

CULTURE BOXES

CUBA



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AGRADECIMIENTOS

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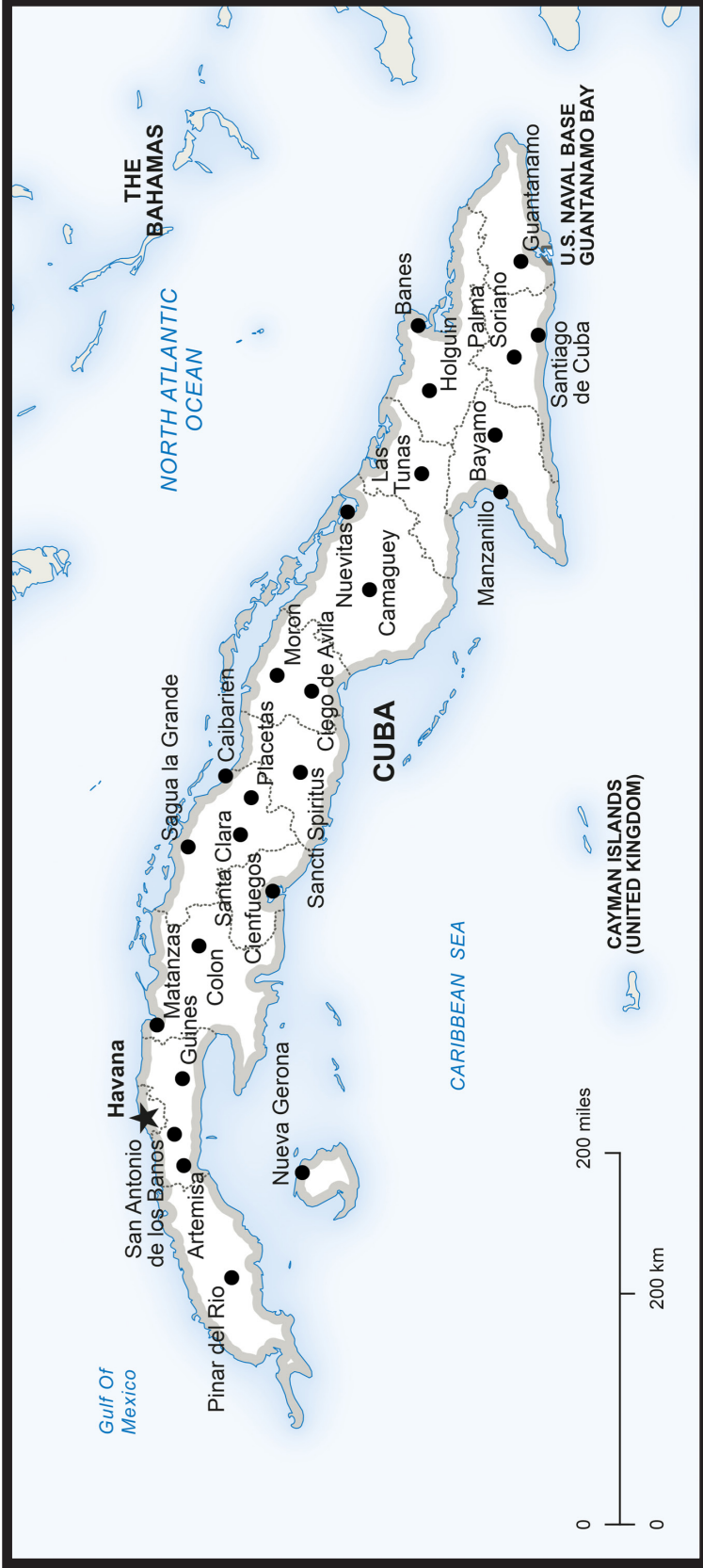
To learn more about the sponsor organizations, see their respective websites:

- **[Latin American & Iberian Institute at the University of New Mexico](#)**
- **[Instituto Cervantes of Albuquerque](#)**
- **[National Hispanic Cultural Center](#)**
- **[Spanish Resource Center of Albuquerque](#)**

NORTH/CENTRAL AMERICA



CUBA



INTRODUCCION

INTRODUCTION

Inevitably, discussion about Cuba is colored by preconception and, frequently, limited information. A joke, recounted in the opening pages of *The Cuba Reader*, demonstrates how ideology affects our understanding of events on the island:

When Pope John Paul visited Havana in 1998, he was personally welcomed by Fidel Castro, who invited him to tour the city. They rode in the Popemobile, and since it was a warm day, they opened the roof. Everything was fine until they reached the Malecón, when suddenly a gust of wind blew up and swept the Pope's zucchetto off his head and out into the sea. There it floated, bobbing on the waves.

"Don't worry, Your Holiness," exclaimed Fidel, "I'll get it for you!" He jumped over the side of the Popemobile, leaped over the seawall, and sped out over the water. Yes, he actually walked on top of the water, all the way out to where the zucchetto lay floating on the waves. Then he turned and dashed back, still skimming over the surface, leaped over the seawall, and jumped back into the Popemobile, without getting a drop of water on his clothes. "Here, Your Holiness," he panted.

The next day, newspapers all over the world reported this amazing incident.

In Granma, the Cuban Communist Party newspaper, the headline read "Fidel is God; He Walks on Water."

In L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper, the headline read "Pope Performs a Miracle: Makes Fidel Castro Walk on Water."

And in the Miami Herald, read by the Cuban exile community in Miami, the headline read "Castro Doesn't Know How to Swim."

This polarization reflects a common response to Cuba's dominant topic: The Revolution. It was either a smashing success or a dismal failure, depending on whom you ask.

Yet surely it benefits us to find a way to teach students about Cuba without reducing the conversation to preconceived notions about Fidel Castro or limiting it only to a discussion about his government. This culture box aims to provide resources for approaching Cuba in a multifaceted, multidisciplinary way. Within it, teachers will find tools to help explore the island's rich and varied geography with its astounding biodiversity; its people's revolutionary discourse and racial, ethnic, and class history; its immigrant experiences; its indigenous, Spanish, and African history; its Santería and Catholic traditions; and its economic roots in slavery. In short, the culture box of Cuba is meant to capture and convey a multidimensional understanding of Cuba.

OBJETOS ITEMS

Reference Items

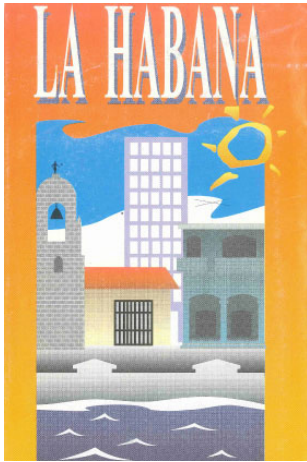
Artifacts

Music & Instruments

Films

Books

MAPA TURÍSTICO



DESCRIPTION

This item is a tourist map of La Habana, Cuba. The enclosed description reads:

“Todas las calles y avenidas de La Habana puestas en sus manos. Le invitamos a andar..Utilice este mapa detallado y actualizado con los principales lugares de interés de la capital, complementado además por un minucioso índice de nombres que le facilita la localización inmediata del sitio que usted desee.”

PHOTOGRAPHY ALBUM



DESCRIPTION

This item is a binder collection of photos taken in Cuba. Each photograph is unlabeled, but can be identified by a number that corresponds to more information on a citation page. The photos are selected so as to encourage divergent, reflective conversations among students about the many ways to interpret a given country's natural, physical, and social resources.

CURRENCY



DESCRIPTION

This item is sealed in a small plastic bag which includes the following:

- Paper currency: 1 peso (x2) convertible
- Paper currency: 3 pesos convertibles
- Paper currency: 5 pesos convertibles
- Paper currency: 10 Cuban pesos
- Coin currency: 5 centavos (x6)
- Coin currency: 10 centavos
- Coin currency: 25 centavos (x3)
- Coin currency: 1 peso convertible

The paper currency included in the culture box has incorporated images from Cuba's movement for Independence from Spain. José Martí, a national hero of Cuban Independence, is portrayed on the back on the 1 peso convertible falling in battle against Spanish troops.

Images from the Cuban Revolution are also displayed prominently on the paper currency. For instance, the front of the paper 3 pesos convertibles is dominated by a vignette of the Monument to Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Guevara has achieved legendary status in Cuba and around the world for his participation in the Cuban Revolution, his tactical mastery of guerilla warfare, and

his proposed economic alternatives to capitalism.

Like the paper CUCs, the only CUP included in the culture box, the 10 pesos, employs themes of both Independence and Revolution. The front of the bill is marked by a portrayal of Máximo Gómez, Cuba's military commander in the 1890s' wars for independence. The back of the bill features an imagined depiction of "la guerra de todo el pueblo," a doctrine of national defense where the people of Cuba are called upon to take arms in the defense of the island from foreign invaders.

In short, Cuba has, as have other nations, used the images on its currency as a vehicle for inspiring nationalism and promoting national goals.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [Banco Central de Cuba \(Spanish\)](#)
- [Cuba Currency Guide](#)
- [Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy: The Cuban Dual Monetary System](#)

FLAG



DESCRIPTION

This item is a large, folded Cuban flag.

The flag was designed by a Venezuelan general in 1849 during Cuba's war for independence from Spain. The design of the flag included: "Three light blue stripes, later changed to ocean blue, representing Cuba's three sections at the time, Western, Central and Eastern. The two white stripes representing the purity and justice of the patriotic liberators' motives. While the lone white star within the equilateral red triangle represents the unity of [Cuban] people upon the blood spilled by [...] revolutionary heroes." One version of the original flag of Cuba can be seen online at cubaflags.com, a website which endeavors to provide "an insight into the flags and emblems of Cuba."

The flag ultimately survived the revolution of 1959, and indeed remains a prominent symbol in Cuba today as Castro supporters and challengers alike tend to invoke the powerful image of "Independence" to support their distinct political goals.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Read more at cubaflags.com.

GRANMA



DESCRIPTION

Granma is the official daily newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party. The culture box contains 2 identical issues from July 3, 2012, and one issue from July 6, 2012.

Across the top right corner of the front page of each edition of Cuba's official Communist newspaper is stamped the slogan: "Friendship ends where duty begins." To the left of that slogan is an image of Castro and others raising their weapons in victory. The newspaper and the Party rely heavily upon Cuba's revolutionary image. The title of the newspaper, Granma, is named for the ship that carried Castro and his forces from Mexico City to Cuba to begin the war in the Sierra Maestra. You might notice that time itself is measured in relation to the Revolution. The top left corner of the newspaper tells readers that the year is 2012, "Año 54 de la Revolución."

Flipping through the pages, particularly of the July 3 edition, one might also notice how influential news from the United States is in the Cuban press. Scholars have certainly noted the asymmetrical level of interest between Latin America and the United States. As Don Coerver and Linda Hall have explained, "For the United States it has been possible, for most of two-centuries, to get along without understanding much about its neighbors to the South. Latin Americans have never had the luxury of ignoring the United States."

The front page of the July 3 edition features two articles relating to the U.S. How often do U.S. newspapers discuss Cuba on the front page? In thinking about "Cuban culture," it might be helpful to also consider the role that the United States plays in the lives of Cubans.

Supporting Resources

- To read current, digital issues, visit Granma’s website (in **Spanish** or **English**).
- For an alternative source of information about current events in Cuba, visit **Cubanet.org**.
- University of New Mexico - Latin American Database: **NotiCen.**, a weekly digest of English-language news about Central America, including the Caribbean, for which teachers can register to receive free access to all current and archived articles.

JUVENTUD REBELDE



DESCRIPTION

This item is a folded newspaper dated July 6, 2012 (written in Spanish).

Juventud Rebelde was founded in 1965 by the Communist Youth Movement. According to Fidel Castro, the newspaper was designed to be "... a paper devoted mainly to youth, with things of interest to young people, but that must try to be a quality newspaper whose content could be interesting to all kinds of readers."

Naturally, the newspaper has been criticized as a mouthpiece of the government and the Communist Party.

This particular issue features, among other things, a front page story about President Raúl Castro Ruz's diplomatic visit to China; articles about poetry, baseball, soccer and the Olympics; and a story about 115,000 students graduating from la Universidad de La Habana.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [Juventud Rebelde: Official Site](#)
- [NPR: Cuban Newspaper Pushes Beyond Party Line](#)
- For an alternative source of information and news on Central America, visit the University of New Mexico - Latin American Database: [NotiCen](#), for which teachers can register to receive free access to all current and archived articles.

CAFÉ BUSTELO



DESCRIPTION

This item is an unopened, yellow and red tin can packed with Café Bustelo espresso.

Although Café Bustelo is neither produced nor sold in Cuba, this item's place in the culture box leads to discussion about the Cuban coffee industry, the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba, and the questionable practice of marketing U.S. products in a way that misleads consumers to believe that the product is actually produced in Cuba.

According to Tea & Coffee Magazine, “coffee production was introduced to Cuban society in the mid-18th century,” from which point forward it continued to flourish right up until the Cuban Revolution in 1956. At the time that the Castro regime came to power, Cuba's coffee exports numbered approximately 20,000 metric tons.

Cuba's coffee exports have suffered since the Castro regime took power in 1959. Tea & Coffee Magazine observed “the Marxists have really blown it.” Indeed, due partly to labor shortages and partly to labor reorganization, output has decreased drastically since the coffee farms were nationalized.

