

The Importance of Music in the Life of the Aztec People

In Partnership with the **Denver Public Schools**
and the **Metropolitan State College of Denver**



El Alma de la Raza Project



The Importance of Music in the Life of the Aztec People

By Susanna E. Rodriguez DeLeon

Grade 3-5

Implementation Time
for Unit of Study: 4-5 weeks

Goals 2000 - Partnerships for
Educating Colorado Students
El Alma de la Raza Curriculum
and Teacher Training Project

Loyola A. Martinez, Project Director

Introduction

When the Spanish conquistadores blew upon the shores of ancient Mexico, little did they know that this seemingly ill-fated voyage, almost doomed to failure due to disheartened sailors, ravaging disease, and serious homesickness, would become one of the best things that ever happened to Spain. It was also the beginning of the worst event for the inhabitants of that land, who for hundreds of years before the Spaniards' coming had been developing truly splendid civilizations and cultures. The civilizations of Mexico—we will focus particularly on the Aztec or Nahua people—were quite well defined and refined. Unfortunately, the Spanish, in their quest to claim the land for the country and for their God, determined that many of the ways of these cultures were abominations and aberrations and therefore needed to be cleaned up, Christianized, and changed.

Fortunately, some brave individuals in the Spanish contingent did their best to save evidence and record their observations of the indigenous cultures before those cultures were destroyed. Aztec historians also worked to preserve evidence of the culture secretly. Therefore, we are able to study the Aztec civilization as one of the great civilizations of this world, and learn about how the Aztecs attempted to give meaning to their lives in their artistic and cultural expressions.

The Spaniards found that, in contrast to the role of art in European culture—to evoke an aesthetic experience—the role of art in the Mexican cultures was spiritual. The indigenous Mexican (Aztec or other) did not sing to display his skill or knowledge, or to entertain spectators, but rather to appease the ancestral gods. Music and dance formed an essential part of the indigenous rites and ceremonies. Religion was closely intertwined with everything the Aztecs did in their daily life. (Though it was hard for the Spanish conquistadores to understand the specific ways of worship of the indigenous people, it was also true of the Spaniards that religion was important in everything they did, including their quest for fame and fortune.)

Research about music of the Aztec people dates back to the writings of Bernal de Castillo (1492-1581), who was appalled by the music of these people because he viewed it during their ritualistic sacrifices, which were very different from rituals of Christian worship. Others, such as the Franciscan monk Fray Bernardino de Sahugan and the Dominican monk Diego Duran, were able to look at the music from different viewpoints, noting the unique instruments and the qualities of pitch and harmony that were achieved with these instruments—new sounds to their ears.

Introduction, cont.

In this unit, students will learn about the importance of music in daily Aztec life. They will learn about some of the ceremonies, celebrations, and rituals of the Aztec culture and about the musical instruments used in some of those events, and will compare the role of music in that culture to its role in contemporary culture. They will create wind and percussion instruments based on their study of Aztec instruments.

I hope that the students and teachers who work with this unit can feel the respect for humankind that I feel through learning about one of the cultures from which the great people of Mexico and Aztlan are descended.

About the Author

Susanna E. Rodriguez DeLeon has lived in Denver all her life. She has taught for twenty years in the Denver Public Schools and for community agencies. She has designed curriculum relating to Aztec and Chicano history in the areas of theater, music and dance. She has also written curriculum designed to empower young Latina women in the areas of self-esteem, cultural pride, job readiness and job search skills.

Susanna has served on the IDEA committee and CDM of Horace Mann Middle School, as well as the Northwest Coalition for Better Schools and the Mayor's Youth Task Force. She has received several awards from community agencies, including the West Side Action Center for teacher involvement in the community; from the North Denver Optimist Club for Teacher of the Month; and most recently, the "Unsung Hero" award from KWGN television (Channel 2).

Standards Addressed by this Unit

History

- Standard 1 Students understand the chronological organization of history and know how to organize events and people into major eras to identify and explain historical relationships.
- Standard 3 Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time.
- Standard 4 Students understand how science, technology and economic activity have developed, changed and affected societies throughout history.
- Standard 6 Students know that religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history.
- Standard 7 Students use appropriate technologies to obtain historical information and concepts; and to access, process and communicate information related to the study of history.

Music

- Standard 3 Students will create music.
- Standard 4 Students will analyze, evaluate, and describe music.
- Standard 5 Students will relate music to various historical and cultural traditions.

