event held in Oaxaca City every July that represents dances from each region in Oaxaca.

Huéhuétl - The big drum used by the Aztecs for rhythm.

Mariachi - Style of music specific to the state of Jalisco.

Oleo - To move the skirt many times in circles.

Penacho - The elaborate headpiece worn by a dancer.

Plano - A dance step in which the whole foot is suspended in the air and then hits the ground flat.

Rama - Tree branch

Sencillo - A step in which the foot hits the ground once.

Sombrero - Hat

Tacón - The heel of the shoe, also a step, in which the whole foot is in the air and only the toe of the shoe hits the ground.

Teponaztli - A smaller percussion instrument used to give a higher pitched sound.

Traje de Listón - Ribbon Dress. Traditionally the more ribbon, the higher the social class.

Viejito - Old Man. The dance of the Old Men (Viejitos) is from Michoacán.

Zapateado - Folklore dance step that is in 3 movements (eg. stomp, heel, stomp). See this dance step in the Veracruz and Jalisco performances.
Post-Performance Video Activities

In addition to the four performance videos, there are a number of short “Insight” and “Activity” videos students can watch on their own (some require adult supervision).

These videos can be found on the same webpage as the performance videos: https://www.mondaviarts.org/arts-education-virtual-events.

Post-Video Performance Discussion Questions

- Had you seen traditional Mexican dance before watching Calidanza’s videos?
- Folklórico brings the culture of México to the world. What parts of your culture would you like to share with the world?
- What did you notice about how the dancers moved? How did they convey emotions? How did they work together?
- How did costumes contribute to the dances? What did they convey? How did they move with the dancers?
- Was the music an important element of the dances? In what way?
- Did you have a favorite dance in the videos? Why was it your favorite?
Mondavi Center Arts Education

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