

MUSIC OF THE REVOLUTION: CORRIDOS

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Revolutionary Mexico saw the rise of numerous hyper-patriotic ballads, called corridos. These stories-in-verse, narrating important events and activities of legendary characters in the classical quatrain form 8a 8b 8a 8b, became an important media for disseminating revolutionary themes to the masses in early twentieth century Mexico.

The corridista (singer) generally begins the song by describing the place, date, and lead character. The typical corrido then concisely and romantically details its story-in-verse, ending with a “friendly farewell.” The typical rhythm has been described as simple, polka-like or waltz-like, mocking the complex rhythms of the elite, and set to a single tune performed in major keys. The corrido is alive and well today. Revolutionary corridos remain well-known and are still performed in Mexico and in the southwestern United States. La Adelita, for instance, continues to celebrate the soldaderas of the Revolution, and retains enormous importance in the region. In *Photographing the Revolution*, the book associated with the exhibit that inspired this Educator’s Guide, John Mraz suggests that every researcher of Mexican photography has heard of a little old lady living in a distant place who insists that she is “Adelita.” These viejita-adelitas typically offer as evidence a blurry, reproduced photo of a woman standing on the platform of a train.

Recently, modern counter-culture corridos have invaded YouTube, glorifying Mexico’s most notorious smugglers, drug dealers, and cartel personalities, like Sinaloa’s infamous drug lord, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera.

In this lesson, students will read and listen to popular corridos related to the Revolution. Classrooms will use the corridos to examine how popular culture conveys historical memory as much as, or at times, more so, than print media and primary historical documents.

Note: The above description partially draws on information from Serra Fox and Osama Solie-man’s essay, available at <http://msw.arizona.edu/content/corridos>. The descriptions below draw heavily on the thoughtful blog entry at Poemas del Río Wang, available at <http://riowang.blogspot.com/2008/07/mexican-corrido.html>.

CORRIDO EXAMPLES: LA RIELERA, ADELITA, AND EL MAYOR DE LOS DORADOS

La Rielera: The “railwaywoman” worked the rails of central Mexico connecting Mexico City to the north. As Mexico factionalized in the later phases of the Revolution, the Carrancistas fought the Villistas, with both sides making extensive use of Mexico’s rail system to move troops and supplies. The song has been performed by numerous artists, including Linda Rondstadt.

AUDIO FILE: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_Sd-eLpbyA

La Adelita: The beautiful and courageous Adelita, inspired and continues to inspire revolutionary sentiment in Mexico. This soldadera loved her sergeant and fought bravely at his side.

AUDIO FILE: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwpJEcXurLI>

El Mayor de los Dorados: The Dorados, Villa’s elite horsemasters, were celebrated and/or feared throughout Mexico. The corridista sings of a loyal Dorado losing his horse in the service of Villa’s cause.

AUDIO FILE: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Wh8VOeM-DE>

MATERIALS

Note: The following handouts are adapted respectively from the website Poems de Rio Wang, the Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies’ “Corridos sin Fronteras: A New World Ballad Tradition,” the latter of which can be found in its entirety online at <http://corridos.org/>, and the Kennedy Center ArtsEdge teaching resources related to corridos.

- ☞ Copy of handout of English and Spanish versions of the corridos La Rielera (the railway woman), La Adelita, and/or El Mayor de los Dorados.
- ☞ Copy of handout about distinguishing features of corridos
- ☞ Internet access
- ☞ Speakers
- ☞ Computer, LCD projector, and/or Smartboard to project short films and audio files for class

PROCEDURE

Note: The following process guidelines are adapted from the Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies’ “Corridos sin Fronteras: A New World Ballad Tradition.”

1. Explain to students that you are going to discuss the Mexican Revolution by listening to and analyzing a corrido from the time period.
2. Explain to students that corridos represented (and still do) a part of Mexican “pop culture.” To assess students’ prior knowledge, divide the students into small groups and ask them to brainstorm definitions of pop culture and examples of current pop culture. As they brain-

storm, write “pop culture” on a large common space (Promethean board, butcher block paper, etc.).