Lesson 1: History of Music in Pre-Cortez Mexico

What will students be learning?		What will be done to help students learn this?		
Benchmark	Specifics	Instructional Strategies	Student Activities	Resources/ Materials
Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time.	Students will gain an awareness and appreciation of Aztec music.	<p>Show students a video about early Aztec dances and music.</p> <p>Use video viewing to begin discussion by pointing out different instruments and developing questions of comparison and contrast.</p> <p>Lead students in hypothesizing about the role that music played for the Aztecs, based on information presented in the video.</p> <p>List student-generated statements about the importance of music in their own lives.</p>	<p>Watch video and participate in discussion about role of music in Aztec culture compared to contemporary culture.</p>	<p><i>Music of Latin America</i>, videocassette (see Bibliography); VCR.</p> <p>Blank Venn diagram; multiple copies for class if desired.</p> <p><i>All of You Was Singing</i>, by Richard Lewis; or <i>How Music Came to the World</i>, by Hal Ober.</p>

Lesson 1 (cont.)

What will students be learning?	
Benchmark	Specifics

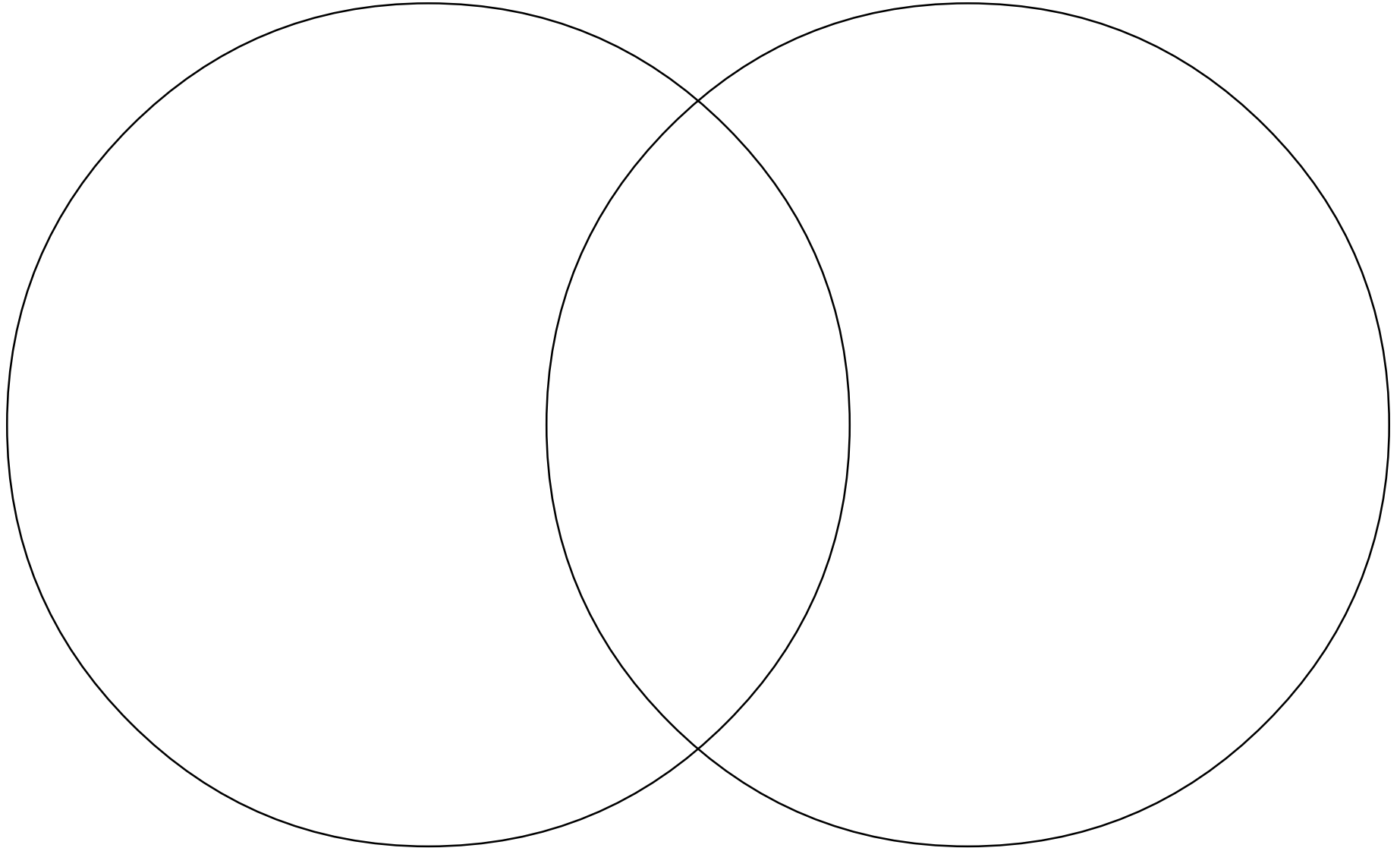
What will be done to help students learn this?		
Instructional Strategies	Student Activities	Resources/ Materials
<p>Guide students through use of a Venn diagram. Use Venn diagram to illustrate similarities and differences between role of music in contemporary culture and in Aztec culture.</p> <p>Read aloud <i>All of You Was Singing</i> or <i>How Music Came to the World</i>. (see bibliography)</p>	<p>Participate in class discussion/creation of Venn diagram. Make a copy of the filled-out Venn diagram in personal music journal.</p>	

