



Smithsonian Center For Education And Museum Studies

## **Learning about History through Corridos** **Lesson 2: Corridos Reflecting Social Justice**

**Targeted Grade Level: 5-12**

### **National History Standards Objectives**

- ❖ Drawing conclusions from different sources of data (e.g. song lyrics, artifacts, visual images)
- ❖ Interpret data presented in time lines
- ❖ Identify issues and problems in the past and analyze the interests, values, perspectives, and points of view of those involved in the situation
- ❖ Reading historical narratives imaginatively and interpreting what they convey about the humanity of the individuals and groups involved

### **Classroom/Internet Approaches**

#### Using different sources to interpret historical narratives

Museum exhibits as well as virtual exhibitions, offer students the chance to learn about history and social issues by analyzing a range of sources including written texts, artifacts and visual images. This set of lessons will prompt students to examine the relationship between corrido song lyrics and other primary sources. In the process, they will expand their historical thinking by interpreting "texts" developed from the perspective of those who have struggled for social justice.

Corridos, as one social text, offer students an important lens on history because their lyrics reflect the day-to-day concerns, triumphs, and struggles of Mexican and Mexican-American peoples. Corridos also convey themes of social justice. For example in the Ballad of Gregorio Cortez, Cortez shoots a man in self defense yet is unjustly sought by the authorities. In the *Listen* (1880-1920) section of the website, students can draw from three different sources, the corrido lyrics, a New York Times article excerpt, and an overview of Cortez' dilemma to draw their own conclusions about this historical figure. Using the 1960-2000 time period of the *Listen* section, students may also compare and contrast the song lyrics from, "The Corrido of César Chávez", "My Chicano People" and the Malaquias Montoya painting, "Undocumented" featured on the time line to interrogate more contemporary social justice issues surrounding immigration.

### Key terms

- ❖ Historian
- ❖ Visual image
- ❖ Sources
- ❖ Rights (Human and Civil)

### Guiding Questions

- ❖ What social justice narratives are told by the various sources of information?
- ❖ How are they specific to Mexican descended communities?
- ❖ How do they reflect “American” ideals and struggles
- ❖ How have themes of injustice, as reflected by corridos, evolved over time?

### **Featured Corridos:**

- ❖ Ballad of Gregorio Cortez
- ❖ Corrido of Cesar Chavez
- ❖ Mi Raza Chicano

### PART I: Artifact/Visual Image Analysis

- ❖ Introducing the concept:
  - Begin by asking students how we learn about history.
  - Sample guiding questions for this discussion--
    - How do you learn about the past?
    - Who teaches you about the past?
    - How do we learn about history in school?
    - What about at home or in our community, how do we learn about the past?
    - What sources teach you about the past?
  - Share with students that one way historians use to understand the past is to look at objects created during a specific time period. For the next couple of days (class periods, weeks) they will learn about history by analyzing corridos and images that show how people have fought for their rights during a particular time period.
  - Refer students to the time line and the “immigration” section of the time line on the website and pass out “Handout A”.
  - Ask them to examine the painting entitled, “Undocumented” and fill out the Handout.
  - At this point you may also want to ask students to browse this website for other objects, images and texts related to the theme of social justice. The videos featured in the website have relevant information they may use.
  - Have students share their observations and analyses with the class.
  - Emphasize that looking at art work and other visual images is one way we can learn about history, but it is important to use different sources to understand history.

## PART II: Deriving historical narratives using multiple sources

- Pass out Handout B and the accompanying corridos. Ask them to work in pairs or small groups as they respond to it.
- As a homework assignment you might ask students to review their daily newspaper and identify current stories dealing with social justice themes. Their research can be incorporated into the larger group project.
- Ask students to examine the song lyrics, the visual image, and any other relevant sources they have identified and derive a historical narrative from these sources. You may want to use the, “guiding questions” listed above to facilitate their process.
- Ask each group to present their findings to the larger class.

**Handout A**  
Artwork/Visual Image Analysis

Describe the work of art. Use as many details as you can. For example what colors are used? What materials were used to make it?

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What's going on in this image?

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What story could you tell about the image?

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What meaning do you think it had for the person who created it?

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When do you think it was created?

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Who do you think are the audiences for this art?

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What themes or issues does it reflect?

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What point of view does the image reflect? Could it reflect different points of view?

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**Handout B**  
Corridos and Themes of Social Justice

Read through the Corrido and respond to the following questions.

1) Corrido Title

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2) Author/Singer

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3) What is the song about?

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4) What is the perspective of the singer?

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5) Who is the audience?

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6) Location and time?

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7) Who is the main character(s)?

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8) What is the main story/conflict?

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9) How does this conflict reflect larger issues of social justice?

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**Handout B Continued**  
Corridos and Themes of Social Justice

10) Select 2 or 3 quotes as support your response to #9.

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11) Discuss different viewpoints related to this issue.

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12) What present day issues does it represent?

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