

Baila la Cumbia/ Dance the Cumbia

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Welcome to “*Baila la Cumbia/Dance the Cumbia.*” *Cumbia* is a popular dance and music throughout Latin America and for many Latina/o/x people in the United States. Did you know that cumbia dance and music has been around for at least three hundred years and is popular on several continents?

In this presentation, we will learn about three different ways to dance cumbia: *Cumbia Colombiana*, *Cumbia Tejana*, and *Cumbia Wepa*.

(The activities in this presentation are designed for students in 2nd-5th grade.)



Cumbia – Transnational History

Cumbia dance and music can look and sound very different depending on where you are. Cumbia is “transnational” which means that it can be found in many different countries. Since cumbia dance and music are popular in many different countries, there are many ways of dancing cumbia.

This map shows the many different styles of cumbia dance throughout Latin America, which covers South America and North America. Look at all the different ways to dance cumbia! There’s Argentine cumbia, Bolivian cumbia, Chilean cumbia, Dominican cumbia, Ecuadorian cumbia, Peruvian cumbia, Salvadoran cumbia, Uruguayan cumbia, and Venezuelan cumbia, and more!

We are going to start our cumbia journey in the country of Colombia which is on the continent of South America. Let’s begin by learning a little bit about cumbia’s history.

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Cumbia started in Colombia during a time now known as the “Spanish colonial era.” The Spanish colonial era occurred during the 1400’s-1800’s. Spanish “conquistadores” set sail searching for land and riches for the Spanish king and queen. Whenever they found the land and riches they were looking for, the conquistadors would take over the land completely and make it part of Spain’s territories. Then, Spain used these territories to import African slaves.

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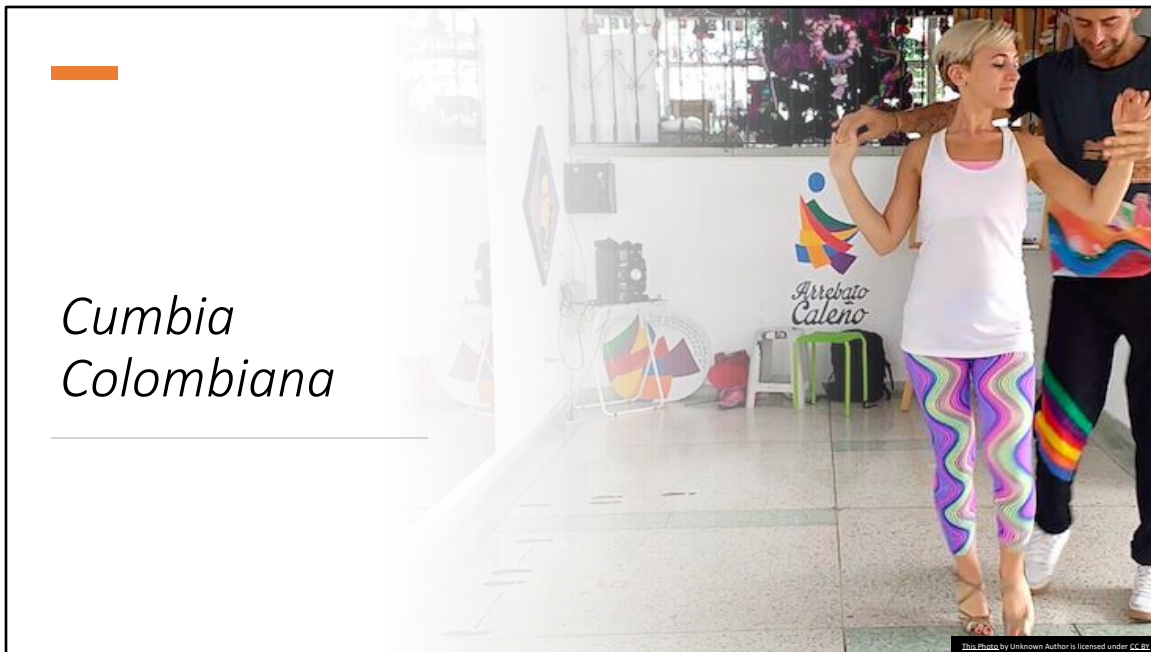
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Cumbia in Colombia

Traditional cumbia, a folk dance and music from Colombia, is influenced by African, Indigenous, and European musical and dance traditions that occurred as a result of the “Spanish colonial era.”

In this image, dancers from Cartagena, Colombia are performing a traditional courtship cumbia folk dance while tourists look on. You can think of a “folk dance” as a dance that comes from “the people” of a nation.

Photo by: Unknown. Licensed under Creative Commons.



Cumbia is best known today as a social and popular dance and music in Colombia. A social and popular dance means that many people enjoy dancing cumbia and listening to cumbia music.