The U.S. trade embargo has also affected the industry. To generate hard currency in the face of the embargo, Cuban economic policy has been to export, to France and Japan, the high quality coffee that Cuban growers do produce, while importing low quality beans (often mixed with peas) which are rationed out for domestic consumption.

Since authentic Cuban coffee cannot easily be purchased in the U.S., the “Cuban” brand has been hijacked by American companies eager to fill the void. Café Bustelo is one example of a product that is marketed as “Cuban” coffee without actually being produced in Cuba. In fact, Bustelo is produced in the United States and is now owned by the J.M. Smucker Company, headquartered in Orville, Ohio. Bustelo is enormously popular among Cuba-Americans in Miami and elsewhere.

The label of the can in the culture box states proudly, “El Café Bustelo, por su sabor, aroma y calidad, es el preferido por la gran colonia Hispana en los Estados Unidos.”

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [Tea & Coffee Magazine – Cuba: Once-Proud Coffee Industry Falls on Hard Times](#)
- [Business Week – Cuban 09 Coffee Harvest, the Worst in History](#)
- [Endtheembargo.com – Caffeinated Cubans](#)
- [NPR – Cuban Coffee Brand May Pour into Mainstream](#)
- [American University – Trade Environment Database: Cuban Coffee: Geographic Indication, Intellectual Property](#)

CHICOTICOS



DESCRIPTION

This item is an empty, folded yellow bag inside a zip-lock bag. It is not recommended to open the exterior zip-lock bag.

Chicoticos are a delicious and pungent garlic snack, popular in Cuba. Garlic itself is familiar to Cubans as the basis of many meals in Cuba (often taking the form of a sauce called “adobo”). Chicoticos are one example of a processed, garlic-based snack foods sold in Cuba.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [Cooking the Cuban Way](#)

COFFEE KETTLE



DESCRIPTION

This is a papier-mâché coffee kettle, painted yellow and decorated with purple flowers, accompanied by four small coffee cups.

In Cuba, many students learn by using papier-mâché reproductions of functional items, from this coffee brewer to a doctor’s stethoscope to a carpenter’s hammer. In this sense, the item can be an educational tool illustrating to students how to share common domestic or culinary tasks. This item also references other important facets of Cuban culture, from the production/ consumption of coffee to repurposed art. For more on coffee, see our description of the Cafe Bustelo coffee in this culture box. Regarding repurposed art, it’s significant to note that many Cuban citizens have been forced by necessity to consider unique ways to re-use items, both for functional and artistic purposes. The use of recycled newspapers to create papier-mâché artwork, for instance, is not uncommon. For another example of papier-mâché Cuban art, see the collection of saints included in this culture box, and to learn more about recycled materials, see the recycled camera and train.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [VisitCuba’s feature of Cuban artist Filiberto Mora Rosales, who creates papier-mâché pieces defined as “Art with an Attitude”](#)
- [NY Time’s article on how “Ebullient Cubans Make a Lot Out of Little,” or the how and why of Cuban artists’ frequent use of recycled materials](#)

COLLECTION OF SAINTS



DESCRIPTION

Here, we see a collection of five small papier-mâché figurines representing different Cuban orichas/saints.

These handcrafted, hand-painted figurines illustrate the history of the island through the lens of religion, demonstrating differences and similarities between the co-existing practices of Catholicism and Santería. The first religion was introduced by the Spaniards; the second by African slave communities.

Catholicism was brought to the island by the Spanish colonizers who invaded the country in the 16th century. Soon thereafter, slaves from western Africa were brought to work on sugar plantations. With them came a different religion based on the deities and beliefs of the people of western Africa. Their practices, modified to survive their new environment, came to be known as Santería, a Spanish word loosely translated as “worship” or “devotion” of saints.

These two religious belief systems, Catholicism and Santería, historically operated in parallel with one another, although Santería was practiced in secret while Catholicism was enforced publicly. During the period of enslavement, secrecy was necessary to avoid persecution; in later years, Santería continued to be practiced in secret by some in order to avoid a perceived stigma associated with Afro-Cuban culture. Moreover, all religious practices were repressed for many years beneath the Castro government, as atheism was viewed as a prerequisite for membership in the Cuban Communist Party. It wasn't until 1991 that the government amended its regulations on Cuba and allowed for non-atheist beliefs.

The two religions share many similarities and can be found practiced in tandem or syncretized within a single household. For instance, Santería's Yoruban Orichas may be seen as parallels to the Catholic saints. As these five papier-mâché figurines illustrate, this parallelism has evolved into a syncretic understanding of the orichas and saints: a single figure can be seen as both. The following dual individuals are included in this culture box:

- Obatala/Tranquilidad Figurine: This is a hand-crafted and hand-painted figurine of Tranquilidad. She wears a white robe and appears to be standing on a cloud. There are two cherubs beneath her and there is a child in her left hand. The Orichan Obatala is combined with the Catholic saint Our Lady of Mercy. The Santería saint Obatala is a man who is the god of peace and purity; here he is displayed similar to the Catholic saint Our Lady of Mercy.

- Ochún/Patrona de Cuba Figurine: This is a hand-crafted and hand-painted figurine of Ochún, the Patrona de Cuba or Patroness of Cuba. She wears an orange robe and seems to be standing in the river. There is a small canoe with three children beneath her and waves surrounding her. She holds a child in her left hand and a red cross in her right. Ochún is the goddess of love in Santería. She controls river waters and love, sexuality, finances, arts, and human pleasures.

- San Lazaro/Babalú Ayé Figurine: This is a hand-crafted and hand-painted figurine of San Lazaro. He wears a hooded purple robe with two black rods in his hands. San Lazaro was the Catholic saint resurrected from the dead by Christ. Here he is seen combined with the Santería ruler of contagious diseases, Babalú Ayé.

- Santa Barbara/ Changó Figurine: This is a hand-crafted and hand-painted figurine of Santa Barbara. She holds an orange sword in her left hand and wears an orange crown. She stands next to an orange tomb in a red robe. Santa Barbara was a third-century martyr who carried a sword. She is the patron saint of artillerymen, military engineers, or anyone associated with arms or explosives. She is combined with the Santería God of war (Changó). This figurine shows Catholicism and Santería strongly combined, as the Santería saint Changó is a male figure, yet is displayed here as a woman.

- Yemallá/ Dueña del Mal Figurine: This is a hand-crafted and hand-painted figurine of Yemallá the Dueña del Mal (Goddess of Bad). She wears a blue robe and appears to stand in the sky. There are three cherubs or small angels beneath her and she holds a child in her left hand. She appears to have a white halo. This is the saint considered to be the mother figure in Santería, compared to Our Lady of Regla in Catholicism. She rules the waterways (oceans, seas) and is patroness to sailors and fishermen, and also to pregnant women.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Moonsong describes the roots of many Santería/Catholic saints
- Cuba Heritage describes the roots of many Santería/Catholic saints
- Vice News talks about how “Santería is Cuba’s New Favorite Religion”
- Washington Post article on current religious practices in Cuba: “Cubans love the pope and the Catholic Church, but they’re just not that into religion.”
- Article on “Sanctioning Faith: Religion, State, and U.S.-Cuban Religions” in Journal of Law and Politics.

ANTIQUE CAR (MINIATURE)



DESCRIPTION

This item is a small wood car fashioned to resemble an antique American-made vehicle. The model year of the car is 1954 and “Cuba” has been burned into the hood of the toy. The wood has been stained orange and green to give the car more realistic coloring.

This item represents an iconic element in Cuban culture: remnants of 1950s America, the era before the embargo redefined the island and cut off exchange between the two countries. Many cars that were purchased prior to the embargo are still in operation today. Although outsiders may view them with nostalgia, their use is a demonstration of how Cuban citizens have had minimal access to the international market. With few exceptions, the vehicles that were on the streets when the Rembargo began in 1960 (the year following Castros’ assumption of power) are still the vehicles on the streets today.

Driven by necessity, Cuban citizens have found ways to maintain these vehicles as functioning modes of transportation. Although their frame still retains the original look and appearance of 1950s American automobiles, their internal mechanisms have been replaced over the years with parts from Russia or China - the few countries willing to undertake trade with the otherwise economically isolated Cuban government.

Many of these vehicles today are restricted to tourist use, particularly in Havana and other city centers. For visitors to the island, they offer a striking reminder of the Cuban people’s ongoing

ingenuity in the face of deprivation.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [Photos of Cuba's Classic Cars](#)
- [One traveler's post about American cars in Cuba](#)
- [A YouTube compilation of photos of American cars being used as Taxis in Cuba](#)

COCO TAXI (MINIATURE)



DESCRIPTION

This item is a miniature Cuban Coco Taxi handcrafted from wood.

This miniature vehicle resembles a “Coco” taxi, a small, open-air vehicle used to transport tourists around the capitol. There are many postcards and art pieces featuring these taxis, calling attention to their strange shape and small size.

Of course, in addition to the Coco Taxi, visitors and residents in Cuba can also find the more familiar four-door yellow taxis and the well-known old-fashioned American car taxis, among many others. The Coco Taxi remains popular because it is one of the more cost efficient ways to get around in-country for tourists. Locals would typically avoid this method, however. This discrepancy alludes to the many differences that mark the experiences of Cuban citizens from visiting tourists.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [Coco Taxi T-shirts, Coffee mugs, Stickers, etc](#)
- [Transportation in Cuba: A list of ways to get around](#)
- [A Youtube compilation of photos of Coco taxis around Havana](#)
- [Travel Cuba’s gallery of Coco Taxis photographs](#)
- [Cuba Junky’s list of ways to get around Havana](#)

VIOLIN (MODEL)



DESCRIPTION

This is a miniature violin and bow crafted from wood with a base to stand the instrument on so it can be displayed.

This small wooden violin does not produce sound (unlike the other instruments in this culture box), but nonetheless is useful for helping to understand the great diversity of music that exists in Cuba. Although other musical instruments in this box focus on more recognizable Cuban music genres, such as charanga and son, this violin attests to Cuba's excellence in other types of music, from orchestral to jazz quartets.

Cuba's excellence in music, and in other performing and fine arts, is a testament in part to the Revolution's utopian aspirations and intent to foster individual growth above and beyond economic productivity. As part of these objectives, the Cuban government reclaimed and renovated a formerly private country club, creating in the process a national art school (known as the Instituto Superior de Artes, or ISA) that has since come to be known as a world-class, prestigious institution for the study of fine and performing arts. Cuban citizens audition for placement at this no-cost institution; international citizens audition and then must pay fees to attend.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [Boogalu Productions presents "A short history of Cuban Music"](#)
- [Boston's NPR News Station writes about how "A Berkley Professor Dives into Cuba's](#)

Vast Music Scene”

- Havana Music School talks about “Studying Music in Cuba”
- “The Grand, Eerie, Forgotten Architecture of Cuba’s National Art Schools” by Slate Design Blog
- An article by Victoria Alcalá on “Roberto Gottardi’s Paradise Lost at ISA”
- The Arch Daily’s review of Cuba’s National Art Schools
- World Monuments Fund features the National Art School in Havana

PILONCILLO



DESCRIPTION

While the sugarcane in the culture box is not actually from Cuba, it is included to represent Cuba's strong historical ties to sugar generally. The island's tropical climate has proven excellent for growing sugarcane and other valuable crops. It is impossible, however, to think about Cuba's production of sugarcane without considering slavery. The nineteenth-century Cuban economy was based on sugarcane, slave labor, and free trade. By the 1820s, the tiny island of Cuba, importing over 10,000 slaves per year, became the largest sugar producer in the world.

The importance of sugar has remarkably declined in recent years. In 2002, the Castro government announced the downsizing of the sugar industry. Castro explained, "It's crazy to make an effort to produce something that costs more to make than to import."

Astonishingly, on an island where sugarcane is said to grow with ease, the Cuban government has actually begun importing sugar from the United States. Tourism has become a key industry, replacing sugar as Cuba's economic engine.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [Spice Hunting: Piloncillo:: How to Use Raw Mexican Sugar](#)
- [Cultura: Sugarcane and Cuba...brief history](#)

RECYCLED MINIATURE COCA-COLA TRAIN



DESCRIPTION

This item is a miniature train crafted from recycled Coca-Cola soda cans. The steam pipes have been crafted from wood, affixed, and painted black. The eight wheels and the frame were also made from wood and painted black.

This item, like others in this culture box, demonstrates how creative the Cuban people are in their ability to recycle and repurpose materials. When faced with scarce resources, the Cubans have turned to recycling as a means for survival. Soda cans are also recycled to be used as small serving bowls, cups, and coin banks. They have been used frequently as art supplies alongside other recycled materials. The Cuban government fully supports recycling programs as an environmentally friendly way to deal with waste. However, even while informal recycling practices thrive, there are few formal programs for recycling on the island.

This item is also a reference to Cuba's long railway history. Put in place during the country's colonial era, the railway system was created primarily to transport sugar from the country's inland refineries to port towns. Trains also played a pivotal role in transporting shipments of men and artillery during Cuba's fight for independence from Spain. As recently as the 20th century, trains were used to support industrialization around the island. The "Hershey Train," for instance, which runs from Havana to Santa Clara, was built in the early 1900s to transport laborers to the chocolate company -- marking a heyday in the sugar plantation industry.

