



LESSON PLAN

Flamenco – A Cross-Cultural Art Form



RELATED FILM

Soleá

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Flamenco – A Cross-Cultural Art Form

Key Idea

Flamenco is an art form rooted in the Spanish culture for generations. Today, flamenco is popular all over the world and is taught in many countries.

Background

This film documents a flamenco guitar player living in Seville, Spain. *Soleá*, the title of the film, is the Spanish term for one of the most basic forms of flamenco music originating in Andalusia, the southern region of Spain. *Soleá*, or *soleares*, is referred to as the “mother of flamenco” since many other forms of flamenco derive from it. *Soleá* comes from the word *soledad*, meaning loneliness, or solitude.

The Gitanos, or gypsies living in Andalusia, were fundamental in maintaining a core form of flamenco through generations. The Spanish Inquisition of 1492 persecuted and expelled the Gitanos, denying public expression of their culture or beliefs. The Gitanos were able to carry forward a sound that expressed a spirit of desperation, struggle, isolation, and pride reflecting this history of persecution and social exclusion that persisted for nearly 500 years. In the late 19th century, the flamenco sounds heard on the streets voiced by vegetable vendors were brought into cafés, the “café cantantes,” and publicized the form into what is now known as the golden age of flamenco.* In 2010, UNESCO declared flamenco as one of the Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, a proclamation which raises awareness on cultural heritage.

The original form of flamenco was only a voice accompanied by the rhythm of a wooden cane beating against the floor. Today, the elements of flamenco include: singing (*cante*), guitar playing (*toque*), dance (*baile*), and handclaps (*palmas*). The center of the flamenco group is the vocals. The dancer through her movements interprets the emotions of the singer. The guitarist accompanies and supports the singer and dancer with melodic, rhythmic percussion. One essential part of flamenco is the live interaction between the dancer and the musicians.

*William Washabaugh, *Flamenco: Passion, Politics and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 1996).



Film: 12 minutes

Class: 60 minutes

SUBJECT AREAS

HIGH SCHOOL

- Geography
- Modern World Studies
- Music
- Spanish

COLLEGE

- Cultural Anthropology
- Film
- Music Studies
- Spanish

THEMES

- Music history
- Creative exploration
- Cross-cultural music
- Dedication and commitment

MATERIALS

- World map
- Online access to the film
- Equipment for showing film

PREPARATION

- None



Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. W.9-10.4 and W.11-12.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards. D2.Geo.2.9-12. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards. D2.Geo.4.9-12. Analyze relationships and interactions within and between human and physical systems to explain reciprocal influences that occur among them.

Lesson

SETTING THE STAGE

Introduce the film by telling students that they will be watching a film about a Colombian flamenco guitarist living in Seville, Spain. Today, thousands around the world are inspired by flamenco and travel to Seville to train as flamenco dancers and guitarists. The guitarist in the film, Juan Ramírez, thought he would live in Seville for one month; he has been living there for 13 years. Ask students: What are the characteristics that draw you to a particular genre of music? (For example: rock, classical, jazz, or pop.) Is it the rhythm, the lyrics, or the experience or feeling the music provides? Why?

ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Direct students to note as they watch the film to observe the various elements of flamenco. They include the following: singing (cante), guitar playing (toque), dance (baile), and handclaps (palmas). Divide the class into groups. Each group will analyze one of the above elements while watching the film. What do they notice? What is the function of this element of flamenco and how does it interrelate with the other elements?



Delving Deeper

After viewing the film, lead a discussion with such questions as:

- Can you list three adjectives describing the element of flamenco you observed while watching the film?
- Ramírez has dedicated his life to the study of flamenco even though it is difficult to make a living in Spain as a flamenco guitarist. “Flamenco comes from the gut,” says Ramírez. What observations from the film justify this statement?
- What kind of story do you think flamenco tells? Why do you think the filmmakers chose to tell this story?
- “There are many beautiful things in flamenco. That’s why you will never finish learning. You will always be learning no matter how many years have you been doing it. You may know it, but you will never finish learning.” Do you think this statement can be applied to other things in life? If so, what?
- “It’s what feeds me,” says Ramírez in the film. How can doing what you love “feed” you? What are some examples, from either your own life or someone you know, where the dedication to an art form (music, writing, dance, art, or even a sport) is an essential part of life?
- If Ramírez were to consider giving up the guitar, what would you say to convince him to continue?
- If you were asked to rename this film, what title would you give it?

Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story. (Note for teachers: Just as quote from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the film to justify their reasoning.)



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1. The community center in your neighborhood is celebrating National Hispanic Heritage Month and will host an evening performance with Juan Ramírez, the flamenco guitarist, in the film. You have been asked to write an article for your town’s newspaper to publicize the event. Many of the people in your community have not been exposed to flamenco before. Your article will include a basic description of flamenco as well as information about Ramírez. Drawing on your observations from the film, how would you describe flamenco? How would you incorporate the Spanish history and heritage of flamenco into your article based on what you’ve seen in the film? If you could ask Ramírez two questions about his craft, what would you ask? Why? (CCSS.ELA.W.9-10.4 and W.11-12.4)
2. Paco de Lucía, a Spanish virtuoso flamenco guitarist who established himself in the 1960s and ‘70s, influenced Ramírez’s music. Think of a person who has motivated your creativity, art, craft, or special ability. Imagine this person is receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award and you are to give a speech to present the award. Write a speech explaining how this person has influenced you. (C3.D2.Geo.4.9-12)
3. [The New York Times published an article](#) which highlights foreigners—from England, Israel, Germany, and Japan—flocking to southern Spain to study flamenco. Based on this article, how would you describe the experience that flamenco provides people who live around the world? Do you think foreigners can have as much enthusiasm for flamenco as the Spanish? If so, why? What evidence from the article backs up this question? (C3.D2.Geo.2.9-12)

Resources

Dan Kaufman, [“Spanish Nights.”](#) *The New Yorker*, September 29, 2014.

Raphael Minder, [“Flamenco’s Foreign Saviors.”](#) *The New York Times*, March 16, 2013.

(Cultural Website) [“National Hispanic Heritage Month.”](#)