In Colombia, dancers dance “Colombian cumbia” or *cumbia Colombiana* while holding onto their partner’s hands, like in this picture you see here. A common dance move that dancers use is a side-to-side shuffling step in a four-count rhythm (1-2-3-4). This video provides a good example of Cumbia Colombiana:

<https://youtu.be/3ObfWT5o4rk>

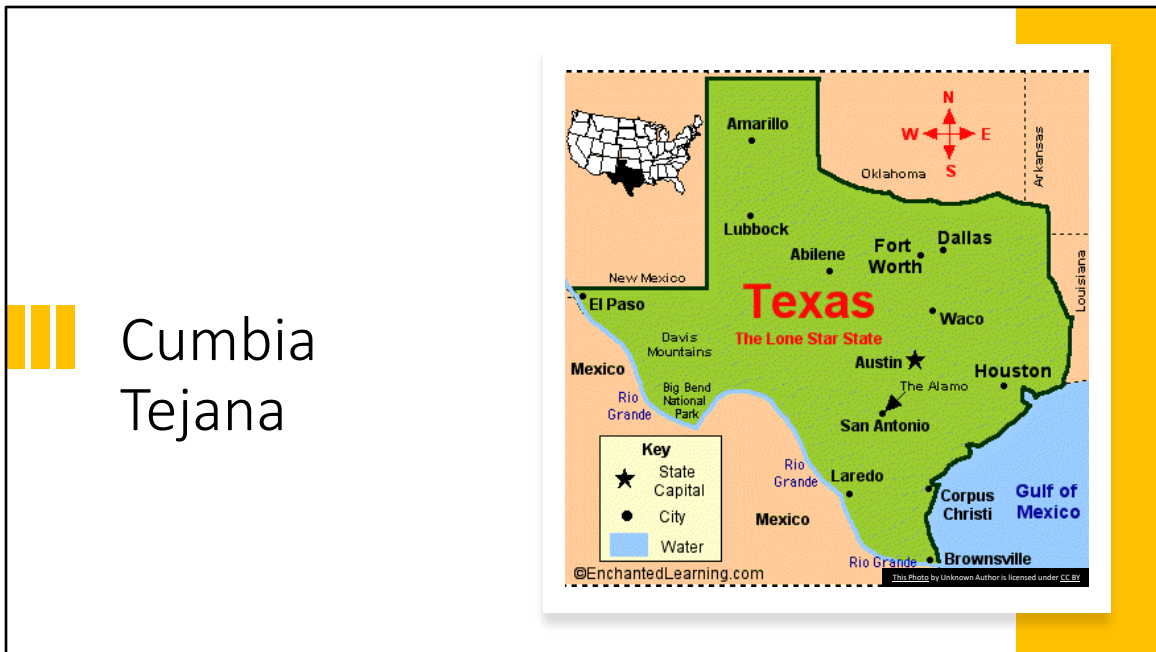
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Did you know that cumbia is also a very popular social dance in the United States? This is especially true if you live in a state that shares a border with México, like California, Arizona, and Texas.

Cumbia's popularity in many states is an example of what I said earlier about cumbia dance and music being "transnational." Transnational means that it can be found in more than one country.

Photo courtesy of Tejano Conjunto Festival, San Antonio (texashillcountry.com)



Cumbia Tejana

Our next stop on our cumbia journey will be in the state of Texas which is in the United States. As you can see in this image, Texas shares a border with México. Cumbia dance and music is really popular along these “borderland” areas of northern México and South Texas.

In South Texas, the type of cumbia that is danced is called, “cumbia Tejana” which means “Texas Cumbia.”

Cumbia Tejana is also danced in a four-count rhythm. The most common cumbia Tejana dance move involves a “rock step” to the back. You can dance cumbia Tejana with a partner, by yourself, or with a group of people!

Photo by: Unknown. Licensed under Creative Commons.

Cumbia Tejana



Selena

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Cumbia *Tejana* (Texas Cumbia) is part of “Tejano” music. This picture features Selena Quintanilla-Perez who is also known as the “Queen of Tejano music.” Selena and her brother, A.B. Quintanilla, created Tejano music that blended their Mexican roots with bold new sounds.

Selena was also a great dancer. One of her most popular songs is “Baila Esta Cumbia” or “Dance this Cumbia.” This was and still is a popular song to dance to. Check out this video on Selena dancing Cumbia Tejana on T.V.: <https://youtu.be/uW4QRkQe110>

Photo by: Unknown. Licensed under Creative Commons. Audio clip licensed under Creative Commons.



Our last stop on our *transnational* cumbia journey is in the country of Mexico!

In Mexico, there are different ways to dance cumbia. One of the Mexican cumbia dance styles is called “cumbia Wepa.” Cumbia Wepa was created by young people. Cumbia Wepa started more recently than the other two styles we have talked about so far.

Sometimes it is just called “Wepa.”

Photo by: Unknown. Licensed under Creative Commons.



Cumbia Wepa

Cumbia Wepa is danced to “cumbia sonidera” music.

Cumbia sonidera is cumbia music played by a deejay, like the one in this picture, who mixes cumbia rhythms with electronic sounds.

Photo by: Unknown. Licensed under Creative Commons.



Cumbia Wepa



Cumbia wepa looks really different from the other two ways we have seen so far. Instead of a shuffling step, or a rocking step, cumbia wepa is danced with hopping steps.

Dancers bend their upper body slightly towards the floor and do fancy moves with their feet as they hop up and down, just like you can see in this picture.

A common wepa dance move is when dancers perform a “toe-heel” hop step. Watch this video on Cumbia Wepa to see how it is done:

<https://youtu.be/8RTGUNp8YQI>

Photo: Denon D.J. VEVO. “Cumbias Con Wepa DJ Antrax ft DenonDjay.”

<https://youtu.be/8RTGUNp8YQI>



I hope you had fun learning about cumbia dance from Colombia, Texas, and Mexico.

Are you ready to try *cumbia Colombiana*, *cumbia Tejana*, and *cumbia Wepa* dance moves?

Let's dance!