In the current era, this history of railway development translates into an extensive albeit

declining network. Today, the railway system is used primarily for traveling long distance. For short commutes, it remains more cost efficient to share taxis, walk or bike around the island.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [SunSentinel’s post on “Necessity makes Cubans masters of recycling”](#)
- [Transportation in Cuba: A list of ways to get around](#)
- [The Guardian’s article on the unreliability of the Cuban train system](#)
- [Experiencing Cuba by Train: A schedule with prices](#)

RECYCLED SPRITE CAMERA



DESCRIPTION

This item is a non-functioning camera crafted from recycled Sprite soda cans. It has a strap made from the can openers and a trigger so that the owner can pretend to take a picture. It also has a little joker character inside the lens that pops out when the trigger is pushed to take a pretend photograph.

Like the miniature Coca-Cola train, this camera is also made from recycled materials. When faced with scarce resources, the Cubans have turned to recycling as a means for survival. Soda cans are also recycled to be used as small serving bowls, cups, and coin banks. They have been used frequently as art supplies alongside other recycled materials. The Cuban government fully supports recycling programs as an environmentally friendly way to deal with waste. However, even while informal recycling practices thrive, there are few formal programs for recycling on the island.

Moreover, this camera could be used to open a conversation about photography in Cuba. Although having easy access to cameras or smart phones is now considered commonplace throughout much of the United States, many Cuban citizens still experience heavily restricted access to the international market as a result of the U.S. embargo. Although tourists often discuss photography on the island, Cuban residents themselves have a much harder time accessing the technology to take photographs. It would be an interesting exercise to compare photography of the island produced by Cubans in contrast to photography produced by tourists.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [SunSentinel's post on "Necessity makes Cubans masters of recycling"](#)
- [The New York Times post on "Photography in Cuba"](#)
- ["Ten Cuban Photographers You Should Know" from the Huffington Post](#)

TOY LADY BUG



DESCRIPTION

This item is a palm-sized, wooden ladybug with neon pink wings and blue polka dots. It is a toy that rolls forward when you pull the black bead on its back, releasing a string that enables the toy to “walk” along the ground.

While the item in the box is a toy, the fact that it represents an insect common to Cuba can also foster conversations related to Cuba’s natural resources. More specifically, and perhaps more importantly, it can also lead to a discussion about the island’s alternative farming practices. Owing to the economic restrictions faced by the island, Cuban citizens have not had easy access to the pesticides and other agro-chemicals that have come to characterize farming around much of the rest of the world. In 1993, when the entire island underwent a severe food shortage, the Cuban government established agricultural cooperatives wherein citizens were allowed to use land indefinitely and without charge in return for producing predetermined quantities of produce. After the initial quota was met, the farmers were then permitted to sell their surplus at local farmers’ markets.

Between the government’s incentives and the opportunity to earn through sales, farmers were motivated to identify alternative methods of production. Their methods were so successful that Cuba’s alternative agricultural practices have since come to be recognized as being at the forefront of organic farming worldwide. Moreover, the United Nations and others have pointed out that the lack of chemicals used in Cubans’ food production may have a positive impact on

the health of Cuban citizens in the long-term.

As part of their organic practices, it is not uncommon for agricultural cooperatives to use varieties of ladybugs to combat insects that would, in other countries, be eliminated through the use of insecticides. It's not farfetched to say that this simple toy ladybug demonstrates Cuban citizens' ability to remain innovative and productive throughout their tumultuous history.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [FarmWeek features Cuban cooperative farming, especially the “Alternative urban farming practices”](#)
- [IndyWeek features a Cuban chef and his methods of cooking with what he has](#)
- [United Nations Environment Programme tells the “Success Story” of “Organic Agriculture in Cuba”](#)
- [The Washington Post tells about how “An arugula-growing farmer feeds a culinary revolution in Cuba”](#)

TU KOLA



DESCRIPTION

Tu Kola is a Coca-Cola-like soft drink that is produced and packaged locally in Cuba. Each 12 oz. can of Tu Kola contains 25 grams of sugar. By way of comparison, a 12 oz. can of Coca-Cola contains 39 grams of sugar. While there is less sugar in Tu Kola than in Coca-Cola, it is certainly a sweet drink and it is marketed as such—with a skateboarding character shouting “Soy Pura Adrenalina,” across the front of the can.

A familiar recycling logo is stamped on the lower portion of the can. Interestingly, Cubans are revolutionary recyclers—often out of necessity. In addition to protecting the planet, recycled materials are cheap to purchase. One popular practice in Cuban bakeries is to serve flan pudding in the cut base of soda cans, and perhaps the Tu Kola can would have been reused in this way if it had not ended up in the culture box.

WOODEN BLOCK CALENDAR



DESCRIPTION

This object is a palm-sized block calendar with “Cuba” burned into the wood on the top. It also has a wooden carving of the country that has been painted colorfully across the top. There are two blocks with the numbers burned into them and two separate blocks with the months and days of the week, in Spanish, burned into them.

This item can be used to introduce the popular holidays celebrated in Cuba, or to practice Spanish numbers, days of the week, and months. Given that the government formerly emphasized atheism, and currently emphasizes secularism, the dates in this calendar are not religious. In fact, the only indication of a holiday in this calendar is the term “Felicidades,” which can be used for many celebrations, including birthdays, weddings, engagements, etc. In addition, this handcrafted item illustrates the popularity of wood crafts on the island.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [National Holidays in Cuba in 2015](#)
- [Learn the Spanish numbers, days of the week, months, and seasons](#)

WOODEN FLOWER WITH HUMMINGBIRD



DESCRIPTION

This item is a hand-carved wooden flower with two petals, a long stem, a heart-shaped base, and a hummingbird feeding from the flower.

This wooden arrangement serves as a beautiful reminder of the natural environments that can be found throughout the island. As an article by NMPBS notes, “Cuba has been called the ‘Accidental Eden’ for its exceptional biodiversity and unique historical development.” EO Earth has also called it the “most biologically important island in the [Caribbean] in terms of biodiversity.” From the coastal waters that shelter 750 species of fish, to the forests on the mainland that provide habitat for 368 different species of birds, Cuba’s natural resources are remarkable and unparalleled throughout most of the world.

These resources have been preserved and protected in part because of the Cuban government’s dedication to environmental ethics. Biological research is a top field in Cuban universities and institutes, leading to thousands of graduates each year who are trained and familiar with ecological preservation. Six different UNESCO biospheres encompass various rainforest and scrubland areas, while other nature preserves protect extensive areas of marine life. Many have come to question to what degree Cuba’s strengthening relationships with the broader

world will impact its natural resources, as tourism, industrialization, and extractive practices take hold.

Although the conversation about ecological diversity is broad, this wooden carving draws the discussion down to a tangible level, and can be used to talk about one example of Cuba's natural wildlife: birds. 70% of the birds in Cuba are migratory; 25 are found only on the island; and several are not endemic, but extremely rare elsewhere, such as the bee hummingbird, which is classified as the world's smallest bird at a weight less than a U.S. penny.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [PBS Nature features an article on "Cuba: The Accidental Eden"](#)
- ["Birds of Cuba" introduced by Wildlife Journal Junior](#)
- [The Encyclopedia of Earth talks about "Biological Diversity in the Caribbean Island"](#)
- ["Animals of Cuba" are introduced by Row Adventures](#)
- [The New York Times talks about what it will mean to "Conserve Cuba, After the Embargo"](#)
- [National Geographic features an article on "Castro the Conservationist"](#)
- [The Havana Times talks about "Cuba and its Biodiversity"](#)

WOODEN MAP



DESCRIPTION

This item is a wooden map of Cuba painted to show the borders of the many provinces in Cuba; each province has an individual image to represent it.

This map provides a tangible way to understand the geography of the island and characteristics associated with each province. As a scale of comparison, Cuba's fifteen provinces are equivalent to an area slightly smaller than Pennsylvania. This island nation is composed of one main island and many small islands, though only one small island has been included in this piece.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [A Wikipedia list of the 16 provinces in Cuba](#)
- [The Nations Encyclopedia post on "Cuba-Location, Size, and Extent"](#)

CLAVES



DESCRIPTION

These are two wooden claves, which are thick cylindrical rods used in the playing of Afro-Cuban music.

To play the clave, hold one lightly and palm-up with the thumb and fingertips of one hand. Firmly grasp the other clave like a drum stick in the other hand and strike the first clave with appropriate timing. This sound is the foundation of Latin rhythm.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- To see an example of standard claves rhythms, visit [**The Rhythm Web: Clave Patterns**](#)
- For a concise overview of the instrument, including a clip of someone playing claves, visit [**Virginia Tech Multidisciplinary Music Dictionary: Claves**](#)
- To hear a clip of American salsa musician Larry Harlow talk about the rhythmic pattern clave and its place in Latin music, visit: [**BBC: The Clave Rhythm Pattern and its Importance in Latin American Music**](#)

CONGA DRUM



DESCRIPTION

This item is a mini tunable conga from the LP Music Collection. Included inside the drum is a tuning wrench and packet of instructions for tuning.

The conga drum (technically the “tumbadora”) is the product of African and Cuban influence. After Spanish conquest, the bulk of Cuban slaves were brought from the Bantu-speaking areas historically known as the Congo. Thus the Bantu ngoma drum is widely recognized as the main predecessor of the conga drum that is played in Cuba today. Drums of other regions of Africa, including the Yoruba batás and bembés of Nigeria also likely influenced the conga.

During the colonial period, Spanish (and later U.S.) colonizers banned the use and construction of African drums. Thus, the design of the traditional drum (which was cut from a single piece of a wood) was modified so that it would no longer be considered an African instrument.

By the mid-20th century, the conga had become popular in the U.S. In the 1950s, for instance, “beatnik” poets would tap a conga drum to accompany their poetry. Several performers at Woodstock made use of the conga.

The embargo and the Cuban revolution put a halt to the export of authentic Cuban drums and opened the door for U.S. companies to begin producing the screw-tensioned fiberglass model that is common today. The conga drum is a key instrument of Cuban son and salsa.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- For the best information on conga history, check out [Nolan Warden's History of the Conga Drum \(PDF\)](#).
- YouTube: [How to Play a Conga Drum](#).
- Percussion Conga Blog: [Anatomy of a Conga Drum](#).
- Check out [the ultimate source](#) for the dissemination of information on Cuban son.

GÜIRO



DESCRIPTION

This item includes two pieces: (1) a cherry-finished, hollow wooden instrument and (2) a light-finished, wooden stick.

The güiro is a pre-Columbian instrument of Latin America. To play the güiro, a musician drags the wooden stick along the vertical, parallel lines that are cut into the base instrument in alternating short and long strokes (e.g., rikki, rikki, raaaaaa; rikki, rikki, raaaaaa).

According to David Shepherd in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World: Part I: Performance and Production*, the güiro is “commonly made from a gourd, either oblong or spherical in shape...but it is most often made out of wood, metal, and bamboo. There are examples made from industrial spare parts, armadillo shells, sea shells, turtle shells, coconuts, bone - indeed, anything to hand with a grooved surface that can be scraped. In some areas of Africa and the Americas, Fanta orange drink bottles are popular!” (p. 373).

Shepherd goes on to note “The instrument is known by a host of names: guacharaca in Colombia; güira (made of metal and played with a fork) in the Dominican Republic; reco-reco in Brazil; guayo or ralladera in Cuba; and guayo, güiro, candungo, carrach, or gícharo in Puerto Rico. The most common name, however, is güiro. It is an essential instrument in Cuban son and trova groups and in salsa orchestras, where it keeps a regular rhythm in the time line and is often played by the singers, lead or second” (p. 373).

“...Opinion is divided as to whether the güiro was first created in Africa or in the Americas....The important thing is that the instrument has always played a key role in many different cultural

groups, and that these cultures have found the güiro aesthetic an integral part of music-making. In Cuba, the güiro is found in an enormous number of different popular ensembles, and indeed many top orchestras have a musician whose sole purpose is to play the güiro” (ibid).

Today, the güiro often accompanies maracas and claves in salsa music that is popular around the world.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- YouTube: [Learn how to play the guiro with Alejandro Sol.](#)

MARACAS



DESCRIPTION

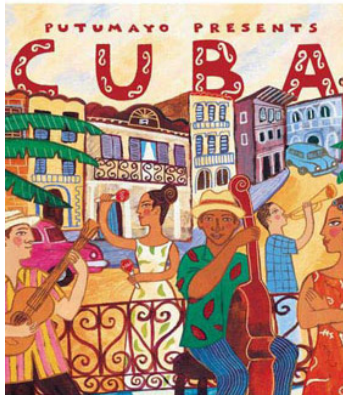
This item includes a pair of wooden maracas, painted with wide red and green stripes.

Maracas are usually made of dried gourds, filled with seeds or rice. The maracas in the culture box are made of wood. Maracas, together with bongos, claves, and guitars are all components of Cuban son, which combines Spanish guitar with African rhythms. Popular forms of music, including salsa, have all sprung from Cuban son.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- To view a tutorial on playing maracas, visit [Mario Grillo's Online Video Lesson.](#)
- To learn how to make a paper maraca, visit [Enchanted Learning.](#)
- To read about the history and development of the Cuban son music, visit [justsalsa.com.](#)

PUTAMAYO PRESENTS CUBA



DESCRIPTION

This item is the best-selling CD from Putumayo’s World Music collection.

“The music of Cuba developed from a unique set of historical and social circumstances. African slaves, brought to work on the Spanish sugar plantations, soon outnumbered the European colonists. The attitude of the Spanish political and religious institutions towards African culture, while undeniably oppressive, was more open than in some other colonial societies. Catholic priests did their best to convert the Africans to Christianity, but they overlooked their worship of African deities as long as they gave them Christian names. In fact, santería, a religion that combines Catholicism with African deities and rituals, is still a key part of Cuban spiritual life.