3. Reconvene the class and spend several minutes hearing from each group. As they provide their definitions, write their suggestions on the common space. See if you can identify common themes or words. One definition that may emerge is that pop culture is “common artistic practices based on popular taste.”
4. As a whole class, return to the topic of corridos. Distribute the handout of the English and Spanish version of the selected corrido. Once students have their individual copies, play the audio version and encourage the students to follow along by reading their individual copies of the corrido’s lyrics.
5. After the music file is complete, divide the class again into small groups and encourage them to work together to consider the following questions: What can the corrido tell us about the Mexican Revolution?” What stories do they hear in the corrido? Whose stories are they -- who are the protagonists? What has happened to them? Who do you think they’re singing to? Why would these sung stories become a part of popular culture? Do you think they were important only to the people singing? Or did they address a broader need to speak out in the country?
6. Reconvene the whole class again, ask one member from each group to share their responses, and write the answers on the board beside the other keywords for corrido.
7. Now that the group has reviewed the corrido(s) and learned about how pop culture, particularly music, can inform our understanding of current events, tell them that they will each now become corridistas (composers of corridos).
8. As time permits, allow students the opportunity to research a current event of their choice. According to the writing processes for your particular classroom, have each student write their own version of a corrido concerning the Mexican Revolution. They may choose to write it about a particular figure (Villa or Zapata, for instance) or about the plight of the workers, women, etc. These stories do not need to be shared with the whole class, though may be interesting and engaging if time allows to do so.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Kennedy Center ArtsEdge resources on “Corridos About the Mexican Revolution” (found at http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/lessons/grade-9-12/Corridos_About_the_Mexican_Revolution.aspx#Overview) offer expansive and substantial suggestions for how to discuss corridos in the classroom.

For an interactive introduction to corridos, see the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, “Corridos Sin Fronteras,” at <http://www.corridos.org/Default.asp?Language=E>.

Additional corridos can be heard here:

- YouTube video of corrido de Emiliano Zapata: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQLfLeb-zgEc>
- Lyrics and audio for corridos sobre Emiliano Zapata y los Zapatistas: <http://www.bibliotecas.tv/zapata/corridos/>
- YouTube video of corrido of Pancho Villa: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRlxQW4y7Bs>

CORRIDO: LA RIELERA

I'm a railwaywoman and I love Juan
he's my life and I'm his delight;
when they say the train is leaving,
adiós, my railwaywoman, your Juan is leaving.

When the engine-driver says
that the train is leaving for San Juan,
I already bring his basket
with which he's going to refine.

I have a pair of pistols
with an ivory head
to defend myself, if necessary,
against those of the railway.

I have a pair of pistols
with a precise aiming
with one shot for my lover
and another for my enemy.

Adiós, boys of Lerdo,
of Gómez and of Torreón
the maintainers are already leaving
the turn is over forever.

I have a pair of horses
for the Revolution
one is called Robin
and the other Sparrow.

They say the Carrancistas
are like scorpion
when the Villistas are coming
they run away with lifted tail.

I know that as you see me in uniform
you believe I come to ask of you
although I come to you, brown girl,
to look for your favors.

As you see me in boots
you believe me to be a soldier
although I'm only a poor railwayman
at the Central Railways.

Yo soy rielera y tengo mi Juan,
él es mi vida yo soy su querer;
cuando me dicen que ya se va el tren,
adiós mi rielera ya se va tu Juan.

Cuando dice el conductor,
va salir para San Juan,
le llevo su canastita
con la que va a refinar.

Tengo mi par de pistolas,
con sus cachas de marfil,
para darme de balazos
con los del ferrocarril.

Tengo mi par de pistolas
con su parque muy cabal,
una para mi querida
y otra para mi rival.

Adiós muchachos de Lerdo,
de Gómez y de Torreón,
ya se van los garroteros,
ya se acabo la función.

Tengo mi par de caballos
para la Revolución,
uno se llama el Jilguero
y otro de llama el Gorrión.

Dicen que los carrancistas
parecen un alacrán,
cuando ven a los villistas
alzan la cola y se van.

So porque me ves de traje
crees que te voy a pedir,
solo quiero prieta chula
tus favores conseguir.

Si porque me ves con botas
piensas que soy melitar, [militar]
soy un pobre rielero
del Ferrocarril Central

CORRIDO: LA ADELITA

On the top of the rocky mountain
there was an army camped
and a courageous women followed them
fallen in love with the sergeant.

Everyone appreciated Adelita
who loved the sergeant
as she was courageous and beautiful
even the colonel estimated her.

And they heard that it was told
by him who loved her so much:

If Adelita wanted to be mine
if Adelita wanted to be my wife
I'd buy her a silk garment
to take her to dance in the caserm.

