



Presents

*Felix Pitre's*  
**MEXICAN LEGENDS AND SONGS**  
**Study Guide**

Mexican Legends and Songs, by Felix Pitre, is a 45-minute program exploring the history, culture and language of Mexico using accounts of historical/legendary figures, folktales, and folk music. We learn about the location of Mexico on our border to the South and the contributions of Mexican Americans, the largest Latino segment of the U.S. population. It includes a Mexican folktale, Pepe and the Figs, about a poor farm boy who refuses to help his parents at home and learns a valuable lesson when he leaves to find his fortune in *el pueblo*, (the town.) The songs, sung in Spanish, are thoroughly explained so the audience can understand and enjoy them regardless of their language background. They are: Cielito Lindo (the chorus is included with translation and pronunciation for the students to learn;) Cu, cu, ru, cu, cu, Paloma – about a dove waiting for its partner to return; Las Mañanitas – the traditional Mexican birthday song and, done with the help of audience volunteers playing “fruit” maracas, a folksong about Mexico’s legendary Pacho Villa - La Cucaracha.

**INTRODUCTION – Cielito Lindo :** The title means “Beautiful Sky” and the song’s trademark chorus, “Ay, ay, ay, ay” is easily recognizable from many American TV and radio programs but the verses are where its beauty lies. The first verse tells of an encounter with a dark eyed stranger coming down the sierra mountains. Then the chorus:

*Ay, ay, ay, ay*  
*Canta Y no llores*  
(Kahn-ta ee no jo-rays)

*“Sing and don’t cry*  
*Because when you sing,*  
*Your heart is happy!”*

*Porque cantanto se allegran*  
(Poor-kay kahn-tahn-doe say ah-lay-grahn)

*Cielito Lindo*  
(See-yea-lee-toe lean-doe)

*Los corazones*  
Lowz coe-rah-sow-nays

The next verse requests that a “*lunar*,” a beauty mark near the subject’s mouth (*la boca*) be reserved just for him. And the last verse explains why he is so bold – he has been wounded by one of Cupid’s arrows. Light hearted and playful it helps set the mood for a journey south of the border.

### Questions for study:

- What is a sierra? Can you find the Sierra Madre in Mexico on the map? Are there any sierras in the United States?
  - The song suggests that we sing when we are sad. When you are unhappy what do you do to feel better? Can you think of other ways to cheer yourself or others?
  - A “lunar” means a beauty mark in Spanish. Do you have one that people can see? How does it make you feel? Why do you think they call it a beauty mark?
1. **Pepe and the Figs:** In Mexico, especially among the country people, the family plays an important role. Children are taught at an early age to pitch in and help out. They assist their mothers at home by doing chores and when they are old enough they contribute by taking care of the animals and working the land. Pepe, is a boy who refuses to help in the house or on the farm. When given a choice by his father, to work or leave he chooses to seek his fortune in town. However on his way to the *pueblo* he encounters a magic fig tree whose yellow and blue figs have wondrous effects when eaten. With a great nose for business Pepe plans to find his fortune in town using the magic figs. In the end when things go terribly wrong and everything seems hopeless, Pepe learns the true value of his family’s love.

### Questions for study:

- What do you do to help at home? How do you feel about this job?
  - What do figs look like? Have you ever tasted one?
  - Why do you think Pepe’s father is willing to give him another chance? Would you have done the same?
2. **Cu cu ru cu cu Paloma:** Bird symbolism is pronounced in Mexican folklore. When the Aztec saw an eagle perched on a cactus plant eating a snake they took it as a good omen from their gods and decided to settle in that location (Mexico City). This sad but popular love song tells about a dove (paloma) that waits in vain for its partner’s return. Many folksongs used animal behavior; sounds, and cries heard in the wild to help explain human actions and feelings. The cooing sound of the bird in this song (cu cu ru cu cu) is the crying of the lonely dove.

### Questions for study:

- Doves are found throughout the world. What animals would you expect to find in Mexico? In your own hometown?
  - Birds are used as symbols to represent something else. What birds can you name that are used this way in our country? In a country from your own background?
  - This song uses the cooing of a bird (cu cu ru cu cu) as part of the words. Do you know other songs or poems that do that? If you were to write a song using an animal sound which one would you choose?
3. **Las Mañanitas:** In this country we usually celebrate a birthday with the “Happy Birthday song.” In Mexico and many other Latin American countries the birthday person is serenaded with *Las Mañanitas*, and they get a chance to hit the piñata, a paper mache donkey stuffed with candy.
  4. **La Cucaracha:** Countless children have sung this popular song about a cockroach without knowing that it was originally a tribute to Mexico’s own Robin Hood, Pancho Villa. Born Doroteo Arrango, he assumed the name of a popular leader of bandits when he was forced to flee his home. He became famous, first throughout Mexico, then in the United States and finally worldwide. His exploits were so legendary that many Americans crossed the border to become his followers and Hollywood even sent cameramen to record his adventures for the newsreels. His followers improvised numerous verses of this song as they rode along the trails. I picked three in Spanish and wrote a few more in English. Volunteers can help get into the spirit of the music by playing fruit and vegetable “maracas” while everyone else can join in the chorus.

### Questions for study:

- La Cucaracha is a song about a cockroach. Why do you think they picked this insect for the song? Do you know any other songs about insects?
- Pancho Villa is a legendary figure in Mexico. What does that mean? Can you mention any legendary figures in this country?
- Some people called Pancho Villa a bandit. Others called him a hero. Why do you think there were different opinions of him? How do you judge if a person is a hero or a villain?

**THEATREWORKSUSA**

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

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