Most of the songs on this collection are a style called son, (lit. “sound”) one of the most popular and influential Cuban musical forms. Son developed around the turn of the century in Oriente, a region in eastern Cuba. Migrating musicians brought son west to Havana in the 1920s, where it exploded in popularity. The fundamental element of the son is a rhythmic pattern called clave (lit. “key”). Played on two wooden sticks, called claves, this repetitive beat is the foundation upon which all of the other musical elements are structured. It gives son the propulsive swing that has endeared it to people around the world. Most contemporary salsa is based on son.”

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Read more, and listen to son at the [Putumayo World Music website](#).
- World Music Network: [Cuba:: Son and Afro-Cuban Music](#)
- Check out [Son Cubano](#), the ultimate son resource on the internet.

POLO MONTAÑÉZ



DESCRIPTION

This item is a CD titled *Grupo* by Polo Montañéz.

The artist of the CD, Polo Montañéz (1955-2002), was a Cuban singer and songwriter from the Pinar del Rio province of Cuba, who reached worldwide acclaim. Montañéz's original and unique musical and poetic abilities earned him international acclaim virtually overnight. In his obituary by *The Guardian*, "Montañéz was a natural poet, composing intuitively using the old Spanish improvised *décima* verse forms beloved of Cuban country music, and particularly fostered by the tobacco farmers of his region, Pinar del Rio... He leaves a legacy of over a hundred songs and two records which have rejuvenated Cuban country music and brought it back into the mainstream."

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Learn more about Montañéz's inspiring life by reading [The Guardian's obituary](#)

OMAR PORTUONDO



DESCRIPTION

This item is a CD titled *Reír y Cantar* by Omar Portuondo.

The artist of the CD, Omar Portuondo, is a widely-acclaimed Cuban singer. Among her many accomplishments, she is known for having formed the group Cuarteto las d'Aida with her sister, Haydee, and for having lent her vocals to the Buena Vista Social Club song "Veinte Aos".

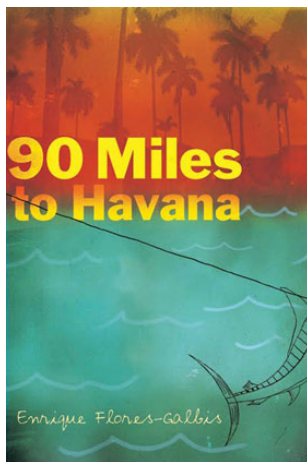
In this CD, she offers a medley of Spanish children's songs.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Learn more about the artist at the [official website for Omar Portuondo](#) (English and Spanish)

90 MILES TO HAVANA

BY ENRIQUE FLORES-GALBIS



DESCRIPTION

90 Miles to Havana (Roaring Press, 2010), is a hardcover, young adult novel by Enrique Flores-Galbis.

In the early 1960s, thousands of children were sent to the United States by their parents in an effort to avoid indoctrination and protect the young generation from the changes implemented by the Castro regime. The operation was called Pedro Pan.

90 Miles to Havana tells Julian's story - when his parents make the heartbreaking decision to send him and his two brothers away from Cuba to Miami via the Pedro Pan operation. Ultimately, "the boys are thrust into a new world where bullies run rampant and it's not always clear how best to protect themselves."

90 Miles to Havana is a 2011 Pura Belpré Honor Book award winner, and a 2011 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

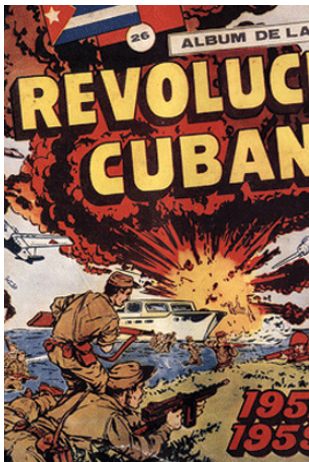
The School Library Journal has called Flores-Galbis's writing "poetic, yet clear as glass."

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- **Author's website**
- The Miami Herald: **"The Network for Operation Pedro,"** a website which acts as a community for those who were transported to the United States as part of Operation Pedro Pan.
- NPR: **"Children of Cuba Remember Their Flight to America."**
- Cold War Museum: **Operation Pedro Pan**
- YouTube: **Pedro Pan Exodus History**
- Readers' reviews of 90 Miles to Havana at **Good Reads.**
- For more resources on this title and other Latin America-related young adult reads, visit the Latin American and Iberian Institute's **Vamos a Leer** blog.

ALBÚM DE LA REVOLUCIÓN

BY THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT



DESCRIPTION

This is a photocopy of an original book published in the 1960s. The copyright page provides the following information: Editado por: Revista Cinegráfico, S.A. | Director Técnico y Administrador: Rene Jiménez. | Dibujos por: CAPDEVILA. | Coordinador: L. Dominguez Triay. | Textos: J.M. Picart - Mario Jimenez. | Patente reg. 190672. Ministerio de Comercio. | Impresión por: Editorial Echevarria. Fomento 114-0-3106.

The book represents a propaganda campaign aimed at children in the 1960s. Children could collect a single trading card with a purchase of Felices tinned fruit. The cards were then carefully pasted into pages with predetermined captions and illustrations. Taken as a sum, the book is an illustrated overview of the Cuban revolution.

The opening page of the album states as follows:

Esta Empresa Editora, consciente del transcendental momento histórico que vive Cuba, desea por este medio rendir un fervoroso y digno homenaje al glorioso Ejército Rebelde, obra del 26 de Julio y del Directorio Revolucionario, cuya figura cimera lo es el Dr. Fidel Castro, héroe continental, su constructor guía, junto con sus comandantes Raúl Castro, Camilo Cienfuegos, Dr. Ernesto Guevara, Faure Chaumont, Rolando Cubelas, Gutiérrez Menoyo y tantos otros.

Estos heroicos Barbudos, que acaban de escribir una página de oro ante el mundo entero, en sus ansias de romper modles tradicionales de oprobio, demostraron como, una juventud idealista, hermanada con nuestros guajiros y la ciudadanía toda, lo mismo en las sierras que en las pobla-

ciones casi sin armas, pero desbordante de coraje, pudo derrotar a un ejército moderno, perfectamente equipada, derrotando a la funesta tiranía que, apoyada en él ensangrentaba nuestra República.

Admirablemente disciplinada, su bravura marchó al par con su generosidad, pues jamás dejó de guardar todas las consideraciones a los adversarios, no obstante ser ella vilmente asesinada al caer prisionera o rendirse, acogiéndose al bando de perdón.

Hemos editado este álbum para que el pueblo cubano pueda conservar un emocionante recuerdo de la Gloriosa Epopeya Cubana, sin pretensiones literarias, ajustándonos a lo publicado en la prensa, rogando excusas por cualquier error u omisión. Todo ello extractado en un orden cronológico e histórico, coleccionado en fotos y dibujos amenos y apropiados para la juventud.

Rebeldes: Un paso al frente ¡Atención! Reciban el abrazo conmovido de todo un pueblo y el aplauso del mundo, en el humilde contenido de este álbum.

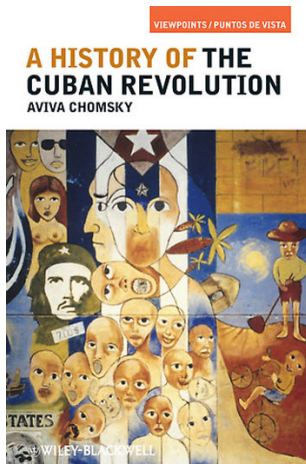
¡Llor a los valientes hijos de Martí!

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- This album has been digitized in its entirety. You can see it by visiting [Babylon Falling](#), a Tumblr website dedicated to digitally recording physical copies of newspapers, magazines, and print ephemera.

A HISTORY OF THE CUBAN REV.

BY AVIVA CHOMSKY



DESCRIPTION

“*A History of the Cuban Revolution* presents a concise socio-historical account of the Cuban Revolution of 1959, an event that continues to spark debate 50 years later. In effect, the text:

- Balances a comprehensive overview of the political and economic events of the revolution with a look at the revolution’s social impact
- Provides a lively, on-the-ground look at the lives of ordinary people
- Features both U.S. and Cuban perspectives to provide a complete and well-rounded look at the revolution and its repercussions
- Encourages students to understand history through the viewpoint of individuals living it.”

Aviva Chomsky is Professor of History and Coordinator of Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies, Salem State College.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- To read more from the publisher: [Wiley](#)

A MANGO IN THE HAND

BY ANTONIO SACRE / ILLUSTRATED BY SEBASTIÁ SERRA



DESCRIPTION

“Ay, niño, mejor un mango en la mano que cien en el árbol. Better one mango in the hand than a hundred in the tree.”

Cuban-American author Antonio Sacre uses this and other proverbs to explain how Francisco went to pick mangoes from the tree in the park and returned with no shirt, no hat, and no mangos. Ultimately, Francisco’s adventure ends in (spoiler alert) a family gathering where mangoes are eaten by all.

A Mango in the Hand tells Francisco’s story in English with Spanish interspersed, a dialect that is common in many American households today.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Visit the [author’s website](#).
- Watch the author perform [A Mango in the Hand](#).
- YouTube Channel: [Antonio Sacre](#).
- For ideas about other excellent books, visit the [Vamos a Leer](#) blog.

BARQUITOS DE PAPEL

BY ALMA FLOR ADA / ILLUSTRATED BY PABLO TORRECILLA



DESCRIPTION

This item is an illustrated, hardcover book written entirely in Spanish by the award-winning, Cuban-American author Alma Flor Ada. It is currently out of print.

Barquitos de papel is one book in a five part, autobiographical series called “Cuentos con Alma.” According to Ada’s website, each book in the series is based on a particular event of the author’s childhood in Cuba. Each book is written in “delicate poetic prose,” and illustrated in watercolor by Pablo Torrecilla.

Barquitos de papel uses the experience of sailing folded paper boats after a rainstorm to present a window into the relationship between father and daughter.

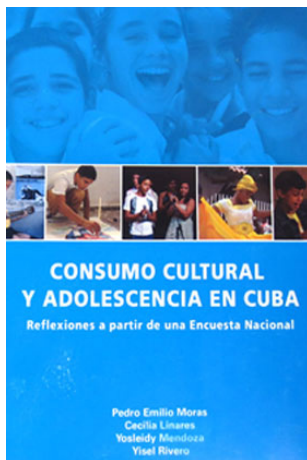
Ada describes, “My father, a surveyor and professor of mathematics, was also very gifted with his hands and he found ways to teach in surprising ways. There was much more to rainy days than making paper boats, although I have chosen them as the center of this vignette which speaks above all the love of a father for his young daughter. Paper boats have remained to this day a wonderful symbol for me.”

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Educational materials are available on the [author's website](#).
- See most of the book digitized through the publisher's website, [Del Sol Books](#).
- Learn how to make paper boats at the [University of Texas' website](#).
- For other excellent books, visit the [Vamos a Leer](#) blog.

CONSUMO CULTURAL

BY THE CUBAN INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL RESEARCH



DESCRIPTION

This is a small blue booklet that documents a study on Cuban adolescent “cultural consumption,” published in Spanish.

In 2011, the Cuban Institute for Cultural Research collaborated with UNICEF to publish this booklet based on the Second National Survey on Cultural Consumption Practices, which was conducted between 2008 and 2009.

The study sought to identify cultural trends among the Cuban adolescent population and compare those results to adult respondents. Reading, watching television, watching movies, listening to the radio, attending extracurricular classes, and other lifestyle patterns are all analyzed. Some interesting findings include:

- 80% of 12-14 year olds indicated that they like to read. The majority of respondents favored adventure books.
- Only 20% of 12-14 year olds go to the movies, though a higher percentage indicated that they would like to go if they could.
- Nearly 85% of 15-18 year olds prefer reggaetón over other genres of music.

One thing to note, regarding the reggaetón finding, is that Cuba’s official youth newspaper Juventud Rebelde has, for years now, taken a moral stance against the genre. This perhaps

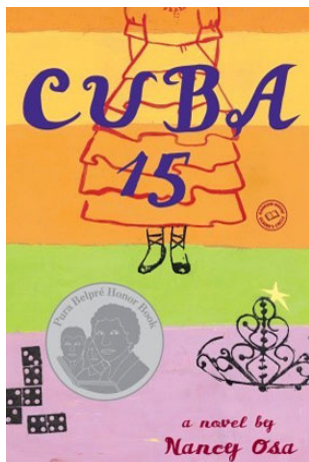
exposes a disconnect between the State's prescribed cultural values, and the actual activities of everyday Cubans.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [Tribuna de la Habana](#)
- [Duke University Press: Reggaetón](#)
- [Cubnet.org](#)
- Florida International University: [The Cuban Research Institute.](#)

CUBA 15

BY NANCY OSA



DESCRIPTION

This item is a paperback, young adult novel by Nancy Osa.

“Violet Paz can’t speak Spanish or dance the mambo, but her Cuban grandmother insists on throwing her a quinceañera—a traditional Cuban fifteenth year celebration. The Paz family discover[s] what’s so funny about themselves as they journey with Violet through a fifteenth year that neither they nor the reader will ever forget.”