And if Adelita went with another
I'd follow her over land and sea
with a battleship on the sea
and with a military train on land.

And as the cruel battle was over
and the army retired to the camp
the sobbing of a woman was heard
her crying filling the whole camp.

The sergeant heard it, and fearing
to loose his adored forever
concealing his pain in himself
he sang like this to his lover:

And they heard that it was told
by him who was dying so much:

And if I died in the battle
and my body was buried there
Adelita, I ask you for God
to come there and cry over me.

En lo alto de una abrupta serranía,
acampado se encontraba un regimiento,
y una joven que valiente lo seguía,
locamente enamorada del sargento.

Popular entre la tropa era Adelita,
las mujer que el sargento idolatraba,
que además de ser valiente era bonita,
que hasta el mismo coronel la respetaba.

Y se oía, que decía,
aquel que tanto la quería:

Y si Adelita quisiera ser mi esposa,
si Adelita fuera mi mujer,
le compraría un vestido de seda
para llevarle a bailar al cuartel.

Y si Adelita se fuera con otro,
la seguiría por tierra y por mar,
si por mar en un buque de guerra,
si por tierra en un tren militar.

Y después que termino la cruel batalla
y la tropa regresó a su campamento,
se oye la voz de una mujer que sollozaba,
su plegaria se escucho en el campamento.

Al oírla el sargento temeroso,
de perder para siempre a su adorada,
ocultando su dolor bajo el esbozo
a su amada le cantó de esta manera:

Y se oía, que decía,
aquel que tanto se moría:

Y si acaso yo muero en campaña,
y mi cadáver lo van a sepultar,
Adelita por Dios te lo ruego,
que con tus ojos me vayas a llorar.

CORRIDO: EL MAYOR DE LOS DORADOS

I was the soldier of Francisco Villa
of the world famous general
who, even if sitting on a simple chair
did not envy that of the President.

Now I live on the seashore
remembering those immortal times
Ay... Ay...
Now I live on the seashore
remembering Parral and Villa.

I was one of the dorados
made a Major by chance
and made crippled by the war
while defending the country and honor.

I remember of times past
how we fought against the invader
today I recall the times past
the dorados of whom I was a Major.

My horse, ridden so many times by me
died under me in Jiménez
a bullet intended to me
run across his body.

While dying, he neighed of pain
and gave his life for the country
Ay... Ay...
while dying, he neighed of pain
how much I cried when he died!

Pancho Villa, I keep you
in my memories and in my heart
even if sometimes we were beaten
by the troops of Álvaro Obregón.

I was always your loyal soldier
until the end of the Revolution
Ay... Ay...
I was always your loyal soldier
fighting always in front of the cannons.

Fui soldado de Francisco Villa
de aquel hombre de fama mundial,
que aunque estuvo sentado en la silla
no envidiaba la presidencial.

Ahora vivo allá por la orilla
recordando aquel tiempo inmortal.
Ay... Ay...
Ahora vivo allá por la orilla
recordando a Villa allá por Parral.

Yo fui uno de aquellos Dorados
que por suerte llegó a ser Mayor,
por la lucha quedamos lisiados
defendiendo la patria y honor.

Hoy recuerdo los tiempos pasados
que peleamos contra el invasor,
hoy recuerdo los tiempos pasados
de aquellos Dorados que yo fui Mayor.

Mi caballo que tanto montara
en Jiménez la muerte encontró,
una bala que a mí me tocaba
a su cuerpo se le atravesó.

Al morir de dolor relinchaba
por la patria la vida entregó
Ay... Ay...
Al morir de dolor relinchaba
cómo le llorara cuando se murió.

Pancho Villa te llevo grabado
en mi mente y en mi corazón
y aunque a veces me vi derrotado
por las fuerzas de Álvaro Obregón.

Siempre anduve como fiel soldado
hasta el fin de la revolución
Ay... Ay...
Siempre anduve como fiel soldado
que siempre ha luchado al pié del cañón.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF CORRIDOS

Corridos are distinguished by a narrative structure that includes:

- ❧ Singer's initial address to the audience
- ❧ Location, time, name of main character
- ❧ Importance of main character
- ❧ Message
- ❧ Main character's farewell
- ❧ Composer's farewell

Most corridos share the following thematic and structural elements. The subject matter of corridos includes, but is not limited to: gun fights, social justice issues, betrayed romance, wars, and horse races.

A main character, or protagonist, is usually featured as heroic, tragic, villainous, or conflicted.