Venn Diagram

Differences

Similarities

Differences



Lesson 2: Aztec Celebrations, Ceremonies, and Festivals

What will students be learning?		What will be done to help students learn this?		
Benchmark	Specifics	Instructional Strategies	Student Activities	Resources/ Materials
Students will relate music to various historical and cultural traditions.	<p>Students will learn the various reasons—celebrations, rituals, and ceremonies—for which the Aztecs used music.</p> <p>Students will use recall and memory for discussion.</p> <p>Students will organize their comparisons into categories.</p>	<p>Ask students to recall celebrations and occasions we use music in contemporary society; create list.</p> <p>Organize students in groups with task of categorizing events: religious occasions, national holidays, fun, etc.</p> <p>Present information about the various ceremonies, festivals, and rituals for which the Aztecs used music; make list on board.</p> <p>Read aloud <i>Musicians of the Sun</i>, by Gerald McDermott.</p>	<p>Participate in group discussion/listing of occasions/events/celebrations for which we use music.</p> <p>Work in small groups to assign those occasions/events/celebrations to categories, using cut-outs from magazines to illustrate the different occasions. Share categorized lists with the class.</p> <p>Copy list of music-related occasions in the Aztec culture into music journal.</p>	<p><i>Musicians of the Sun</i>, by Gerald McDermott (see Bibliography).</p> <p>Construction paper, scissors, glue, magazines.</p>

Lesson 3: Percussion Instruments Used by the Aztecs

What will students be learning?	
Benchmark	Specifics
<p>Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time.</p> <p>Students understand how science, technology and economic activity have developed, changed and affected societies throughout history.</p> <p>Students will create music.</p>	<p>Students will know the two main classifications of instruments used by the Aztecs.</p> <p>Students will be able to identify the percussion instruments used by the Aztecs.</p>

What will be done to help students learn this?		
Instructional Strategies	Student Activities	Resources/ Materials
<p>Present vocabulary words associated with Aztec percussion instruments. Define and clarify.</p> <p>Lead brainstorming about types of percussion instruments that exist.</p> <p>Guide students in the use of a WEB to generate a list of ideas/examples of various percussion instruments that exist or that students can imagine, and materials that could be used to create percussion instruments. Use WEB chart provided or create one.</p>	<p>Students will participate actively in discussion and brainstorming.</p> <p>Participate cooperatively in generating WEB examples.</p>	<p>Vocabulary list (see next page).</p> <p>WEB chart for each cooperative group (see page after next).</p> <p>WEB transparency, overhead projector.</p> <p>Natural and recycled materials, such as pebbles, dried beans, gourds, cleaned food containers or paper towel rolls, nutshells, etc., for making percussion instruments.</p> <p>Paints and markers, for decorating instruments.</p>

Lesson 3 (cont.)

What will students be learning?	
Benchmark	Specifics

What will be done to help students learn this?		
Instructional Strategies	Student Activities	Resources/ Materials
<p>Demonstrate different kinds of percussion instruments.</p> <p>Model the construction of a percussion instrument.</p> <p>Lead students in comparing instruments with each other: which are played the same way? Which sound similar? Which is the loudest? Deepest sound? Etc.</p> <p>Show video and lead discussion about types of Aztec percussion instruments.</p>	<p>Create an individual percussion instrument.</p> <p>Demonstrate instruments to each other. Notice similarities and differences.</p> <p>View video and participate in discussion.</p>	<p><i>Music of Latin America</i>, videocassette (see Bibliography).</p>

Vocabulary: Percussion Instruments

Percussion instrument: a musical instrument in which sound is produced by striking, such as a drum, xylophone, or piano.