Nancy Osa received the Nineteenth Delacorte Press Prize for a First Young Adult Novel and the ALA Pura Belpré Honor Book award.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Educational materials are available on the [author’s website](#).
- To engage in authentic discussions about Latin American books, culture, and social justice, visit the Latin American & Iberian Institute’s [Vamos a Leer](#) blog.

CUBA LIBRE'S PASSPORT TO CUBAN CUISINE



DESCRIPTION

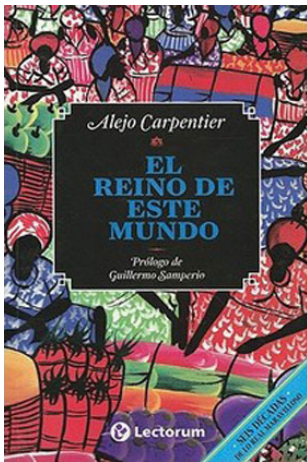
This is a small paperback menu of recipes from Philadelphia's "Cuba Libre" restaurant.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Visit the [restaurant's website](#)
- For a history of food in Cuba, visit [Food by Country: Cuba](#)
- For a cursory overview of Cuban cuisine writ large, specific recipes, cultural influences, and cooking terminology, visit [Nina's Gourmet Cuban Recipes](#).

EL REINO DE ESTE MUNDO

BY ALEJO CARPENTIER



DESCRIPTION

This item is a new, paperback edition of Alejo Carpentier’s real maravilloso classic, *El reino de este mundo*.

Alejo Carpentier is a renowned Cuban writer who travelled to Haiti shortly before writing *El reino de este mundo*, which recounts the Haitian slave insurrections and the rise of King Henri Christophe. In addition to providing some insight into the dialectic of revolution, readers will experience Carpentier’s magical realism—a method that is common among the literary masterpieces of Latin America. The book in the culture box has no internal translations and would be best understood by intermediate to proficient Spanish readers. For assistance with the historical background necessary to understand the book, visit the resources below.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Excellent page-by-page (pagination may be somewhat different) explanations of historical references are available, along with historical context, at the [website of Dr. Stuart D. Willis of Michigan State University](#).
- Teaching guides for Carpentier are available at the [Digital Library of the Caribbean](#).

ENCOUNTER

BY JANE YOLEN / ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID SHANNON



DESCRIPTION

From the publisher:

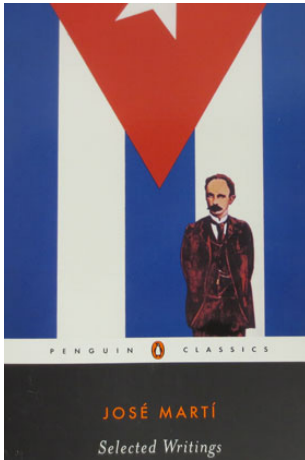
When Christopher Columbus landed on the island of San Salvador in 1492, what he discovered were the Taíno Indians. Told from a young Taíno boy's point of view, this is a story of how the boy tried to warn his people against welcoming the strangers, who seemed more interested in golden ornaments than friendship. Years later, the boy, now an old man, looks back at the destruction of his people and their culture by the colonizers.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [El Museo: Permanent Collection: Taíno](#)

JOSE MARTÍ: SELECTED WRITINGS

BY JOSE MARTÍ



DESCRIPTION

This is a paperback volume of selected writings by “the most renowned political and literary figure in the history of Cuba.” José Martí is a legendary figure in Cuba and across Latin America. Martí represents “an idealized fusion of politics and poetry.” This book is a compilation of essays and poems recorded during Martí’s exile from Cuba.

From the Afterword by editor Esther Allen:

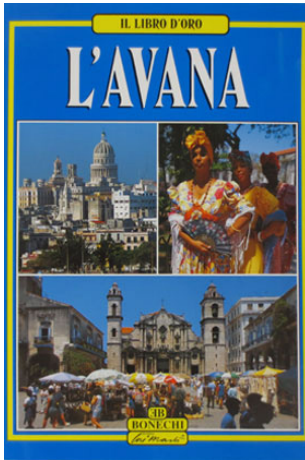
“José Martí lived in New York City for fifteen years. He didn’t merely occupy space there; he came to grips with the city and the nation around it, plunged into the fray of its day-to-day doings, and wrote thousands of dense, impassioned pages about what he saw, heard, read, felt, and experienced...In choosing the passages from Martí’s vast oeuvre that have been included here, I had three primary objectives: to provide an overview of Martí’s life, and of the wide spectrum of his work, from poetry to journalism to political writing; to give as complete a picture as possible of his complex views on the United States and its relationship to Latin America; and to translate into English in its entirety, for the first time, his dreamlike final masterpiece, the War Diaries.”

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Visit the Library of Congress’ [biographical blurb on Martí.](#)

L'AVANA

IN ITALY



DESCRIPTION

L'Avana is a travel book, printed by an Italian publisher, written in Italian.

L'Avana features beautiful pictures of Cuba's capital city—including shots of La Plaza de Armas, el Palacio del Segundo Cabo, el Museo de la Ciudad, and other tourist attractions. Visitors to Havana can apparently run the gamut, from exploring ornate cathedrals dating back to the mid-sixteenth century to visiting the office that was used by Ernesto “Che” Guevara when he served as President of Cuba's National Bank.

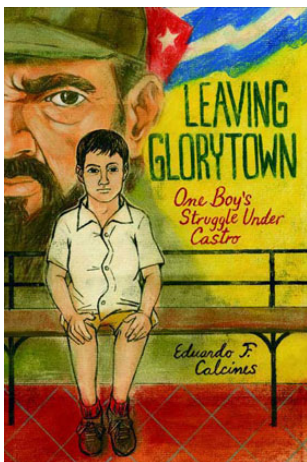
This book's place in the culture box can best be understood in the context of a Cuban refocus on tourism as a method of generating hard currency. As experts on Cuba have noted, “The Cuban government has made investment in tourism a cornerstone of its economic recovery plan. Hotels, many of them run by joint ventures with Spanish, Italian, Canadian, Mexican, or other foreign capital, are being renovated, and tourists from Canada, Latin America, and Europe are provided with First World luxuries that Cubans have long lived without. Tourism has come to rival sugar as Cuba's primary source of income.”

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Visit the publisher's website: [Casa Editrice Bonechi](#).
- Ethicaltraveler.org: [Cuban Government Evolves along with Tourism Spike](#).
- US State Department: [Travel to Cuba](#).
- NPR: [U.S. Travel to Cuba Grows as Restrictions Are Eased](#).
- [Cubatravel.cu](#).

LEAVING GLORYTOWN

BY EDUARDO F. CALCINES



DESCRIPTION

This is a hardcover, young adult novel in English by Eduardo F. Calcines.

In the words of author Eduardo F. Calcines, “I was a child of Communism. This means I was raised in two worlds—one a world of ideals, the other the real world. The world of ideals was full of Fidel Castro’s lying propaganda and empty promises of a better tomorrow. The real world was even worse: a world of oppression, hunger, fear, poverty, and violence...”

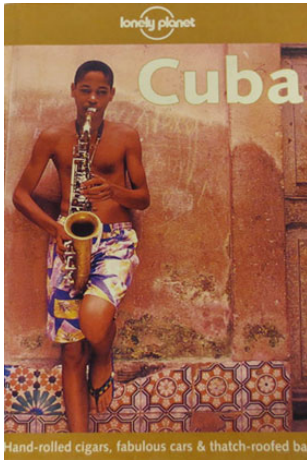
Leaving Glorytown is Calcines’s memoir, the humorous and heartwarming story of a family’s ten-year struggle to escape the reforms of the Fidel Castro regime. When young Eduardo’s family applied for an exit visa, Eduardo was ridiculed by classmates for being a traitor to the revolution. Worse yet, Eduardo’s father was sent to a work camp as punishment for daring to leave. This book presents a critical perspective on Castro’s Cuba.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Visit the [author’s website](#).
- Human Rights Watch: [Cuba](#).
- Amnesty International Report: [Human Rights in Republic of Cuba](#).
- This book is being reviewed and supplemented at the Latin American Iberian Institute’s [Vamos A Leer](#) blog.
- Leaving Glorytown is on [Facebook](#).

LONELY PLANET GUIDE TO CUBA

LONELY PLANET



DESCRIPTION

This is Lonely Planet's 2000 edition travel guide for Cuba.

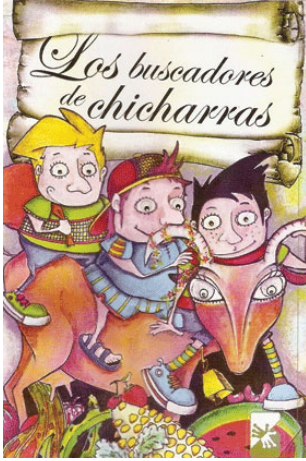
“For half a century Cuba has been infamous for its politics, dominated by the increasingly wrinkled visage of Fidel Castro, who only has to cough for the world media to go on red alert. But the polemics hide deeper secrets. Most visitors are surprised to arrive in Havana and find, not some grey communist dystopia, but a wildly exuberant place where the taxi drivers quote Hemingway and even hardened cynics are ensnared by the intrigue and romance.”

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Visit the [publisher's website](#).

LOS BUSCADORES DE CHICHARRAS

BY PEDRO FONTE GONZÁLEZ



DESCRIPTION

This is a short, paperback book by Pedro Fonte González. The book includes a recipe section at the end.

Los buscadores de chicharras completes the author's "Tales of Muna" trilogy. The book follows its child protagonists as they explore themes of the Afro-Cuban religions Yoruba and Palo Monte. Recipes of delicious foods are incorporated into the story. This book has no internal translations and would be best understood by proficient Spanish readers.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba \(UNEAC\)](#)

MORNING GIRL

BY MICHAEL DORRIS



DESCRIPTION

This item is the young adult book *Morning Girl* written by Michael Dorris.

From the publisher: “A peaceful, tropical world is the setting for *Morning Girl*, a simple yet rich glimpse into the lives of a young sister and brother. *Morning Girl* and *Star Boy* grapple with timeless, universal issues such as experiencing simultaneous anger and love toward family members and the quest to discover the true self. As all siblings do, these children respond to, play off of, and learn from each other. Precisely where *Morning Girl* and *Star Boy* are growing up is not revealed, but it’s clearly a place where the residents have no modern amenities. Living in harmony with nature is a necessary priority here, and--given the descriptive names of the characters--a Native Indian culture seems likely. But not until the epilogue do readers discover that the story takes place in 1492. Suddenly we realize that the strange-looking visitors *Morning Girl* welcomes to shore are not as harmless as they may appear. The excerpt from Christopher Columbus’s journal provides an ominous footnote: these gentle people, who seem so very much like us, will not be permitted their idyllic existence much longer.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [El Museo: Permanent Collection: Taíno](#)
- [Morning Girl on Shelfari](#)

MY HAVANA

BY ROSEMARY WELLS



DESCRIPTION

This item is an illustrated, young adult novel written by Rosemary Wells.

My Havana is a fictionalized, young adult novel, written in English, based on the childhood memories of an illustrator who has lived in pre and post-Castro Cuba and has experienced the life of an immigrant in both Madrid and New York City.

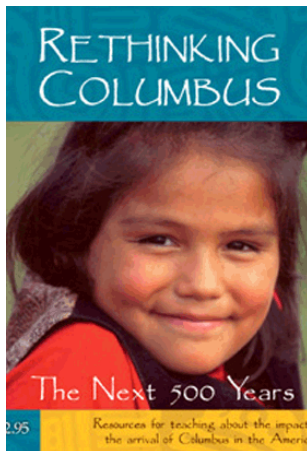
According to Booklist, “In this fictionalized, first-person account, Wells teams up with architect [Secundino] Fernandez in a portrait of a child’s life under Castro’s Cuba, Franco’s Spain, and Eisenhower’s America. Small and observant, “Dino” loves to draw his colorful Havana surroundings. At age six, he visits his grandparents in Madrid, and his shock over his new surroundings changes his drawing style as he develops his unique visual perspective. A highly anticipated homecoming in Cuba is short-lived, though; after threats from Che Guevara, Dino’s family flees to “terribly black and gray” New York City. Eventually, Dino is able to draw on old memories as well as the thrill of new friends, a new language, and fresh visual inspiration to help him assimilate and grow up to become a respected and accomplished architect. Full-color and black-and-white illustrations throughout add to the strong atmospheric language to make for a literary piece that will be understandable to anyone who’s ever left one place and made a new life in another.”

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- To view the portfolio of illustrator Peter Ferguson, visit www.foundfolios.com.
- ***My Havana Teachers' Guide*** from Candlewick Press
- For other excellent books, visit the [Vamos a Leer](#) blog.

RETHINKING COLUMBUS

BY RETHINKING SCHOOLS



DESCRIPTION

This item is the teacher resource guide *Rethinking Columbus* edited by Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson, and produced by Rethinking Schools.

From the publisher:

Why rethink Christopher Columbus? Because the Columbus myth is a foundation of children's beliefs about society. Columbus is often a child's first lesson about encounters between different cultures and races. The murky legend of a brave adventurer tells children whose version of history to accept, and whose to ignore. It says nothing about the brutality of the European invasion of North America.

We need to listen to a wider range of voices. We need to hear from those whose lands and rights were taken away by those who "discovered" them. Their stories, too often suppressed, tell of 500 years of courageous struggle, and the lasting wisdom of native peoples. Understanding what really happened to them in 1492 is key to understanding why people suffer the same injustices today.

