

presents

*Felix Pitre's*

# *STORIES AND SONGS OF LATIN AMERICA*

## Study Guide

Felix Pitre's *Stories and Songs of Latin America* is a 45 minute program which gives the audience a taste of America Latina through its stories, songs, instruments and language. Although most of the program is in English (except *La Bamba*), Spanish words are used and explained throughout in Felix's unique bilingual style. The students sing Mexico's *La Bamba* after learning its history and meaning, experience *Juan Bobo and the Pig* or *Paco and the Witch* of Puerto Rican folklore and participate in a Latin American favorite, *Pollito, Chicken* complete with sign language. Coqui, the lovable puppet, speaks with an accent helping others to understand that everyone has some kind of accent and what we say is more important than how we speak. An author himself, Felix encourages the students to tell stories, write them down and continue developing these skills so that maybe someday they too may write a story for others to enjoy and possibly get published.

***La Bamba***, the well known Mexican American favorite, opens the program. Felix explains the origin of the song as a tune played at weddings in Veracruz by the *mariachis*, the wedding musicians. The bride and groom dance while tying a ribbon on the floor into a bow with their feet!

After a brief explanation on the role of the teeth, tongue and facial areas in speaking different languages and learning the meanings of the words used, Felix introduces a folktale from Puerto Rico:

*(ONE of the two following stories depending on age group)*

- K-3** **Paco and the Witch** - This story, based on an old legend (and Felix's second book), tells of Paco, a boy living in the mountains of Puerto Rico with his family, who is sent to the village below to buy some *turrón* (a nougat and wafer candy from Spain) for that night's fiesta. The boy stops by the woods on the way to the store and meets an old woman who is the witch his grandmother had warned him about. She traps him with a spell that can only be broken by guessing her name. Luckily, the friendly crab comes to his rescue. After the story the audience is asked what lesson, if any, Paco learned from his experience. Answers have ranged from "don't talk to strangers" to "don't take drugs" to the memorable "always be nice to crabs, 'cause you never know when you might need their help."
- 4-12** **Juan Bobo and the Pig** - Based on the Puerto Rican folkhero, Juan Bobo, this story (which is also Felix's first book) recounts the adventures of Juan, whom everyone calls a fool. But he manages to teach a lesson and prove he's not as foolish as others may think. Juan's mother dresses up and goes to church on Sunday leaving him in charge of the pig. As soon as she is gone the pig starts squealing and when it refuses Juan's offering of food (pork chops) and drink (soda) Juan comes to the conclusion that the pig wants to go to church too. He dresses the pig in his mother's best clothes and sends it to church. The pig, however, only wants to roll in the mud. The result, when Juan's mother returns, is the basis for a well known Puerto Rican saying that chides those who overdress and stresses the value of truth and sincerity.

**Sign Language Song (Pollito Chicken)** - This is a favorite Latin American song used to teach children English words. Felix turns it around to teach Spanish and takes it one step further by using American Sign Language. After learning the song and the signs, two volunteers are invited to help Felix and the rest of the audience sing the song.

**Coqui** - A coqui is a little frog that only lives in Puerto Rico. If you take a coqui from the island, it dies and no one knows why. Coqui (the puppet in our story) has come to visit and speaks with a Puerto Rican accent providing an opportunity to learn that everyone speaks with some kind of accent, be they from Cuba, Argentina, Chile, etc., or from the many regions of the United States. He's learned to speak English by listening to the radio and watching television (as many others have) and sings his song with the help of an invited audience member.

**Finale** - *La Bamba* is performed again, this time in a more Caribbean style with audience volunteers playing Latin percussion instruments - *maracas*, *güiro*, *güira*, *pandereta* (tambourine), *campana* (cow bell), *palitos* (claves) and *tambor* (drum). Each instrument is explained and after a quick demonstration of how it is played, Felix invites two dancers to help him perform the song. After this number there is a short version of *Cielito Lindo* and a discussion of the importance of all our cultures and how each one of us can contribute to making a better world.

### **PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES**

1. The exploration of the new world by Spain was led by Christopher Columbus. Can you name any other Spanish explorers? English? Portuguese? What other languages besides Spanish are spoken in Latin America (for example, in Brazil, Haiti, etc.)? Why?
2. A special food from Puerto Rico is *pasteles* (made from green bananas with a meat sauce filling and wrapped in a banana leaf). Can you name any other foods from Latin America? Have you ever tasted any of them?
3. The *coqui* is a Puerto Rican frog only found on the island. Can you name other animals from Latin America? (Examples -- llamas - Peru, jaguar - Brazil, etc.) Can you find pictures of these animals in books or magazines? (Check the library.)
4. Listen to some Latin American music. Can you name some of the dances? Can you dance any of them?