Instrument names are listed in one or two languages: Náhuatl (Spanish).

Ayacahtli (sonajas): gourd-shaped rattles with seeds, beads, pebbles inside.

Áyotl: Tortoise shell, pair of prongs on the belly side which were struck with pieces of antlers

Cacalachtli (sonajas rituales en la ceramica mejicana): clay rattle.

Chicahuaztli: long rattle sticks, ending in a jagged joint, used only in religious ceremonies.

Chililitli or caililiztli: copper disks of cornetts, flutes, conch shells, and of a metal gong, struck with a metal hammer, or more likely, pine mallets.

Coyolli (las castañuelas): jingles made of various materials, including clay, nutshells, dried fruit; worn as dancer's necklaces, bracelets, anklets.

Huehltl: cylindrical wooden drum which sat on three legs; the top covered with stretched animal hide and the bottom open. Played with fingers. Could also be made of clay instead of wood.
The most revered instrument.

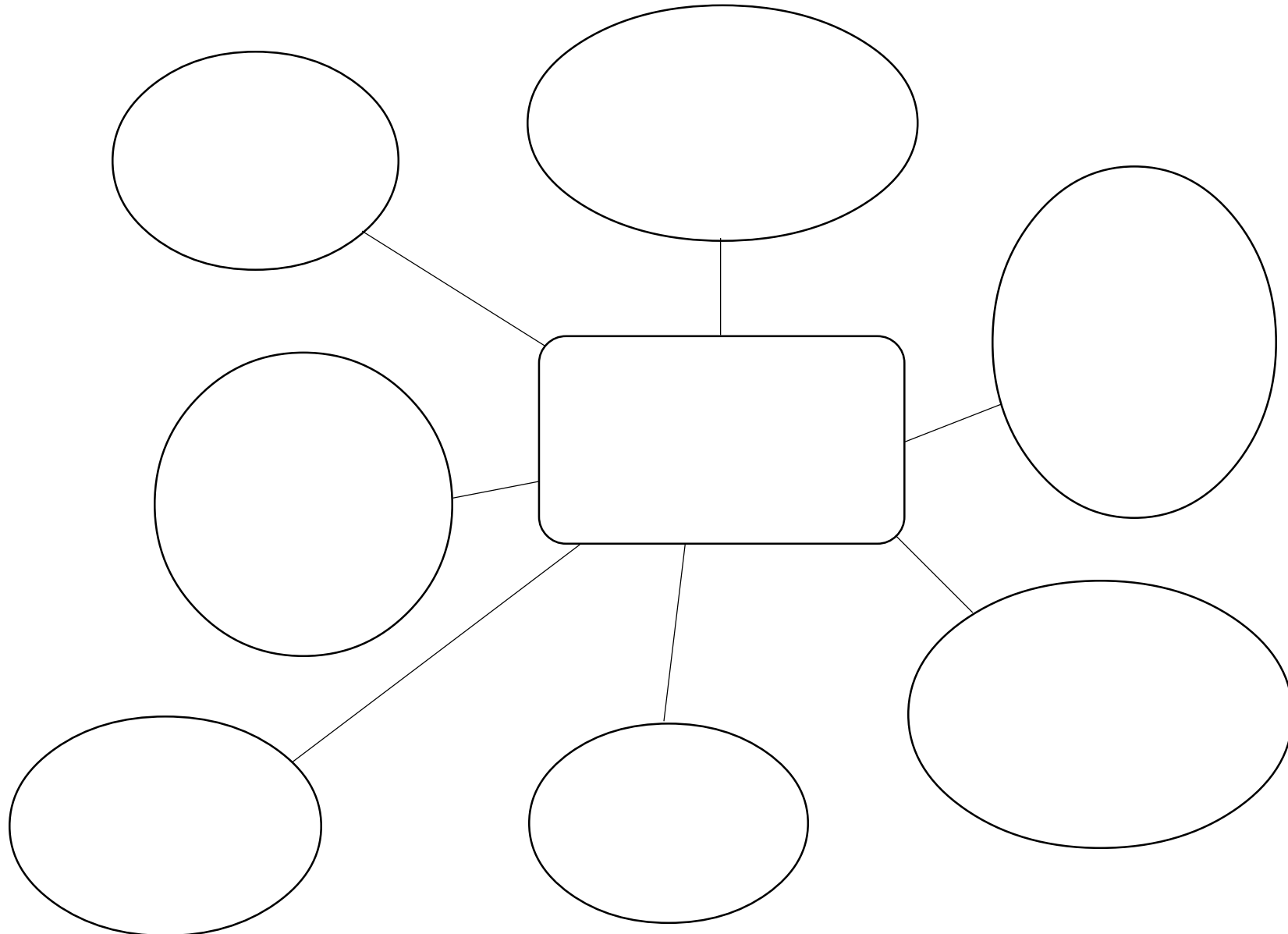
Omichicahuaztli: striated bones of deer, played by scraping with smaller bones.