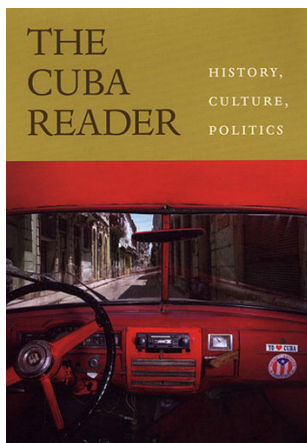
More than 80 essays, poems, interviews, historical vignettes, and lesson plans reevaluate the myth of Columbus and issues of indigenous rights. *Rethinking Columbus* is packed with useful teaching ideas for kindergarten through college.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Rethinking Schools
- History Channel: Columbus Reaches the New World

THE CUBA READER

BY AVIVA CHOMSKY, BARRY CAR, PAMELA MARIA SMORKALOFF



DESCRIPTION

This item is a dense compilation of essays titled *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics* by Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff. It was published in 2004.

“Cuba is often perceived in starkly black and white terms – either as the site of one of Latin America’s most successful revolutions or as the repressive regime that is the world’s last bastion of communism. The Cuba Reader multiplies perspectives on the nation many times over, presenting more than one hundred selections about Cuba’s history, culture, and politics.”

The Cuba Reader combines songs, paintings, photographs, poems, short stories, speeches, cartoons, government reports and proclamations, and pieces by historians, journalists, and others. Most of these are by Cubans, and many appear for the first time in English. The writings and speeches of José Martí, Fernando Ortiz, Fidel Castro, Alejo Carpentier, Che Guevara, and Reinaldo Arenas appear alongside the testimonies of slaves, prostitutes, doctors, travelers, and activists. Some selections examine health, education, Catholicism, and santería; others celebrate Cuba’s vibrant dance, music, film, and literary cultures. The pieces are grouped into chronological sections. Each section and individual selection is preceded by a brief introduction by the editors.

THE FIREFLY LETTERS

BY MARGARITA ENGLE



DESCRIPTION

This is a hardcover, young adult novel-in-verse by award-winning poet Margarita Engle.

“The freedom to roam is something that women and girls in Cuba do not have. Yet when Frederika Bremer visits from Sweden in 1851 to learn about the people of this magical island, she is accompanied by Cecilia, a young slave who longs for her lost home in Africa. Soon Elena, the wealthy daughter of the house, sneaks out to join them. As the three women explore the lush countryside, they form a bond that breaks the barriers of language and culture.”

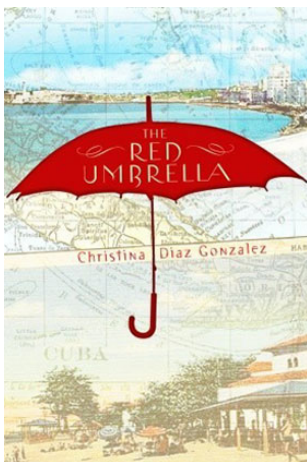
The Firefly Letters has received the Pura Belpré Honor, the Américas Award, and several other honors. Margarita Engle is a renowned Cuban-American author who uses novel in verse as an exploration, “a dreamlike blend of imagination and reality.”

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Peruse other great books by Margarita Engle at the [author’s website](#).
- Learn about the women’s movement in Cuba, and download teaching materials at [US Women & Cuba Collaboration](#).
- For other excellent books, visit the [Vamos a Leer](#) blog.

THE RED UMBRELLA

BY CHRISTINA DIAZ GONZALEZ



DESCRIPTION

This is a paperback young adult novel, the first by Cuban-American writer Christina Diaz Gonzalez.

“In 1961, two years after the Communist revolution, Lucía Álvarez still leads a carefree life, dreaming of parties and her first crush. But when the soldiers come to her sleepy Cuban town, everything begins to change. Freedoms are stripped away. Neighbors disappear. Her friends feel like strangers. And her family is being watched.

As the revolution’s impact becomes more oppressive, Lucía’s parents make the heart-wrenching decision to send her and her little brother to the United States—on their own. . .

Based on the real events of Operation Pedro Pan, where over 14,000 Cuban children were sent to the U.S. in the two-year period between 1960-1962, this novel depicts the pain of losing one’s homeland and showcases the generosity of the American spirit.”

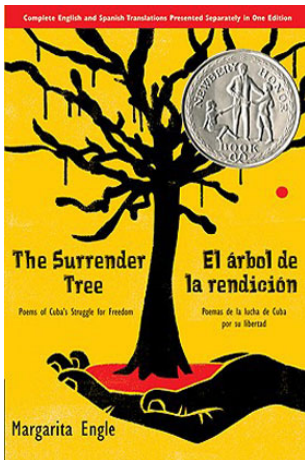
SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Christina Diaz Gonzalez has created a comprehensive [discussion guide](#) (PDF) for educators who would like to use *The Red Umbrella* in the classroom.
- Visit the [author’s website](#).

- Check out the **official website** of the Operation Pedro Pan Group.
- NPR: **Children of Cuba Remember Their Flight to America**.
- Human Rights Watch: **Cuba**.
- Amnesty International Report: **Human Rights in Republic of Cuba**.
- For an in-depth discussion of The Red Umbrella to supplement the reading, visit the **Vamos a Leer** blog.

THE SURRENDER TREE

BY MARGARITA ENGLE



DESCRIPTION

This item is an award winning, young adult novel in verse by the poet Margarita Engle.

As Kirkus Reviews has noted, “Tales of political dissent can prove, at times, to be challenging reads for youngsters, but this fictionalized version of the Cuban struggle for independence from Spain may act as an entry to the form. “

The Surrender Tree weaves verse narrative with historical events to paint a portrait of Cuban people during the wars for independence. Its Cuban-American author, Margarita Engle, is the winner of the first Newbery Honor ever awarded to a Latino.

The story revolves primarily around Rosa, a nurse who turns hidden caves into hospitals, seeking to heal the wounded and sick.

Each poem is translated in English and Spanish.

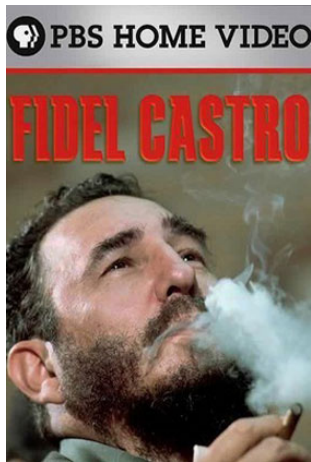
SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- For an in-depth discussion of *The Surrender Tree*, and a list of additional resources including lesson plans and activities to supplement the reading, visit the [Vamos a Leer](#) blog.

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE:

FIDEL CASTRO

PRODUCED BY ADRIANA BOSCH



DESCRIPTION

This item is a 60-minute PBS documentary which biographically considers Fidel Castro. It was produced by Adriana Bosch in 2005. It is in English with Spanish subtitles.

PBS summarizes the documentary as follows: In the United States, Latin America, Europe, and in far corners of the globe, people from all walks of life either despise Fidel Castro as a ruthless dictator or lionize him as a champion of social justice. Nearly five decades after he assumed power, he remains a living legend, a touchstone for revolutionaries the world over, and a symbol of resistance to American dominance.

The documentary “*Fidel Castro* offers insights into topics in American history including U.S. involvement in the Caribbean and Latin America, the Cold War, Communism, presidential politics, international diplomacy, nuclear war and the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Bay of Pigs, Cuban exiles and the Cuban American community, refugee policy, trade embargoes, the nature of leadership, and more.”

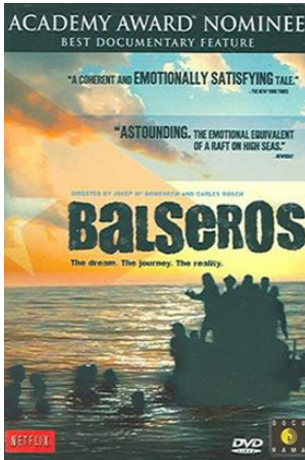
Furthermore, PBS has developed a set of suggestions for active learning for teachers who intend to use the film in their classrooms.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- To see the film’s accompanying teacher guide, visit PBS’ [Fidel Castro: Teacher’s Guide:: Suggestions for Active Learning.](#)
- For additional visual content, see BBC New’s [Fidel Castro: A Life in Pictures.](#)
- To learn more about the Cuban revolution from a teaching perspective, visit The New York Time’s Scholastic article [1959: The Cuban Revolution.](#)The Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC) has an extensive collection of transcriptions of Castro’s speeches: [Castro Speech Data Base.](#)
- For more on Fidel Castro’s life, visit the [The Biography Channel.](#)
- To read Fidel Castro’s speech in a different fashion, review his Twitter postings:Fidel Castro on Twitter or read more about Castro on Twitter through this article from the Huffington Post: [Fidel Castro Discovers Brevity.](#)
- Lastly, see a collection of news articles related to Fidel Castro through the New York Times’ database of [Fidel Castro articles.](#)

BALSEROS

BY CARLES BOSCH AND JOSEP M. DOMÉNECH



DESCRIPTION

This item is an Oscar-nominated DVD documentary by Carles Bosch and Joseph Maria Domenech.

In August of 1994, President Fidel Castro told citizens that they could leave Cuba if they so chose. Over the objection of U.S. officials, thousands of Cubans piled into homemade rafts and set sail for Miami. Who were these refugees who risked their lives in this dangerous sea exodus?

Rafael Cano was a man in search of a house, a car, and a good woman. Juan Carlos wanted only to work, with “no vacations.” Oscar del Valle wanted to make money to send back to his family in Cuba. Meanwhile, his wife would tell his daughter that “Daddy went shopping,” and other little lies.

Guillermo was convinced that he had been robbed of 5 years of his daughter’s childhood. She lived in Miami, with her mother, while Guillermo had been fruitlessly waiting for a visa to join his family in the United States. “We’ll be together in 4 months,” he said hopefully. “4, or 5, or 10... Daddy’s going to the U.S.”

As these and other refugees pushed their precarious vessels off shore, family and friends sang to The Virgin of the Sea: “Row, row, row... Row, row, row... The Virgin will accompany you.”

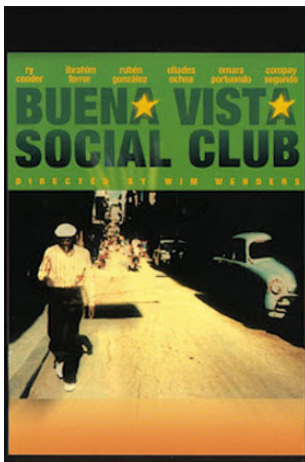
The filmmakers follow the refugees for the next seven years, documenting the dreams and realities of the immigrant saga in the United States.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- New York Times: [Review of Balsaeros.](#)
- University of Miami: [“The Cuban Rafter Phenomenon: A Unique Sea Exodus,” a virtual exhibit.](#)

BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB

PRODUCED BY RY COODER, NICK GOLD, AND THE JERRY BOYS



DESCRIPTION

The *Buena Vista Social Club* explores the recently re-discovered talents of Cuba's foremost folk musicians. The album, upon which the DVD is based, sold millions of copies and earned a Grammy Award.

As American musician Ry Cooder describes, "The players and singers of the 'son de Cuba' have nurtured this very refined and funky music in an atmosphere sealed off from the fall out of a hyper-organised and noisy world. In the time of about a hundred and fifty years, they have developed a beautiful ensemble concept that works like greased lightning. . . Music is a treasure hunt. You dig and dig and sometimes you find something. In Cuba the music flows like a river. It takes care of you and rebuilds you from the inside out."

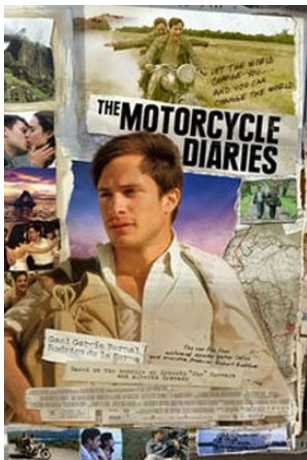
The *Buena Vista Social Club* was the elegant center of Cuban nightlife prior to the revolution. The irony is that the club "at the mystical heart" of this Wim Wenders documentary no longer exists. "The revolution of 1959 stands as a border in time." By the late 1960s, "the distinctness of the myriad sub-genres of Cuban tropical music began to blur, diluting into the generic 'salsa' that we have today." This film is about re-establishing that link. To read more about Cuban son, the history of the club, and the making of the DVD, visit some of the resources below.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- **PBS: The Buena Vista Social Club**
- Buena Vista Social Club: **Official Website**
- **Director's website**
- **Compilation of information and videos on Cuban son.**

THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES

DIRECTED BY WALTER SALLES



DESCRIPTION

According to Netflix, “*The Motorcycle Diaries*, which world-premiered to standing ovation at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, follows an inspiring journey of self-discovery and traces the youthful origins of a revolutionary heart. The rich and complex human and social topography of the Latin American continent is unveiled in all its glory as two friends experience life at its fullest.”

Indeed, the film traces the early adventures of two Argentineans on the comically unreliable motorcycle, “La Poderosa.” One of the protagonists is the young “Che” Guevara, then medical student, later subcomandante of the Cuban Revolution, legend and martyr among anti-imperialists of Latin America and across the globe.