### **AFTER THE PERFORMANCE**

1. Do you know anyone who can speak more than one language? Can you? How did they learn it? What country is the language from?
2. Other than *La Bamba*, can you name an American song that has a Latin sound or origin?
3. **Juan Bobo and the Pig.** People made fun of Juan Bobo because they thought he was a fool. How did he prove them wrong? Can you remember three Spanish words from the story? What is a folk hero? Can you name another one? Is there a lesson to be learned from this story?
4. **Paco and the Witch.** What lesson did Paco learn from his experience? Have your grandparents or parents ever told you a ghost or witch story? Why did the crab help Paco? Can you remember the witch's name? Do you know another story about a person's name? How is it the same/different?

5. Why do people use sign language? Try to tell something to a friend without using words. Have you ever made up words to mean something special?
6. What kind of accent do you think you speak with? Can you imitate a British, French, or “Southern” accent? When you hear someone with a foreign accent, do you think that they are smart; not smart; funny; weird; interesting; or what else? Why? How many accents can you notice from watching television or listening to the radio tonight? Make a list.
7. How many instruments can you name from the performance? Which is your favorite? Do you play an instrument? Listen to a recording of Latin American music. Can you name the instruments that you hear?

---

## VOCABULARY LIST

### GENERAL

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>agua</b>      | water   |
| <b>bailar</b>    | to dance  |
| <b>capitán</b>   | captain   |
| <b>gallina</b>   | hen   |
| <b>gracia</b>    | style, grace  |
| <b>güiro</b>     | instrument made by the Taínos from a marimba gourd                |
| <b>hola</b>      | hello   |
| <b>lápiz</b>     | pencil  |
| <b>maestra</b>   | teacher   |
| <b>maracas</b>   | instruments made by the Taínos from the fruit of the higuera tree |
| <b>palitos</b>   | sticks (claves)   |
| <b>pandereta</b> | tambourine  |
| <b> piso</b>     | floor   |
| <b>pluma</b>     | pen   |
| <b>pollito</b>   | chicken   |
| <b>poquito</b>   | a little bit  |
| <b>puerta</b>    | door  |
| <b>rana</b>      | frog  |
| <b>ventana</b>   | window  |

### JUAN BOBO AND THE PIG

|                      |                               |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>aretes</b>        | earrings                      |
| <b>bobo</b>          | fool                          |
| <b>brazales</b>      | bracelets                     |
| <b>chuletas</b>      | pork chops (de cerdo)         |
| <b>collares</b>      | necklaces                     |
| <b>domingo</b>       | Sunday                        |
| <b>faja</b>          | girdle                        |
| <b>fango</b>         | mud                           |
| <b>iglésia</b>       | church                        |
| <b>jibaros</b>       | country people of Puerto Rico |
| <b>puerquito</b>     | pig                           |
| <b>¿qué quieres?</b> | what do you want?             |
| <b>si</b>            | yes                           |
| <b>traje</b>         | dress                         |

### PACO AND THE WITCH

|                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| <b>bruja</b>    | witch              |
| <b>caliente</b> | hot                |
| <b>cangrejo</b> | crab               |
| <b>coquí</b>    | Puerto Rican frog  |
| <b>cotorra</b>  | parrot             |
| <b>el sol</b>   | the sun            |
| <b>fiesta</b>   | party              |
| <b>gandules</b> | pigeon peas        |
| <b>leña</b>     | firewood           |
| <b>montaña</b>  | mountain           |
| <b>nombre</b>   | name               |
| <b>refresco</b> | cool drink         |
| <b>turrón</b>   | nougat wafer candy |

## ***BIBLIOGRAPHY***

Alegria, Ricardo E. Discovery, Conquest and Colonization of Puerto Rico 1493-1599.  
San Juan de Puerto Rico: Coleccion de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 1979.

Belpré, Pura. The Tiger and the Rabbit and Other Tales. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1965.

Bloch, Peter. LA-LE-LO-LAI, Puerto Rican Music and Its Performers. New York: Plus Ultra  
Educational Publishers, Inc., 1973.

Pitre, Felix. Juan Bobo and the Pig. New York: Lodestar Books, Dutton, 1993.

Pitre, Felix. Paco and the Witch. New York: Lodestar Books, Dutton, 1995.

Rivera, José Ramirez. Los Cuentos de Juan Bobo (Juan Bobo Tales). Mayaguez, Puerto Rico:  
Ediciones Libero, 1979.



151 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10001

(212) 647-1100  
[www.theatreworksusa.org](http://www.theatreworksusa.org)