Tecomapiloa (marimba): gourd drum hit with rubber-tipped sticks; a women's instrument.

Teponaztli: hollowed-out wooden cylinder laid sideways and hit by rubber-tipped mallets, producing two pitches.

Tetzilacatl: gong made of copper or stone.

WEB



Lesson 4: Wind Instruments Used by the Aztecs

What will students be learning?		What will be done to help students learn this?		
Benchmark	Specifics	Instructional Strategies	Student Activities	Resources/ Materials
<p>Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time.</p> <p>Students understand how science, technology and economic activity have developed, changed and affected societies throughout history.</p> <p>Students will create music.</p>	<p>Students will know the two main classifications of instruments used by the Aztecs.</p> <p>Students will be able to identify the wind instruments used by the Aztecs.</p>	<p>Present vocabulary words associated with Aztec wind instruments. Define and clarify.</p> <p>Lead brainstorming about types of wind instruments that exist.</p> <p>Guide students in the use of a WEB to generate a list of ideas/examples of various wind instruments that exist or that students can imagine, and materials that could be used to create wind instruments. Use WEB chart provided or create one.</p>	<p>Students will participate actively in discussion and brainstorming.</p> <p>Participate cooperatively in generating WEB examples.</p>	<p>Vocabulary list (see next page).</p> <p>WEB chart for each cooperative group (see earlier page).</p> <p>WEB transparency, overhead projector.</p> <p>Natural and recycled materials including gourds, clay, for making wind instruments.</p> <p>Paints and markers, for decorating instruments.</p> <p><i>Music of Latin America</i>, videocassette (see Bibliography).</p>

Lesson 4 (cont.)

What will students be learning?	
Benchmark	Specifics

What will be done to help students learn this?		
Instructional Strategies	Student Activities	Resources/ Materials
<p>Demonstrate different kinds of wind instruments.</p> <p>Model the construction of a wind instrument.</p> <p>Lead students in comparing instruments with each other: which are played the same way? Which sound similar? Which is the loudest? Deepest sound? Etc.</p> <p>Show video and lead discussion about types of Aztec wind instruments. (See <i>Music in Aztec and Inca Territory</i> for description of instruments.)</p>	<p>Create an individual wind instrument.</p> <p>Demonstrate instruments to each other. Notice similarities and differences.</p> <p>View video and participate in discussion.</p>	<p><i>Music of Latin America</i>, videocassette (see Bibliography).</p>

Vocabulary: Wind Instruments

Wind instrument: a musical instrument in which sound is produced by vibrating the lips or a reed, such as modern-day woodwinds including bassoon, clarinet, flute, oboe, and saxophone; and modern-day brass instruments including trumpet, trombone, French horn, and tuba.

Instrument names are listed in one or two languages: Náhuatl (Spanish).

Atecocoli or Atecuculli (caracol muy grande): large perforated conch blown as a trumpet.

Chichitli: Whistle flute.

Cocoloctli: flute which made a buzzing sound. Actually twin four-holed reed flutes tied near the mouthpiece with a ribbon which protected a spider egg sac; the sac caused the buzzing sound.

Huilacapitztli (instrumentos musicales precortesianos or flautas): ocarina, flute or fife, globular flute, usually formed in an animal shape.

Quiquiztli (caracoles mariscos): conch-shell trumpet.

Tecciztli (otro caracol grande or cornetas): wind instrument made of shell or bone.

Tepuzquiquiztli (trompeta): metal trumpet made of copper. If metal was unavailable or before it came into use, wood or very large gourds were used.

Tlapitzalli: three-holed vertical flute made of bone or clay.

How will students apply what they are learning?

Performance Task	Scoring Rubric
<p>Instructional Information Review vocabulary, uses of instruments in traditional ceremonies and everyday life, and characteristics of percussion and wind instruments.</p> <p>Task Provide an oral presentation on the instrument you made. Include correct terminology (Nahuatl, Spanish, and English, as appropriate), whether it is a percussion or wind instrument, what materials were used to make this instrument, what sound it is trying to create, and its significance in traditional ceremonies and everyday use. Demonstrate its use.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Provides complete and accurate information on instrument, its significance, and its construction.3. Provides generally complete and accurate information on instrument, its significance, and its construction.2. Missing some required elements and significant errors in information.1. Few if any elements covered and numerous errors.