Long after these events, Guevara’s companion, Granado, described his journey with Che:

“The two of us, as informed as we were, realized that as much as we knew about what was going on in Europe, as much as we knew about the civilizations of Crete, Greece, and Rome, we didn’t know a thing about Latin America. We didn’t know what the Mapuches were like; didn’t know where Machu Picchu was; so those were the things that would whet our appetite to get to know the world.”

After the events dramatized in the film, Granado would go on to practice medicine. Che would

travel to Guatemala to witness the agrarian reforms of then President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán. Che was likely radicalized by a C.I.A.-backed coup that unseated the democratically elected Árbenz. In the wake of the coup, as the young doctor's philosophy turned to armed revolution, Che traveled to Mexico City where he met the exiled Fidel Castro Ruz. The rest is history.

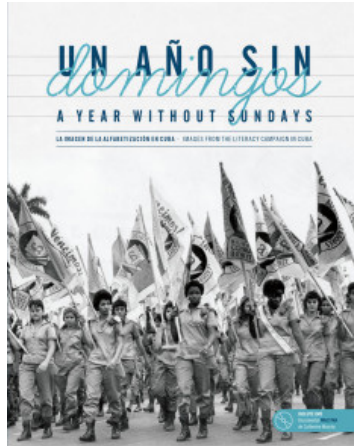
The magnificence of *The Motorcycle Diaries* is that it can stand on its own as a thrilling adventure shared among friends. However, the film also foreshadows the revolutionary awakening of one of Latin America's monumental figures. As Granado describes, "[Che's] farewell to the lepers [portrayed in the film] seemed to say: 'I am leaving this common medicine to become a doctor of souls, of the People.'"

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- Focus Features: [The Motorcycle Diaries](#).
- BBC History: [Che Guevara \(1928 – 1967\)](#).
- Marxists.org: [The Che Guevara Speech Archive](#).
- Harvard's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies: [The Legacy of Che Guevara](#).
- BBC News: ["My Best Friend Che," interview with Alberto Granado](#).

MAESTRA

DIRECTED BY CATHERINE MURPHY



DESCRIPTION

Directed by Catherine Murphy in collaboration with numerous individuals from Cuba, this film documents the Cuban literacy campaign of 1961. As the film's materials state: "Cuba, 1961: 250,000 volunteers taught 700,000 people to read and write in one year. 100,000 of the teachers were under 18 years old. Over half were women. MAESTRA explores this story through the personal testimonies of the young women who went out to teach literacy in rural communities across the island - and found themselves deeply transformed in the process."

The documentary is accompanied by a book, *A Year Without Sundays / Un año sin domingos*.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- [The official website for MAESTRA: The Film.](#)

MAS INFORMACION

MORE INFORMATION

CURRENCY

RELIGION

FLAG

SLAVERY

FOOD

TOURISM

GEOGRAPHY

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

MIGRATION

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

LANGUAGE

MUSIC

NARRATIVES

CURRENCY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Cuban government maintains two official currencies: the Cuban peso (CUP, also known as moneda nacional) and the peso convertible (CUC). While Cuban pesos remain the primary local currency for purchasing everyday items, convertibles, which are tied to the American dollar, are used to purchase luxury items and to grease the wheels of tourism in Cuba today. Tourists may see this system play out in restaurants. Some Cuban restaurants and other stories will have two menus—one in pesos, and one in convertibles. According to Lonely Planet (in the culture box), tourists who pay in convertibles have access to different food than locals who order from the peso menu.

One effect of this dual currency system is that Cubans who work outside of the tourism industry, including doctors and other professionals, have had far less access to convertibles, which ultimately decreases their standard of living. The State's official position is that the dual currency system is unfortunate but economically necessary, at least for now.

REFERENCES

- [Banco Central de Cuba \(Spanish\)](#)
- [Cuba Currency Guide](#)
- [Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy: The Cuban Dual Monetary System](#)

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Artifact: Currency

FLAG

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Cuban flag is marked by three bands of blue running horizontally that are interrupted by a red triangle based on the hoist side of the flag. The triangle acts as a backdrop for a white, five pointed star.

As is the case with many flags, the Cuban flag is a symbol and source of nationalism. It links viewers to the independence movement that gave rise to the flag's design. The blue bands refer to the geographic divisions of the island (east, west, and central). The alternating white bands symbolize the purity of independence. The sides of the equilateral triangle symbolize the principles of equality, fraternity and liberty. The white star, adapted from the star of Texas, lights the way to freedom; while the red color of the triangle symbolizes the bloodshed necessary to get there.

National symbols can be alternatively viewed as patriotic, inspirational marks of a nation's unity or artificial and stifling symbols of homogeneity. The case is no different in Cuba, where idealized "independence," symbolized by the flag, disguises a more nuanced political history that has been shaped by the dissent and repression of people with differing points of view, including anarchists, conservatives, feminists and Castro's bearded revolutionaries who elected to keep the flag's design after they seized power in 1959.

REFERENCES

- [Surviving \(on\) the Soup of Signs: Postmodernism, Politics, and Culture in Cuba](#)
- [Freedom Teaching: Anarchism and Education in Early Republican Cuba, 1898-1925](#)

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Artifact: Flag

FOOD

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cuban cuisine is shaped by indigenous, African and European influence. Spanish colonists brought their favorite foods from Spain, such as wheat flour buñuelos (fried balls of dough). In Cuba, the buñuelo evolved from wheat to cassava flour which is made from local yuca. When forcibly brought to the island, African slaves brought with them their own cuisine, including a crispy fried plantain, called a Tostone. In addition to these influences, a period of Chinese labor-driven migration gave rise to Chinese variations of the already popular Cuban pork and rice dishes.

Cuban cooking primarily relies on fresh staples, such as rice, beans and pork seasoned with garlic, oregano and other spices—rather than the chili peppers which are common elsewhere in Latin America. In Cuba, most residents begin their day with buttered bread and café con leche (coffee with milk). Cubans often come home for a midday almuerzo consisting of soup, salad, and a guarapo (a fresh sugarcane drink). The evening meal is eaten late and varies from stews, soups, chicken dishes, or some combination of black beans, pork or rice. (See also Pan-ela in the culture box). Of course, snacks and soft drinks (such as Chicoticos and TuKola in the culture box) are also very popular.

Large Cuban networks have formed in the United States. Through the gateway of Miami, authentic Cuban foods are being introduced to the US market.

REFERENCES

- [Havana Central: What is Cuban Cuisine?](#)
- [Food by Country: Cuba](#)

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Artifact: Café Bustelo
- Artifact: Chicoticos
- Artifact: Panela
- Artifact: TuKola
- Book: *Cuba Libre's Passport to Cuban Cuisine*

GEOGRAPHY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Slightly smaller than the state of Pennsylvania, Cuba is located between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. The island is less than 100 miles south of Key West, Florida. Cuba boasts rolling plains, with rugged hills and mountains in the southeast and a tropical climate with a rainy season that lasts from May to October. Cuba is unpleasantly hot during July and August.

Cuba's most dramatic phenomena are its chronic Atlantic hurricanes. The word even originates from the name of the Cuban indigenous god of wind and rain, "Uracán." Cuba averages one hurricane every other year, and major storms have occasionally wreaked havoc in Havana. Often overlooked, geography also has military and trade implications for the development of nations. In Cuba's case, the Caribbean was strategically important to European colonizers who thought of Cuba as a gatepost, protecting the mainland gold and silver mines of Mexico and Peru. A similar rationale of geographic, naval importance was later employed to justify the US occupation of Cuba that began in 1898.

REFERENCES

- [National Geographic: Cuba](#)
- [Cuba Nature Travel: Geography \(albeit a tourist-focused site, it has useful information regarding geography and provinces\).](#)

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Book: *Lonely Planet: Cuba*
- Map: Mapa Turístico
- Photography: Album

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1959 a group of revolutionaries, led by a young Fidel Castro, seized power in Cuba. This revolution is best understood as an intellectual, philosophical and social movement that drew on a long revolutionary tradition.

Prior to Castro's triumphant march into Havana, Fulgencio Batista ruled, either directly or indirectly, for nearly three decades. Batista's Cuba was marred by political and economic turmoil. Aside from widespread corruption and graft, the State faced deep structural problems, including overdependence on a single volatile product (sugar, like the brown cane Panela in the culture box), economic and political subordination to the United States, weak democratic institutions, and sharp inequality. A class of landless workers survived on beans and sugar-water. Meanwhile, well-to-do North American tourists visited Cuba en masse, lured by brothels, casinos, luxury hotels and tropical beaches. The perception that tourism was a higher priority than improving the quality of life for struggling Cubans undoubtedly contributed to anti-Batista sentiment.

The Revolutionary regime sought to correct these problems by redistributing land, promoting voluntarism, funding literacy campaigns and tapping into extensive human resources in farming and healthcare. Despite some successes, domestic labor shortages and the US trade embargo led to Cuba's eventual reliance on the Soviet Union until the USSR collapsed in 1989. Today, Cuba remains a self-declared Communist state now headed by President Raúl Castro Ruz—who was elected to a five year term by Cuba's legislative body in 2008. Cuba's unicameral legislature is composed solely of members of Cuba's Communist Party, the only legal political party in Cuba, and critics of the one-party system are sometimes subject to arbitrary detention. Cuba has attempted to justify its repression on national security grounds—as a legitimate reaction to US interventionist policy—and Cuba thus refuses to recognize the legitimacy of international human rights observers. Meanwhile, multiple generations of anti-Castro Cubans have flocked to Miami, influencing US policy and longing to return to a Castro-free Cuba. Café Bustelo (in the culture box) is an example of a US product that is marketed as a taste of home for Miami-based Cubans.

There have been some limited economic reforms. Products like TuKola (in the culture box), a Cuban variant of Coca-Cola, are produced domestically and exported to Europe with some success. Small entrepreneurs are encouraged to buy and sell houses and the Cuban government invites farmers to lease State-owned land. The US has relaxed travel restrictions to Cuba; although the trade embargo remains intact.

REFERENCES

- Cuba: A Global Studies Handbook

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Artifact: Granma
- Artifact: Juventud Rebelde
- Artifact: TuKola
- Artifact: Café Bustelo
- Book: *A History of the Cuban Revolution*
- Book: *Album de la Revolución Cubana*
- Book: *José Martí: Selected Writings*
- Book: *The Cuba Reader*
- Book: *Leaving Glorytown*
- Book: *The Firefly Letters*
- Book: *The Surrender Tree*
- Film: *Fidel Castro*
- Film: *The Motorcycle Diaries*

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The name “Cuba” is actually derived from the indigenous name Cubanascnan. Cuba was historically inhabited by Arawak speaking peoples, including the indigenous Ciboney and the migrating Taíno Arawak, talented sailors and shipbuilders who made use of the island during their early migrations from the Yucatán to Hispaniola (Haiti). Hispaniola eventually became the regional center for the Taíno Arawak, who later sent colonists back to Eastern Cuba, forming a settling Taíno population in Cuba itself.

There is much opportunity in the classroom for debunking myths about conquest and colonization, and particularly for addressing the common myths surrounding Christopher Columbus, who was not just an ambitious seafarer. In Cuba, for instance, Spanish colonization of the island began shortly after the well-known voyage of 1492, and ultimately resulted in a feudal-type encomienda system which exploited forced Taíno labor in order to siphon the wealth of the New World off to Europe. Spanish colonization effectively wiped out the indigenous people of Cuba. The Taíno Arawak were largely killed by violence and disease and there remain no distinct indigenous communities in Cuba today. However, some Ciboney-Taíno-Arawak descended populations do still reside in rural areas, and as is the case across Latin America, indigenous elements remain interwoven in Cuban culture at large.

REFERENCES

- [UNHCR: World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Rethinking Columbus](#)
- [Journal of Economic History: Encomienda or Slavery?](#)
- [Bartolomé de Las Casas: The Devastation of the Indies](#)

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Book: *A History of the Cuban Revolution*
- Book: *The Cuba Reader*
- Book: *The Surrender Tree*

LANGUAGE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (IN CUBA)

For obvious reasons, many Cubans in tourist areas speak some English. English is also taught in primary schools across the island. However, Spanish is the official language of Cuba and is generally the only language spoken away from tourist centers. Cuban Spanish is heavily influenced by indigenous and African sources. For instance, the name “Cuba” is itself a derivative of its indigenous Taíno name, “Cubanascan.” Likewise, “Africanisms” have worked their way into common Cuban speech, including words and phrases like *asere* (“buddy”), *ecobio* (“friend”), *¿Que bola?* (“What’s up?”), and *aché* (“spirit”).

Due to Cuba’s close relationship with the Soviet Union, a generation of Cuban students learned Russian and were raised watching *muñequitos rusos* (“Russian cartoons”). Despite this influence, there has been little if any Russian impact on Cuban Spanish.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (IN THE U.S.)

According to the 2010 census, Cuban-Americans account for 4% of the “Hispanic” population in the United States, making it the third largest Hispanic group. In most Cuban-American households, the primary language is Spanish, but, as is often the case with language, terminology becomes blended and English and Spanish words are used interchangeably—particularly within dense Hispanic population centers like Miami (see particularly *A Mango in the Hand* in the culture box).