Notes on Aztec music unit:

Where do the music standards come from?

A number of the standards cited don't seem to be dealt with in the unit, including History standards 2, 5, 7 and Music standards 1, 2, 4.

I have used standards for the benchmarks in each lesson but there may be more specific sections of those standards that would work better. Needs to be reviewed.

There is a KWL chart in the unit but it is never referred to in the lesson plans.

I think some specific suggestions about what kinds of materials to use for instruments and what kind of instruments to make are necessary particularly for wind instruments.

Reference to other cooperative units is made. If this is to be a free-standing unit, perhaps some details about the Aztec calendar can be included in the discussion of rituals and events.

In the original summary of what the students will learn on page 1 of Susanna's manuscript, there is reference to learning specific dance and movements. I know they watch a video of dance movements but perhaps that should be extended into another lesson.

There is also reference to participating in a cooperative presentation in the original manuscript. Again, for this unit to be complete, perhaps that should be fleshed out. Having the unit end with the making of the instruments seems incomplete. There is not currently any mention in this unit of students performing--making music. (I added a note in lesson 3 and 4 that they demonstrate the instruments for each other.)

Scoring rubric:

Problems with current scoring rubric:

The one included includes material covered in the entire unit

There are no specific tasks described in which students will apply or demonstrate knowledge.

Suggestion: Susanna needs to break this into perhaps two separate tasks with scoring rubrics. Develop a way for students to demonstrate knowledge of rituals, types of instruments, etc. for the first one. Second one could be hands-on, based on instrument making and/or participation in presentation.

Annotated Bibliography

Books

Blackwood, Alan. *Musical Instruments*. New York: Bookwright Press, 1987.

Descriptions and pictures of musical instruments and descriptions of how to play them.

Huerta, Jorge A. *A Bibliography of Chicano and Mexican Dance, Drama, and Music*. Los Angeles, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

Early works of Chicano and Mexican dance, music and theater.

Lewis, Richard. *All of You Was Singing*. New York: Atheneum, 1991.

Lyrical account of the earth's creation and the advent of music.

Marti, Samuel. *Dances of the Anahuac: The Choreography and Music of Precortesian Dances*. Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., 1964.

Descriptions of dance and music of the Aztec people.

Marti, Samuel. *Music before Columbus: Musica Precolombia*. Mexico: Ediciones Euroamericana, Klaus-Thiele, 1972.

English/Spanish version of descriptions of music from Central and South America.

McDermott. *Musicians of the Sun*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Books for Young Readers, 1997.

Children's Aztec mythological account of the musical gods sent to earth to teach music to the world.

Ober, Hal. *How Music Came to the New World*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994.

Children's account of an ancient Aztec myth in which the sky god and the wind god bring music from Sun's house to the earth.

Scherer, Tony. *Beneath the Moon and Under the Sun*. Albuquerque: Sun Publishing Company, 1975.

Poetry and stories about the musical gods.

Scherer, Tony. *Spirit Song*. Denver: Lost Images, 1978.

Lyrical writings; stories about music gods and sacred instruments.

Stevenson, Robert. *Music in Aztec and Inca Territory*. Los Angeles, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.

Descriptions of rituals, alphabetized list and descriptions of instruments, notes from other historians.

Weinstock, Herbert. *Mexican Music*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1940.

Mexican music, notes of Herbert Weinstock for concerts arranged by Carlos Chavez as part of the exhibition "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art."

La Musica y los Instrumentos. Madrid: Biblioteca Interactiva Mundo Marvillioso Musica, 1993.

Children's picture book of different instruments.

Videocassettes

Mestizo Magic. Impossible Artz, Daniel and Maruca Salazar, producers.

A retelling of the creation and the introduction of music, through the eyes of two well-known Chicano artists.

Music of Latin America, Huntsville: Educational Video Network.

Examples of indigenous dances done by the Aztecs using instruments and indigenous dress.

Internet Sites

<http://www.burbank.k12.ca.us/~luther/aztecs/aztec.html>

Web page designed to teach about the Aztecs and other civilizations in ancient Mexico.

<http://www.latines.com/HOME/ABOUTLAT/>

Features a special workshop on Aztec music offered by Children's Museum in Los Angeles.