REFERENCES

- [Lonely Planet: Cuba](#)
- [Cuba: A Global Studies Handbook](#)
- [Ethnologue: Cuba](#)
- [Census.gov: The Hispanic Population, 2010](#)
- [Education Resources Information Center: Cuba-Americans in the United States](#)

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Artifact: Granma
- Artifact: Juventud Rebelde
- Book: *Album de la Revolución Cubana*
- Book: *A Mango in the Hand*
- Book: *Barquitos de papel*
- Book: *Los buscadores de chicharras*
- Book: *Reino de este mundo*
- Book: *The Surrender Tree*
- Film: *The Motorcycle Diaries*

MIGRATION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (US-CUBA)

Cubans have been visiting Florida since long before Castro took power in 1959. As Aviva Chomsky describes, “for many middle-class Cubans, a South Florida vacation was a yearly ritual; for the wealthy, it could be a daily excursion.” Thus when Castro and his guerillas marched into Havana, Cubans who opposed the Revolution saw Miami as a “first resort.” In the first two years of the Revolution, 200,000 Cubans left for the United States. Demographically, most of those who fled the island in the 1960s were cut from the ranks of doctors, professionals and other businesspeople.

In the early ‘60s, a Miami priest agreed to sign visas for Cuban children under the age of 17. Daily Pan Am flights began transporting children out of Cuba at the request of their parents—who feared Communist indoctrination (whether or not such fears were rational). This was known as Operation Pedro Pan (see *Leaving Glorytown* and *The Red Umbrella* in the culture box). Today, many of those children are now adults living in Miami and elsewhere.

In 1980 and 1994, the Cuban government told citizens that they could leave the island if they so chose. In the 1980 exodus—the so-called Mariel Boatlift—over 100,000 Cubans, many of whom were released from Cuban prisons, made the journey to South Florida. The prisoners whom were released included, among others, individuals identified as homosexuals, dissidents, artists and intellectuals, and individuals with mental or physical health problems. In 1994, thousands more again piled into homemade rafts and set sail for Miami (see the film *Balseros* in the culture box). Again, many of these people have remained in the US, forming a substantial Cuban population centered in Florida.

One important factor in considering Cuban immigration has been US anti-Communist policy. The 1962 Migration and Refugee Assistance Act and the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act have allowed unprecedented numbers of immigrants from a single nation to obtain refugee status in the United States—based primarily on policy that classified immigrants from Communist countries favorably compared to immigrants who have fled rightist state terror in El Salvador and Guatemala, for instance.

It is not possible to summarize the diverse experience of Cuban-American families in the space on this page, but the materials in the culture box will be helpful for understanding.

REFERENCES

- Federation of American Scientists - Cuban Migration to the United States: Policy and Trends

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Artifact: Café Bustelo
- Book: *90 Miles to Havana*
- Book: *A History of the Cuban Revolution*
- Book: Cuba 15
- Book: *Cuba Libre's Passport to Cuban Cuisine*
- Book: *Leaving Glorytown*
- Book: *My Havana: Memories of a Cuban Boyhood*
- Book: *The Red Umbrella*
- Film: *Balseros*

MUSIC

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cuban musical genres include, among others, the diverse sounds of son, rumba, danzón, canción, conga, mambo, Latin jazz, songa, timba, Cuban hip-hop and salsa itself. Of these, son is generally considered the most widely influential and distinctly Cuban. The sounds of Cuban son form the basis for most forms of the modern Latin American and Caribbean dance music that is played around the world today.

It is the clave (in the culture box) that blends a mix of seemingly incompatible instruments. The rhythm of the clave melds the harmonies of European horns and guitars with the percussive rhythms of the African drum (see the Conga drum in the culture box). Listeners can hear an excellent selection of Cuban son by checking out the *Buena Vista Social Club* (in the culture box).

REFERENCES

- Soncubano.com
- [Cuba: A Global Studies Handbook](#)
- [PBS.org: The Buena Vista Social Club](#)

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Book: *A History of the Cuban Revolution*
- Book: *Consumo Cultural y Adolescencia en Cuba*
- Film: *Buena Vista Social Club*
- Music: Claves
- Music: Conga drum (tumbadora)
- Music: Güiro
- Music: Maracas
- Music: *Putamayo Presents Cuba*

NARRATIVES

LITERARY AND VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS

Various books are included in the culture box in order to give students access to narratives from different perspectives. The hope is that the range of voices expressed in the books will supplement the artifacts in the culture box to help students understand that “culture” is an elusive and multidimensional concept. This approach is particularly necessary for understanding Cuba, where discussion inevitably winds up colored by pre-conceptions and, frequently, limited information. The stories in the culture box include *Barquitos de papel*, Alma Flor Ada’s beautiful story of making paper boats with her father; *Cuba 15*, Nancy Osa’s fictionalized account of a Cuban-American childhood; *The Firefly Letters*, Margarita Engle’s powerful novel in verse, invoking themes of slavery, language, and culture; *El Reino de este mundo*, the magical realism of Alejo Carpentier; *Leaving Glorytown*, an immigration saga that doubles as a human rights-based critique of Castro’s regime, and many more.

In addition to these stories, photographs of Cuba have been included to drive discussion and help students recognize their own pre-conceptions about the country and its people. Together, the books, photographs, and artifacts will encourage students to think critically about perspective and voice, leading to a nuanced exploration of Cuba that is relatively free of the pitfalls of stereotyping.

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Book: *90 Miles to Havana*
- Book: *Album de la Revolución Cubana*
- Book: *A Mango in the Hand*
- Book: *Barquitos de papel*
- Book: *Cuba 15*
- Book: *El reino de este mundo*
- Book: *Leaving Glorytown*
- Book: *Los buscadores de chicarras*
- Book: *My Havana: Memories of a Cuban Boyhood*
- Book: *The Red Umbrella*
- Book: *The Firefly Letters*
- Book: *The Surrender Tree*
- Film: *The Motorcycle Diaries*
- Photography: Photography Album

RELIGION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Religion in Cuba is a syncretic mix of formal Spanish Catholicism with a variety of African spiritual practices that followed slavery into Latin America. Santería, an example of this mixture, has become the popular religion in Cuba today.

The resilience of African religion in Cuba is somewhat remarkable. Santería literally means “the worship of Saints,” and under this name the people of Spanish colonial Cuba celebrated African deities (orisha), “hiding in plain sight.” As *Cuba: A Global Studies Handbook* describes, “In order to avoid detection and harsh punishment, African slaves and their descendants in Cuba would mimic and feign fealty to Catholic symbols and saints, when in fact they were keeping their long-repressed traditions and beliefs alive. However, after hundreds of years of simulation, few Cubans today know (or care) where Catholicism stops and santería begins.”

As a matter of speech, santería is something of a catch-all term for an array of Afro-Cuban religious traditions. Among these are Yoruba and Palo Monte, both of which are briefly explored in *Los buscadores de chicharras* (in the culture box).

REFERENCES

- [Cuba: A Global Studies Handbook](#)
- [Theatre Goodman: Santeria, the Intersection of Catholicism and African Traditional Religions](#)

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Book: *Los buscadores de chicharras*

SLAVERY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

18th century Havana was a natural harbor for the Spanish fleet and thus a central cog in the Spanish empire. It was provisioned largely by slave labor. The bulk of Cuban slaves were transported from the Bantu-speaking areas historically known as the Congo. The modern tumbadora (Conga drum in the culture box) is just one remnant of this cross-Atlantic forced migration.

By the mid-18th century, one quarter of Cuba's population was enslaved. While the sugar industry was important, Cuba's economy was far more diverse than in later eras. During this period, slave labor was diverse as well, occupying virtually every economic activity on the island. In 1791, Haitian slaves revolted and world sugar production collapsed (see *El Reino de Este Mundo* in the culture box). Cuban plantations moved in to fill the void. This event, likely more than any other, inextricably linked Cuba's future to slave-based sugar production.

In his *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*, Cuban scholar Esteban Montejo described some of the living conditions for Cuban slaves during the last decades of slavery. Many plantation slaves lived in baracoons, similar to dungeons—with mud floors and little ventilation. There, the occupants slept among swarming fleas and ticks until four-thirty each morning when bells rang Ave Maria to signal the start of a new day working in the canefields.

Montejo also speaks of diversity within the baracoons. Cuban slaves were both ethnically and religiously diverse—primarily breaking into two African religious groups, the Congolese and the Lucumi (see *The Surrender Tree* in the culture box).

All told, the institution of slavery in Cuba lasted nearly 400 years. Final abolition wasn't proclaimed until 1886.

REFERENCES

- [UN Radio: Telling the truth about African slaves in Cuba \(Spanish\)](#)
- [The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States](#)
- [The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave](#)

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Book: *The Cuba Reader*
- Book: *El reino de este mundo*
- Book: *The Surrender Tree*
- Music: Conga (tumbadora)
- Music: *Putumayo Presents Cuba*

TOURISM

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

While tourism is an industry of considerable economic importance, it can also adversely impact the environment and superficially portray culture as static and homogenous. The items in the culture box related to tourism are meant to be viewed with a critical eye as to how the country is portrayed.

In the 1990s, tourism became a principal area of economic growth in Cuba. Despite some stagnation following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, tourism in Cuba has since expanded to account for an annual \$2.3 billion in gross revenue—ten times the revenue generated by tourism in 1989, for instance. These numbers are expected to further skyrocket as relationships between the U.S. and Cuba began to ease in 2015 and onward.

The island juxtaposes Caribbean-style tourism against a socialist-egalitarian mantra. As Castro himself has put it, “Who would have thought that we, so doctrinaire, we who fought foreign investment, would one day view foreign investment as an urgent need?” Thus, as tourism flourishes, stark inequalities between wealthy tourists and relatively poor locals have led to “claims of ‘tourist apartheid,’” and the cheap commodification of culture for tourist consumption. [Source: Cuba: A Global Studies Handbook].

Tourist guides to Havana are published in various languages and shipped around the world (see *LaVana* in the culture box). Indeed, what better place for tourists than a beautiful city on a tropical island with rich and extensive colonial history. As the *Lonely Planet Guide to Cuba* (in the culture box) describes, “Most visitors are surprised to arrive in Havana and find, not some grey communist dystopia, but a wildly exuberant place where the taxi drivers quote Hemingway and even hardened cynics are ensnared by the intrigue and romance.”

REFERENCES

- [CIA Factbook](#)
- [Cuba: A Global Studies Handbook](#)
- [Latin America Working Group: End the Travel Ban on Cuba](#)

CORRESPONDING INVENTORY

- Artifact: Currency
- Book: *L'Avana*
- Book: *Lonely Planet Guide to Cuba*
- Map: Mapa Turístico

CONTENTS CHECKLIST: CUBA

Please carefully repackage the culture box and check off each item before returning the box.

REFERENCE ITEMS

- Mapa Turística (map)
- Photography album
- Currency
- Flag
- Granma Newspaper
- Juventud Rebelde Newspaper

ARTIFACTS

- Café Bustelo
- Chicoticos
- Coffee Kettle
- Collection of Saints
- Miniature Antique Car
- Miniature Coco Taxi
- Miniature Violin
- Piloncillo
- Recycled Miniature Coca-Cola Train
- Recycled Sprite Camera
- Toy Lady Bug
- Tu Kola
- Wooden Block Calendar
- Wooden Flower with Hummingbird
- Wooden map

MUSIC & INSTRUMENTS

- Claves (instrument)
- Conga Drum (instrument)
- Güiro (instrument)
- Maracas (instrument)
- Putamayo Presents Cuba (CD)
- Polo Montañéz (CD)
- Omara Portuondo (CD)

BOOKS

- 90 Miles to Havana
- Albúm de la Revolución (photocopied book)
- A History of the Cuban Revolution
- A Mango in the Hand
- Barquitos de papel
- Consumo cultural
- Cuba 15
- Cuba Libre's Passport to Cuban Cuisine
- El reino de este mundo
- Encounter
- José Martí: Selected Writings
- L'avana
- Leaving Glorytown

- ___ Loney Planet Guide to Cuba
- ___ Los buscadores de Chicharras
- ___ Morning Girl
- ___ My Havana
- ___ Rethinking Columbus
- ___ The Cuba Reader
- ___ The Firefly Letters
- ___ The Red Umbrella
- ___ The Surrender Tree

FILMS

- ___ American Experience: Fidel Castro
- ___ Balseros
- ___ Buena Vista Social Club
- ___ The Motorcycle Diaries
- ___ Maestra (DVD with book)

EVALUATION: CUBA

Name: _____

Institution: _____

City: _____

Email: _____

Grade Level: _____

Subject Area: _____

Date Borrowed: _____

How did you hear about the program?

Please describe your institution and the students with whom you work.

Please tell us about how you incorporated these materials into your classroom and the topics on which you focused.

What other materials would you suggest we add to the program?

None

More information about the region

Teaching strategies

Opportunities for classroom speakers

Grade-specific lesson plans

Subject-specific lesson plans

Library/Media resources

Funding for field trips

Please circle the statement that most closely represents your opinion of the following statements:

1. The program presented me with new information about Latin America and the Caribbean.

Strongly Disagree *Somewhat disagree* *Slightly agree* *Strongly Agree*

2. The program content helped me serve my students' needs.

Strongly Disagree *Somewhat disagree* *Slightly agree* *Strongly Agree*

3. I plan to integrate content from this program into my curriculum/career.

Strongly Disagree *Somewhat disagree* *Slightly agree* *Strongly Agree*

5. The reservation and check-out process was straightforward and easy to complete.

Strongly Disagree *Somewhat disagree* *Slightly agree* *Strongly Agree*

Would you be willing to share a testimonial that we might publish anonymously?

Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

Thank you for your time! We appreciate your feedback and will use it to improve the program.